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## From Homo Pugnans to Homo Partum: Societal agency and the new nature of power

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# About the author



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# Abstract

The nature of power is changing faster than the institutions and conceptual frameworks of international relations. Contemporary warfare reveals a growing contradiction between the increasing empowerment of individuals and societies through technology and the continuing elitist, state-centric and increasingly personalized character of international relations. As material power becomes less dependent on territory and physical resources, the ability of states and autocratic leaders to control societies through territorial conquest and military force becomes increasingly problematic. The alternative is not simply greater military deterrence, but greater engagement with societies themselves—through recognition, inclusion, dignity and co-creation.


# Introduction

Last year, I ordered a taxi from Summertown in Oxford to Gloucester Green bus station, where I was to catch a bus to Heathrow Airport. The taxi driver appeared to be a Muslim Arab from Tanzania. I rarely miss an opportunity to speak with people outside academic circles, so after introducing myself and mentioning that I was writing an article on liberalism, I asked him whether he thought people in Tanzania shared liberal values.

He did not respond at first but threw a glance in the mirror. When we arrived at the bus station, I offered to pay the fare. To my surprise, he refused. I insisted, but he suggested instead that he take me all the way to Heathrow. I declined, explaining that I could not afford a £200 long-distance taxi journey. He replied that he did not expect payment and would take me there and back for free.

Realizing that he was willing to sacrifice his daily earnings for something he considered important, I agreed.

During the journey to and from the airport, we discussed a wide range of issues, including whether Tanzanians shared liberal values. A central theme of our conversation was the West's failure to understand and listen to the East, and the broader idea that people may be less different from one another than political and cultural narratives often suggest.

Stories involving taxi drivers are easily dismissed as anecdotal or trivial. Yet this was not my only experience of strong reactions to questions about liberalism. In conversations I have had in the United Kingdom and across

Europe, many people—particularly migrants—have expressed how deeply issues of freedom, equality and dignity matter to them.

This particular encounter, however, stayed with me for another reason. The driver's willingness to sacrifice his daily income simply to continue a conversation about values illustrated a few points that are central to this article: people do not necessarily prioritize material interests over values, dignity and recognition. At times, the opposite may be true. The encounter also pointed to a broader gap between the universal aspirations of liberal values and the ways in which those values have been politically and internationally articulated.

That gap has become increasingly significant in the contemporary era of war.

The wars in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan are taking place in an international environment characterized not only by geopolitical rivalry and technological transformation, but also by a profound crisis of political leadership and international authority. At the same time, individuals and societies have acquired unprecedented opportunities to express themselves, organize, influence narratives and produce value through digital technologies. The result is a growing contradiction: *societies are becoming increasingly empowered, while international relations remain largely organized around states, elites and political leaders whose legitimacy and authority are themselves increasingly contested.*

This article argues that this contradiction is central to understanding the changing character of contemporary warfare and international politics. The increasing personalization of political power, the decline of liberal institutions and the dominance of transactional geopolitics have reinforced the state-centric and elitist character of international relations. Yet technological change—particularly the internet, social networks and artificial intelligence—has simultaneously empowered individuals and non-state actors, weakened traditional boundaries and transformed the nature of power itself.

This transformation has important consequences for the effectiveness of both military power and soft power. Territorial conquest may provide physical control without producing control over people's choices, identities or aspirations. Likewise, engagement with governments and political elites may produce tactical agreements without generating durable influence within societies. In this context, effective international engagement increasingly requires a shift from *influence to co-creation*, and from engagement primarily with regimes to engagement with societies.

The argument is not that states or military power have become irrelevant. On the contrary, military resilience remains essential for the defence of sovereignty and deterrence. But military power alone is increasingly insufficient for achieving political objectives in a world in which the most important sources of power are increasingly intangible, networked and human.

The central question, therefore, is not simply how to defeat autocratic leaders or deter aggression. It is how to *compete for and with societies* by creating conditions in which people can realize their own reform potential, exercise agency and contribute to the production of political and social value.

This requires a reconsideration of the meaning of soft power. Rather than treating liberal values as something to be exported from the West to the rest, they should increasingly be understood as a process of *equal co-creation*.[1] Engagement and effectiveness of relations should be measured *not only by trade, security agreements or diplomatic outcomes, but also by whether international relations create conditions conducive to freedom, dignity, participation and the realization of societies' own creative and reform potential.*

The changing nature of power makes this shift increasingly possible. Information technologies have made borders more permeable and have enabled previously marginalized individuals to become visible, influential and economically or culturally productive. At the same time, energy transition is gradually weakening the strategic importance of some traditional material resources, particularly fossil fuels. These developments challenge the assumption that control over territory and material resources is the most durable foundation of political power.

Contemporary warfare therefore contains a paradox. On the one hand, states and leaders increasingly rely on military force, territorial control and coercion—forms of power associated with an earlier era. On the other, technological and social transformation is producing new forms of power based on information, creativity, connectivity and human agency.

This article explores that paradox through the changing character of contemporary wars, the personalization of political leadership, the consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine, the changing relationship between states and societies, and the emerging possibilities for more

[1] See for instance Leila Alieva 2024 (16 May) Soft Power Lessons from Russia's wars: How to Overcome Polarization and Strengthen Liberal Democracy, Foreign Policy Center, London. https://fpc.org.uk/soft-power-lessons-from-russias-war-how-to-overcome-polarisation-and-strengthen-liberal-democracy

inclusive forms of international engagement. It concludes by stressing a greater importance of a shift from the traditional logic of interstate influence toward the recognition and empowerment of societal agency.

The argument is ultimately about a struggle between two different understandings of power: **power as control over people and territory, and power as the capacity of people to create, participate and realize their potential.** The emergence of the latter does not make war impossible. But it increasingly makes the former an inadequate basis for enduring political power.

## The new era of wars: changing warfare and changing nature of power

In the end of the Cold War scholars were predicting the eventual end to wars, at least their inevitable decline, but the contemporary world is characterized by a few profoundly aggressive and cruel ones, such as wars in Ukraine, Gaza, or Sudan. Decline and transformation of the hegemony based neoliberal order appeared to weaken traditional mechanisms of prevention and deterrence.

Wars did not disappear, but they change and occur in the quickly and radically transforming international context. The change has been reflected first of all in their never-ending character[2] Advances in technology led to the "democratisation and diversification of war", which, according to Mats Berdal takes place in an era when state and non-state actors resort to war more frequently, but with less effectiveness, so wars getting more prolonged and intractable revealing ambiguous effect of technological innovations and use of drones.[3] Berdal mentions some major risks caused by technological innovation which in turn contributes to the decline of normative limits of violence, pointing to the increasing cases of state sponsored assassinations and hybrid operations.

Contemporary wars reveal transformations at the level of their nature too. The world, besides geopolitics, is undergoing the trend of further universalization of common threats, interests, values due to the empowerment of non-state actors[4] and the global nature of challenges. Information technology and AI are increasingly making the size of material

[2] Zachery Tyson Brown "Unmasking war's changing character" Modern War Institute at West Point 03.12.19 https://mwi.westpoint.edu/unmasking-wars-changing-character/
[3] Mats Berdal " The democratisation and diversification of war. Reflections on the effect of the technological change and normative retrenchment on the character of the contemporary war" Global (Dis)Order international policy programme, British Academy. Carnegie Endowment for International peace.
[4] By Berdal, this is "democratization and diversification of the character of war"

resources, or territories, less important as a basis of power with boundaries becoming more transparent, thus taking competition to the virtual level. Our study in 2018 confirmed this transformation of viewing power, or might of the state, from the perception of the size of it toward the added value, such as technologies, which its citizens can produce.[5] The boundaries and borders are blurred causing ambiguity at the level of origins of hybrid attacks- external or internal as well as between peace and war[6]. Statistics also reflect the declining importance of the size of the land resources with the growing technological advancement. In 2024 agriculture contributed just 0.56% to the UK economy with 1.3% of labour force [7], declining from almost 50% of its share in 1900[8]. (compare to Digital Sector 6,8% contribution to GVA in 2024[9], and financial sector -13%[10] On the other hand, across Europe the number of young people preferring nomadic life style -living in the rented premises -to property acquisitions has increased with 22% of millennials quoting mobility, rather than affordability, as a reason[11] These tendencies reveal a tension between changing nature of power and evolving with informational technology *provisionality* of physical borders – on the one hand, and pre-modern/modern intensity of desire of physical control and destruction as means of assertion of power – on the other, whatever is the political justification of it – security, historical, revanchist etc.

Domestically, incapacity of autocrats to create an attractive state or regime models, like the case of Russia's war in Ukraine shows, drives an incentive of distracting people's attention from the quality of life to the quantity or size of the state- rather brutal and direct attempt of control of material resources, and subjugation or annihilation of people populating it. In such cases, the hybrid war became an application of the IT tools for achieving material gains, and furthermore – of sense of control over cross - border through disruption of global processes.

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[5] Alieva, L., Aslanov, B. " How autocracy impedes de-securitization, or why democracy matters; the case of Nagorno-Karabagh in the eyes of Azerbaijanis" in The Caucasus Survey, 6(3), 2018.

[6] Jean Mafart Hybrid threats : from geopolitics to internal security, Schuman Papers n.819, Strategy, Security and Defence, Foundation Robert Schuman, 27 January 2026 https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/819-hybrid-threats-from-geopolitics-to-internal-security

[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farming-evidence-pack-a-high-level-overview-of-the-uk-agricultural-industry/farming-evidence-key-statistics-accessible-version

[8] UK economic sector contribution 1900-2000 https://www.scribd.com/document/534202739/Task-1-Bar-Chart-the-Contribution-of-Fields-to-the-Economy-of-the-UK-in-the-20th-Century-Corrected

[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/economic-estimates-digital-sector-annual-2010-to-2024-and-regional-2010-to-2022-gross-value-added

[10] https://www.theglobalcity.uk/PositiveWebsite/media/Research-reports/State-of-Sector_2024.pdf

[11] https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/02/19/generation-rent-from-house-prices-to-lifestyle-choices-why-are-europeans-opting-out-of-buy

# Personalization of political power and of the states

The wars are also taking place amid a crisis of leadership, which besides reflecting the trends of anti-establishment and populism, demonstrate calamities of its increasing and almost unchecked personalistic nature. The probability of political choices based on leaders' personal charisma has increased – with identification on emotional basis becoming important, which gives advantage to a leader producing simple and emotional messages, going along the identity politics and strengthening juxtaposition/divergence and "otherness" of the rival, thus giving the rise to the ultra-right and populist leaders. This process has a potential to make and is already making conflicts and confrontations especially acute and fierce. The wars are also taking place in the context of decline of democracy and liberalism, which contributes to the unchecked decisions and confrontational logic. De-ideologization of leadership is another trend which contributes to its personalistic nature. Neither Trump, nor Putin are profound ideologues, in spite of MAGA and "Russkiy mir"– whose governance is characterized by the absence or weak presence of the deterring political party framework. The practice of international relations demonstrates how they can reinforce political personalities, thus contributing to strengthening of personalistic rule.[12] Furthermore, amid this trend, the official speeches might mask the process of state interests being replaced by personal motivation and serving to frame the tactical moves rather than strategic intention. Russia's case is a perfect example of this mixture of a Soviet legacy of demagogy and personalistic disclosures, finding its expression in inconsistency of statements - reactions to the domestic or international events.

Decline of democracy is also expressed in encroachment of even elected leaders on institutions of checks and balances and strengthening of executive power at the expense of other branches of power and institutions as the current situation in the US testifies. The unchecked power makes international affairs and prospects of peace and security more dependent on the personalities of leaders, especially those of big states/powers, increasing the number of related risks.

The current great power's leadership is a best illustration of the crisis: its not accidental that the analysis of the policies of the leaders of the biggest states -such as Trump and Putin- often move beyond the political science framework and focus on their personality characteristics ranging from

[12] Tim Eaton " Is Washington endorsing a family rule in Libia? The US should heed its own track record of backing individuals in the conflict-affected states" , Foreign Policy, June 30, 2026.

narcissism to bordering personality disorders. The dangers and risks of such institutional transformation, when exceeding executive powers are in the hands of personalities are obvious, which has precedents in history with leaders preoccupied with the domination of the world throughout centuries. The studies showed the role of institutions of checks and balances in democratic states in balancing the personalities of first leaders otherwise tempted and inclined to military action. Personalization of power in turn is reflected in behaviour of states acting as the challenged egos of the political leaders. This is reinforced by the increased role of geopolitics in the multilateral world and the transactional approach to IR which under mentioned conditions contribute to *personalization* of states. While the concept of viewing the state as a person is not a new one.[13] Few current trends reinforce its relevance in current politics and IR. Geopolitical focus and realist approach rather than liberal one leaves out in a shade the state's function as a societal provider, including soft power and values, neglecting societies as agencies. In the most recent interview in Kyiv Steve Witkoff reiterated importance of personal relations in conflicts and that Putin "has always treated them respectfully"[14]

At the same time, the "virtuality" of power, overcoming the borders and boundaries, expresses itself also in growing resistance to identification with the nation-states. Academic Radchenko, for instance, is rather direct in his analysis, writing in his sub-stack that he "hates nation-states" and likes the idea "of human civilization"[15] Furthermore, the polls show the decline of a sense of patriotism in the US. Although weakening of identification with the states like Russia or the US might be related to the status of the country and disappointment with their leaders' policies, these data are supported by the studies where the experts, sounding counterintuitively in the era of geopolitics, observe "a decline of the nation-states" [16], as "new technologies force us to re-think sovereignty and the role of the state" [17]

[13] The debate on this issue was reflected in such publications as Wendt ,A " The state as a person in International theory" Review of International Studies, 30(2), 2004.
[14]Journalist Challenges Trump Envoy Witkoff Over Putin meetings: Don't You Find it Disgusting? By Kyiv Post Sept.7 , 2026 https://www.kyivpost.com/post/83920
[15] Sergey Radchenko "A morning rant about national identities", Feb 27, 2026, substack, https://profradchenko.substack.com/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email
[16] Democracy is not declining. The Nation-State is, by Joe Mathews, International Democracy Community, 03.10.2024 https://www.democracy.community/stories/democracy-isnt-declining-nation-state
[17] Adam Strobeyko " The treatment of the state as a person in the international law" PhD Thesis in the international law, Geneva Graduate Institute, 20 April 2023.
https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/news/treatment-state-person-international-law

# Case of Ukraine: society as an agency

The Russian aggression in Ukraine has illuminated the complexity of security problems in the neighbourhood and ultimately served legitimization of the other autocrats' policies, who justified their move towards "greater balancing" - in fact move away from the West - by the acute security considerations. The Ukraine case in this respect was a perfect example of how the West amid Russia's aggression has broken its promises to provide security guarantees for Ukraine in exchange for her giving up the nuclear weapons. In addition, Putin found an effective way of blackmail by the threat of unpredictability in applying nuclear weapons and the threat of aggression beyond the borders of Ukraine. In neighbouring states, like in Georgia, when identity driven EU integration, as evidenced by numerous popular protests, clashed with the interests of regime security, this tension is being reconciled at the level of threat to state security with the Ukrainian case as an excuse for restraining trends of integration. Further monopolization of power in Georgia, or Azerbaijan has been justified by the acute security considerations and unreliability of the Western partners in providing these guarantees. Thus, as evidenced by the polls, while societies clearly prefer European integration, their leaders take an advantage of the devastating effects of the pro-European, pro-Western choice of their neighbour, left alone vis-a-vis undeterred and ambitious Northern power. But lasting now for already more than 4 years destructive war against Ukraine, EU's rather secondary role as an actor in the region, inability to play more effective role in the conflicts of the region prompts these states besides balancing, to resort to the regional cooperation, such as Azerbaijan joining Organization of Turkic States, or Non-Aligned Movement, or play even increasing independent role in the region. While the consequences of security conundrum in Ukraine result in manoeuvring of regional leaders, mainly autocrats, despite the societies' attitudes, the democracy resisting occupation showed an increasingly profound role of the societal factor in resisting an autocrat-aggressor.

Ukraine appeared to be a case study demonstrating the effect of democratisation of warfare on politics, and most importantly- reflection of the societal agency both domestically and internationally. Ukraine's drone dominated warfare shaped a need in accommodation of the new societal power. According to Gumeniuk, recent political tension in Ukraine is caused by the delay in recognition and inclusion of this power : " The embrace of a decentralized technology driven defense strategy has required new forms of

cooperation between military and civilians, giving far more people a stake in matters of national security and military strategy"[18]

Putin failed on many stated objectives in the war against Ukraine. However, this policy has disclosed yet another significant contradiction – that control over parts of territories will not lead to the control of the people's choices, or hard power gains or at least the partial ones so far did not mean achievement of the soft power goals of the aggressor. Military resilience as a foundation of resistance did not lose its significance for the sovereignty of the nation, facing an attack, but in this case it has a meaning far beyond the physical borders. For Ukraine, it is a defence of sovereignty and the right of people to make their choice and is a war of autocracy and illiberalism against democracy and liberalism. This serves a case demonstrating power, resilience and agency of the society both in response to the external challenges and domestic - clear limits of territorial military control by the aggressor, and demand of greater political participation domestically as a result of the changed nature of warfare. At the same time the official negotiations mediated by the US between Russia and Ukraine so far has not been effective because it did not take into account the role of the society in Ukraine – its needs, attitudes, resolve - as the main actor in the defence and resilience of the much smaller country than its adversary. The case of Ukraine illuminates the discrepancy between societies already performing independent agency on the one hand, and limits of diplomacy, bilateral relations and the international institutions dealing primarily with the governments – on the other.

## Digital identity and the new sources of power

Among factors influencing current trends of leadership and wars, is heightened competition caused by undermined authority of the political leaders which is one of the effects of the IT – when anyone can become an influencer by spreading various (shallow or deep) messages, and avoid the numerous barriers (class, education, experience, geographical borders) which filter career political leaders. It is not by accident that one of the profound factors contributing to the probability of the contemporary politicians to be elected is their capacity to be a competent communicator extended to social networks[19] At the same time, this pressure along with the

[18] Nataliya Gumeniuk The Future of Ukraine's Drone Democracy. Transforming the military has changed the war- and upended Politics.
[19] Alexandra Topping "He is natural: Andy Burnham's allies give his social media style a thumbs-up", The Guardian, 22 May 2026.
https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2026/may/22/natural-andy-burnham-allies-social-media-thumbs-up

accelerated speed of politics and relations, incentivize the political leaders to be more populist in order to compete with numerous, although virtual, contesters. This trend is reinforced as it was mentioned, by decline of democracy leading to the weakening of institutions of checks and balances and to exceeding executive power. The era of IT and new wars is witnessing a further transformation of leaders through anti-establishment figures towards the entertaining populist ones. The contemporary leadership, whose function becomes more that of performance than of representation, is increasingly based on identification with personal charisma adding elements of dramatism and entertainment, sometimes bordering with satire.

At the same time, conclusions from the decline of democracy or rise of populists are hurried and mistaken- the problem is not a failure of a concept of universality of democracy or liberal values beyond the borders, but the way the united West had been approaching it. The indicator of effectiveness of relations with external institutions and states nowadays lies beyond mere statistics of trade turnover and peace – it is promotion of conditions which would allow the societies to realize their best reform and creative potential, or at least not to block it. The comparative analysis of the two oil booms in Azerbaijan allowed to see how conditions in the world trade in the 19th century were more conducive for promotion of democracy and preventing "resource curse" than 100 years after, when the oil exploration coincided with the Soviet institutional legacies, and when the West did not take into account the clash with democratization agenda in its policies toward the oil rich states. In most cases of trade with energy rich states, the foreign aid, as one of the major tools of the soft power was adjusted to the interests of the West who preferred not to upset the centralized and autocratic governance for the uninterrupted energy supply.

The story in introduction has obvious hints on the processes with the societies. Free ride and readiness to sacrifice a daily earning only for a chance to discuss the liberal values for a migrant driver is the best reflection *and an illustration of the gap which has existed in the ideology of liberalism and colonial legacies in the relations between the West and the rest. This divergence contributed to* the confusion regarding liberalism – as an ideological and ethical norm, on the one hand, and liberal international order, which many in the Global South connected with "hypocrisy". In fact, the global decision making still struggles to fully include the Global South representatives in the decision making in international affairs[20].

International relations and this divergence plays a role in identity formation- first causing misperception on what is important for the

[20] John B. Alterman and Lily McElwee "Fulcrums of order: Rising States and the Struggle for the Future" , CSIS, December 2, 2025. ." https://www.csis.org/analysis/fulcrums-order-rising-states-and-struggle-future

reference group and allowing the autocrat to hi-jack the identity formation, as in case of Putin's narrative of Russian identity. The essence of the contemporary threats – their universal nature- such as climate change – requires to look beyond development of mobilization based on in essence confrontational and divisive security logic and treat them instead as cooperation to deal with the shared threats. This approach is reinforced by the virtuality of space of most significant activities and interaction, which overcomes boundaries and the level of weaponization of soft power and technological innovation in the military sphere. Despite autocrats' attempts to limit access to the internet to prevent their societies from the exposure to alternative ideas, the virtual space which is not finite allows endless opportunities for technological progress overcoming these boundaries.

## Soft power reconsidered: from influence to co-creation

While increasing the military budgets of NATO and EU member states is a critical necessity for defending against and deterring aggression in light of current military conflicts, it must be complemented by proactive normative policies to become an effective means of preventing future wars—wars that provide autocrats with an easy way to present themselves as "victors" to their societies by reinforcing national identity at the expense of vulnerable targets. Withdrawal of Trump's US from the rest of the world in the area of soft power – serious cuts of the support to societies - humanitarian, or rights agenda- means deprivation of these societies of alternative opportunities to realize their reform potential. The interaction with officials at the international level, which is not limited to the democratically elected representatives of the democratic states, develop into an isolated and elitist communication, following its own logic.

However counterintuitive this might sound in the times of rise of geopolitics, the new era requires renewed stress on universality of the human rights, values of freedoms and dignity – the approach overcoming geopolitical logic. One of the ways to resolve mentioned contradictions as the first step – is to reinforce a concept of universality of values- and thus reduce the confrontational trends. The "influence" should be replaced by "co-creation" thus recognizing the contribution and equal participation in producing and development of added value in the area of soft power of the societies, rather than of the regimes representing states, of the other less democratic systems. In this regard for the politicians the alternative to following the confrontational logic of populist sentiments is the option of opening a new, or another, perspective and information extending the

boundaries of knowledge and identity of the citizen. Driven by contemporary transactional logic of international relations, however, the engagement with the autocrats and corrupt officials may lead to only tactical and temporary effect, as in many cases war serves as a tool for regime security. The inconsistency of the achievements in negotiations with Iran, or with Russia is a clear example of this. Therefore, prevention of wars should bring back the competition over the hearts and minds of societies, but in a consistent, equitable and inclusive way. In this regard, the greater share of foreign aid should be allocated to freedoms, which has been practically neglected equalling less than 1% of it.[21] For this to happen, the experts suggest treating these values not "as a moral preference", but as "a productive infrastructure on which every other cause depends". While recognizing the convincing logic of this pragmatic approach, yet, the other perspective – that the normative aspect of the relations which was overshadowed by the market interests, should gain its high place in the hierarchy of priorities in official relations, might also appear to be important. Unlike the previous years - the support for the soft power should not come as that "exported" by the West, but as an *equal process of co-creation by all actors*.

## From Homo Pugnans to Homo Partum

The topic of empowerment and inclusion of front-line communities, non-state actors, societies and different segments of it is taking increasing space at the contemporary international forums. As COP30 in Brazil stated at one of its panels "you cannot de-colonize the climate future if the same voices dominate the table."[22] Thus the way out is not so much "fighting" the dictators, but compete with them over and for the societies. The competition for the societies, whose realization of best reform potential is deterred and locked by the respective autocratic leaders, is not just about the competition of narratives of the soft power, but also about making relations conducive for this realization. "Returning the dignity", as one of the major objectives was stated at the 4th Mediterranean Security Dialogue[23]. The spread of the narratives promoted by autocrats is usually achieved not only due to the imposed by such leaders limits on the freedom of media, or the passivity and reactive nature of the Western narratives (unlike in the times of the Cold War) but also because of the faults and gaps in the foreign policies

[21] Tim Reynolds & Alvaro Salas-Castro " The Power of Freedom Philanthropy" , in Journal of Democracy, Volume 37, N.3, July 2026. https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/993642
[22] See Robert Bosch Academy blog post https://www.linkedin.com/posts/robert-bosch-academy_cop30-decolonisingclimate-climatejustice-activity-7399333594910904321-3K8J/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAACk7gUB7vzCQzB5TNok8GsT9OwZg8KHnYk
[23] "Introductory panel : The spiral is accelerating", 4th Strategic Mediterranean Dialogue, Toulon, 5 October, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96RYP4uAP0w

of the external actors and challenges of the international order. This includes the sacrifice of the human rights agenda for the sake of trade, or selective application of principles of legal justice or human rights, particularly in case of conflicts, observed in the policies of the EU or the US. While the former - compromising human rights agenda- might be partly overcome by "friendshoring", there is still no effective mechanism to improve the latter ( unequal treatment of parties to the conflict). It is also an opportunity for the EU to suggest and demonstrate a different perspective on international relations, a way of resolving the conflicts, and to play a leading role in reasserting the universality of human dignity. However, as studies show, the European political elite increasingly resorts to the civilizational conceptual framework.

Wars of interstate aggression and territorial expansion are (archaic) characteristics of the international relations, indicating weakness, rather than strength of the international actors. While still being able to achieve some results – such as distraction of the domestic public opinion and blackmail by a "spoiler" internationally, wars as means of gaining physical control are becoming increasingly outdated and lagging behind the accelerating change of nature of power. The other aspect of the current wars is the "enduring requirement of manpower"[24] in the armies despite the technological innovations and usage of the unmanned weapons, such as drones etc. This increasingly is in contradiction with the developing attitudes of the younger generations, when even the defending states struggle to mobilize fighters[25], as "will to fight" remains the key component of war[26] .

Social networks have been hosting and promoting voices of ordinary people, most importantly their otherwise hidden numerous outstanding talents, so that previously unknown provincial and poor user may overnight turn into a celebrity[27]. This is in a sense an analogue of the poor peasants of the Baku villages more than a century ago, when discovery of a shallow and abundant oil resources made them an oil millionaire but nowadays is based on- besides the recognition of people's entrepreneurial talent - of a creative one – reflecting evolving contemporary nature of power, which is expressed not in the size of material assets, but in the human technological or other creative skills. At the same time, young people continue to lose their lives in the senseless battles for the contractual promise of financial reward, like in the contract based army of Russia. While most of them are driven by the need to provide for subsistence or additional income, some are re-directing

[24] Amos Fox, " Who Consolidates Gains? The Enduring Requirement for Manpower in Army Formations". https://smallwarsjournal.com/2026/02/06/mobile-brigade-combat-team-land-warfare/ Small Wars Journal, Essay, 02.06.2026.
[25] Sara Rainsford "Ukraine's drone commander has Russian oil, troops and morale in his sights", BBC news, April 27, 2026, https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/ukraines-drone-commander-russian-oil-050344439.html

[26] https://www.ccw.ox.ac.uk/what-is-war-today
[27] The musical self-expression on Tiktok for instance is one of the most dominant categories among its 1 bln users.

their aggression resulting from frustration of the social pressures, allowing them to feel power and masculinity. In fact, the unfolding underlying ***competition between states or communities, is the one between opposing ways of self-realization of a personality*** – the process which can definitely be influenced by politicians, by reinforcing the opportunities for self-realization created by informational technology and social networks and eventually weakening incentives for warfare or military mobilization. In addition to a few trends promoting decline of violence and wars by Steven Pinker, the IT gives a stage to another one- much more accessible and less elitist way for self-realization of one's own talents and recognition.

Thus in the process of recognizing/empowering society, in addition to *Homo Faber*, so famously critically reflected upon by Hanna Arendt and in his novel by Max Frisch, the contemporary technological progress contribute to promoting of *Homo Partum - a creative person*- empowered by social networks (including *Homo Motus*, *Homo Vocalis*- dancing or singing person[28] etc), on the one hand, and resulting from the outdated notion of power, a fighting one – *Homo Pugnans* -on the other. The understanding expressed through *Homo Pugnans* is the human being whose capacity is demonstrated through struggle, domination, territorial control, and the defeat of others. In this conception, power is a zero-sum relationship, or that one actor becomes powerful through the subordination or destruction of another. This conception remains central to contemporary warfare. The significance of *Homo Partum* lies not in the claim that creativity will replace conflict. Rather, it lies in the possibility that human recognition and self-realization can increasingly be achieved through creation rather than domination. A person may seek visibility, recognition, influence, or achievement through the production of music, knowledge, technological innovation, entrepreneurship, or social contribution rather than through participation in a hierarchy of political or military power. It is at the level of *Homo Partum* where communities - contrary to the conflictual logic- show their capacity to produce added value from the harmonious collaboration culminating in such brilliant examples of music created by Sami Yusuf, or the Barenboim orchestra. In a deeply symbolic way, these relations have been shown by the young Palestinian artists who transformed their trauma into an art, (rather than revenge), when recently turning the city into a painting canvas[29].

So the deeper transformation involved here reflects competing understandings of human power with technological transformation having

[28] See for instance interview of Marcia Barrett of Boney M "You can't fight while dancing", asserting further, that wars are silly, while music- inspirational and "it's a healer" and that she wished it would more mingling with the daily lives. (Cultural diplomacy dedicated song, Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, 5 September 2014, https://youtu.be/7Cx89gLKc10)

[29] https://www.linkedin.com/posts/aljazeera-english_gaza-activity-7432333793723809792-OKFo?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAACk7gUB7vzCOzB5TNok8GsT9OwZg8KHnYk

created new opportunities for another form of human agency. Individuals increasingly possess the ability to create value through knowledge, communication, artistic production, technological innovation, and networks that do not depend upon control of territory or large material resources. The same possibility exists at the level of communities. Communities can compete through destruction, but they can also compete—and cooperate—through the production of cultural, intellectual, technological, and social value. The central competition of the future may therefore increasingly be understood not simply as a competition among states, but as a competition among different possibilities for human self-realization. One path directs human frustration, ambition, and identity toward confrontation. Another expands opportunities for creation. Diplomacy that encourages the latter does more than improve relations among governments. It contributes to the creation of environments in which people possess alternatives to the political and psychological attractions of confrontation.

## Conclusion: Inclusion as a strategy of peace

The character and nature of wars today has been changing, becoming more protracted and ineffective, reflecting controversial effects of technological achievements and revealing limits of territorial control as a tool of political domination.

At the same time contemporary nature of wars reflects the delayed adjustment of political institutions to the quickly changing conditions, such as gap in international authority, or a decline of a hegemon, but also of a growing contrast between yet exclusionary and elitist nature of politics and international relations on the one hand, and underrepresented, while empowered by IT tools societies. People are increasingly present in global life but remain insufficiently present in international relations. While non-state and societal actors are being empowered by technology with their impact spreading and intensifying through bloggers and influencers, transactional approach in international relations and rise of geopolitics reinforce state-centric approach, amid personalized leadership and states. With IT progress and turning of societies and non-state actors into an agency less dependent on states and overcoming the borders, personality motivation and incentives grow more important. The underlying substance of conflicts, competition and rivalry is becoming less about states or communities, but about different ways of self-realization – between the one based on confrontation and destruction of the other, and – the one of realizing one's own creative and reform potential.

"Outsmarting" aggressive autocrats would mean undermining the basis of its support through appeal to and inclusion of the respective societies – asserting universality of values of dignity based on recognition of the contribution of these societies to the development of these values of freedom, democracy and liberalism. The voice of the liberal states and institutions should be heard and channelled even more profoundly than in the Cold War, as it is dealing with much more complex reality of the contemporary politics and international relations.

Climate change, pandemics, technological transformation, migration, environmental degradation, and the consequences of artificial intelligence do not respect conventional political boundaries. They produce different consequences in different societies, but they nevertheless create forms of shared vulnerability. Humanity increasingly confronts common problems, while political identity remains organized around increasingly intense forms of national and civilizational competition. This has implications for diplomacy. A diplomacy based upon societal engagement could help address this contradiction by expanding the boundaries within which political identity is formed. The inclusion of societies in international relations should not be understood merely as an ethical improvement upon an existing system. It may also be a strategy of peace, and even of survival via-avis new threats related to AI. Wars are often sustained by the separation between those who make decisions and those who experience their consequences. Political leaders may calculate strategic advantages, while populations bear the costs of death, displacement, economic destruction, and the long-term consequences of hostility. The greater participation of societal actors cannot eliminate this problem, but it may create additional pressures against the reduction of other societies to geopolitical objects.

While inclusion as a way to improve chances for peace is not a new topic, its significance rose exponentially under the current conditions. The greater inclusion of the societal actors comes out also as an imperative to protect, or defend them from the unfolding numerous pressures. One of them is that delegating some intellectual or mental functions to the technological device (such as AI) might lead to the weakening of these human functions, although not without development of the other. On the other hand, "human factor" is challenged by the still unfolding role of AI depending on whether it will remain a tool, or evolve into a critical competitor to the human being. Moreover, the trend of inequality in capacity of using AI has been warned about by the leading IT entrepreneurs such as Meredith Whittacker[30], president of Signal. Rising significance of geopolitics, with the side effect of strengthening of the state actors with questioned legitimacy in this process,

[30] The AI series: AI and Surveillance Capitalism. AI experts Camille Francois and Meredith Whittaker discuss how to break up Big tech and build a safe ethical AI. Al Jazeera, 22 Feb. 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/video/studio-b-unscripted/2024/2/22/the-ai-series-ai-and-surveillance-capitalism

is weakening participation of the societies which might be driven otherwise by the universal values of self-realization and creativity.

The introductory story with the driver is a stark illustration of the importance of the ideational and value based aspects of the people's life, such as freedoms, respect and dignity, taking over economic issues. In the context of prevention of wars and conflict resolution this points to dignity and equality as prerequisites for effective engagement.

Whether creative people promoted by internet- *Homo Partum* - will take over those fighting real wars - *Homo Pugnans*-will be revealed with time, but contemporary interstate territorial wars look increasingly outdated and ineffective in the context of energy transition and IT progress, which significantly transform the nature of power, and evolving universality of threats, In the meantime, amid this period of transformation of the world order with profoundly personalistic leadership and ineffectiveness of international institutions, inclusion of communities, societies, social groups, non-state actors in the global and regional decision making will allow to overcome exclusive nature of contemporary international relations, side effects of the IT and influence the absolutist trends of political power.