

A World in Turmoil and the Emerging New Arms Race

Marcos de Mendonça Silva

Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras - AMAN,
Resende, RJ, Brasil

Email: mmsilva70@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9534-4679>

Rafael Roesler

Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras - AMAN,
Resende, RJ, Brasil

Email: editorchefe.ran@aman.eb.mil.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0733-6389>

Arlindo José de Barros Junior

Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras - AMAN,
Resende, RJ, Brasil.

Email: ran.editor@aman.eb.mil.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0625-6835>



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The end of the Cold War appeared to herald the consolidation of a more cooperative international order, marked by globalization, economic interdependence, and a reduction in geopolitical tensions. Yet, as the first quarter of the twenty-first century draws to a close, a diametrically opposite scenario has emerged: conflicts have erupted across multiple regions, and a renewed global arms race is underway - not only nuclear, but also spatial, conventional, cyber, and hypersonic. Political science, international relations, geopolitics, and various other fields of study now find themselves operating within a living laboratory, in which power struggles shape, in real time, the trajectory of international security.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), global military spending reached USD 2.718 trillion in 2024, an increase of nearly 10 percent compared to the previous year. This rise occurred across all major geographic regions, underscoring the truly global nature of contemporary militarization (George *et al.*, 2025).

We are experiencing a rare convergence of crises. For the first time since the end of the bipolar order, virtually all major strategic theaters are under simultaneous strain. This situation has led some analysts to draw parallels with historical periods in which the combination of multiple regional conflicts ultimately triggered both the First and the Second World Wars.



Are we, therefore, on the threshold of a Third World War? It is not our role to engage in risky exercises of prediction, but it is prudent to examine the numerous impacts these conflicts exert on the (re)configuration of the global order. This synchronicity is, after all, no coincidence; it reflects a system undergoing accelerated transition, in which the liberal hegemonic order of 1991–2008 is giving way to a multipolar world still lacking clearly defined rules.

The war in Ukraine and the return of bloc politics

The war between Russia and Ukraine has once again reshaped the map of Europe and has produced significant consequences thus far: incessant migratory flows of directly affected populations; the destruction of critical infrastructure; the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) - with Finland joining in 2023 and Sweden in 2024, thereby reviving Cold War era, in which there were bloc dynamics; and the acceleration of militarization, driven by rising expenditures linked to the modernization and expansion of the armed forces of multiple countries. In the current context of Western restrictions, Russia has intensified its contacts with Beijing, Pyongyang, and Tehran, including discussions focused on logistical matters.

The Pacific Basin as the epicenter of tension

Meanwhile, the Pacific Basin has emerged as the new epicenter of strategic rivalry. The South China Sea - rich in fish stocks and highly promising for the exploration of hydrocarbons and metallic nodules - has become the locus of territorial disputes between Beijing and its neighbors. This strategic maritime corridor is responsible for more than one-third of global sea trade and has witnessed the transformation of islands and atolls into substantive military outposts, particularly by the People's Republic of China. In response to this escalation, Japan has been seriously debating a revision of Article 9 of its constitution.

Taiwan stands at the center of this geopolitical chessboard, supported by the United States, which, for now, serves as the guarantor of the island's security. Yet, it is not mere conjecture to consider the possibility of a reunification initiative by Beijing, which has repeatedly signaled its intention to reintegrate the island, including through coercive means - an action that could trigger a conflict of considerable magnitude.

Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States - through the AUKUS alliance - and India are actively engaged in efforts that, in their view, "aim to maintain regional security, both on



land and at sea, in order to uphold the principles of the Liberal International Order, international law, and freedom of navigation”¹ (Reis, 2023).

The Middle East: an unending cycle of violence

In the Middle East, deep-rooted tensions linger like open wounds. The conflict between Israel and Hamas, coupled with Israel’s response in Gaza, has reignited historical fault lines while also revealing new alignments: on one side, U.S. led diplomatic efforts to normalize relations between Israel and Sunni Arab states (the Abraham Accords); on the other, the so-called “Axis of Resistance” composed of Iran, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iraqi Shia militias. Tehran was approaching the nuclear threshold when precise U.S. strikes on enrichment facilities halted - at least for now - its advance toward acquiring nuclear weapons, a development that could further destabilize a region already grappling with competition among three major powers: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey.

Israel has made clear that it will not accept a nuclear-armed Iran. Meanwhile, the Houthis have demonstrated that inexpensive cruise missiles are capable of disrupting vital commercial routes in the Red Sea, exposing the vulnerability of global supply chains that depend on this critical maritime choke point. Chronic instability continues to fuel the regional arms race.

Africa: forgotten but devastating conflicts

Across Africa, the continent is confronted with a series of bloody internal and cross-border conflicts, frequently tied to struggles over natural resources, ethnic and religious disputes, and the presence of extremist groups. Recent political developments in Sahel nations and persistent violence in the continent’s center-east (such as in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) reveal significant limitations among many states and within regional security structures. International media coverage of the humanitarian and security challenges affecting the continent remains limited.

Latin America and the fight against narco-terrorism

Latin America, although historically less central to major interstate rivalries, faces a critical threat that likewise demands a militarized response: narco-terrorism. The power and violence of criminal cartels - particularly in Ecuador, Mexico, and Colombia - have transformed organized crime into a tangible threat to state sovereignty and democratic stability. The deployment of U.S. forces in

¹ Original text: *objetivam fazer a manutenção da segurança regional – seja terrestre ou marítima – para garantir os princípios da Ordem Liberal Global, do direito internacional e da livre navegação*



the Caribbean, combined with support for states confronting crises linked to drug trafficking, signals an expansion of the arenas in which geopolitical tensions and security challenges unfold, involving transnational non-state actors.

The challenge for science

The new arms race is multifaceted, encompassing not only conventional and nuclear weapons but also the cyber domain and the militarization of outer space. The global rise in military spending - diverting essential resources from efforts to address economic crises, hunger, pandemics, and social inequality - constitutes a tragic failure of collective priorities.

The scientific community plays a crucial role in analyzing the causes and consequences of these tensions. It is essential to propose pathways and alternatives capable of fostering cooperation among states and reducing the likelihood of conflict. Research in preventive diplomacy, peace studies, and international security - drawing on complex models to anticipate points of inflection - has never been more vital. Scientific journals must serve as forums for debate that transcend polarized narratives, offering evidence-based insights to ensure that the fervor of militarization - or polarization - does not overshadow reason. The future of global stability and human well-being depends on our collective capacity to manage and ultimately defuse these tensions.

Finally, with the aim of reflecting on the issues discussed here, RAN reiterates its invitation to the academic community to publish its studies and research in our Journal. We believe that academic-scientific production plays a significant role in building pathways toward understanding and preventing the tensions that shape the contemporary international landscape. Through analyses grounded in scientific rigor and high-quality debate, it can contribute to expanding cooperation among states and strengthening diplomacy in pursuit of global peace and stability.

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