

# Theorising Systemic Appeasement in International Politics

Y. Emre Öziçci<sup>1</sup>

Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Nairobi, ORCID: 0000-0003-3388-7149,  
corresponding address: emremisik@icloud.com

## Abstract

*The current state of the relations between Russia and the 'West' presents curious similarities with the '30s appeasement of Germany. These include the change in the international order, the (late) emergence of a system-challenger after an 'intermediary' period that followed the change, the conduct of the challenge and the reactions of the direct custodians of the system. Similarly in both cases, a cycle of escalation-empathy-appeasement defines the interactions between the system and its challenger, creates a centrifugal effect among third actors and deteriorates the system. The similarity necessitates a theoretical effort to define the phenomenon as to its genesis, processes and its end from a systemic perspective, through the comparison of the two cases yet beyond a purely historical angle that has been almost the only one in dealing with the appeasement. In other words, this article engages in two theory-developing case studies centred on the German Reich and contemporary Russia to understand the theoretical value of appeasement as a specific mode of interactions in international politics.*

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## Introduction

Appeasement has mostly been studied from a historical perspective and moreover, as one particular case, the British and French appeasement of Nazi Germany, almost to the point of making the phenomenon identical with this particular period. Furthermore, Aster's work on the 'appeasement literature' (Aster 2008) amply shows that the study of this period, be it 'mainstream' or 'revisionist', mostly concentrated on the decision-makers' personalities and beliefs. As such, work on the appeasement became roughly reducible to a debate on the 'Guilty Men' of 1940 ("Cato" 1998).

Within this framework, the '30s appeasement was much criticised as the ultimate error in dealing with an aggressive, system-challenging power. According to critics, (Churchill 2002; Shirer 1991; Namier 1949, 1952; Wheeler-Bennett 1948; Gilbert & Gott 1963<sup>2</sup>) the appeasers did not only fail to reconcile with the challenger but in trying to do so overlooked their commitments *vis-à-vis* their partners/allies. They gradually sacrificed the principles and the safeguards of the post-War international system. They consequently freed the system-challenger from the need to compromise. A self-perpetuating escalation/appeasement cycle emerged. As they discredited the system, they caused other actors to revise their alignments and behaviour patterns. It led to a point where neither further appeasement nor the system-challenger's self-restraint were possible. Revisionist approaches, on the other hand, consisted of various re-interpretations of the balance of power or of the decision-makers' (appeasers') intentions, yet without denying the process' spiral-descent to bankruptcy (Hoare 1954; Medlicott 1968; Taylor 1991; Northedge 1966; Ripsman & Levy 2008; Weinberg 1994: 56-57, 66-67; Gilbert 1966; Feiling 1946).

Arguably the climatic event of the '30s appeasement, Munich has been the popular symbol of how not to deal with aggressive actors. It was also – and controversially – referred to when rationalising escalation (Aster 2008; Lippmann 1966). Still, it is difficult to say that the 'ghost of Munich' eradicated appeasement. During the '30s, appeasers had enjoyed considerable public and intellectual support (Adams 1993: 128) and there is no reason to think that the dynamics of appeasement vanished altogether. After all, Roosevelt dismissed Churchill's warnings about the Soviet policies in Yalta only a few years and a world war after Munich.

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2 With an emphasis on anti-communist "obsessions" that made the German appeasement an ideological choice.

Could the phenomenon of appeasement be confined to the decision-makers' behaviour or does it transcend a unique period and a unique set of decision-makers? As such, can it be defined as part of IR theory?

Theorisation of the appeasement is not wholly absent in the literature. Lanyi's attempt to define active and passive forms of appeasement constitutes a valuable example and an important source of inspiration for this paper (Lanyi 1963). Still, it is centred on the policy form and does not expand the study toward its (possible) systemic framework.

Is it possible to bring a theoretical framework specific to the study of the appeasement as a systemic phenomenon? Is it useful?

As to the possibility of a theoretical framework, the answer is affirmative. Yet such a study requires rethinking some ground concepts of the IR theorisation, to combine a systemic approach with a 'behavioural pattern' that would be defined beyond decision-makers' individuality. Here the international *order*, not being identical with the international *structure* but defining its intersubjective, actual, lived and normatively expressed (therefore referred to as such) appearance, more defining the actors' positions in their power relations than vice versa, shall constitute the ground notion of this study. The nature of the actor-order relationship will give the matter of research: A relationship defined by the actor's position toward the order as the normative appearance of the system, it is conducted with actors that are identified with it as its 'custodians'. These are not the great/major powers of a given international structure at a given time, but the ones, *among them*, which founded or have been maintaining the order as a normative reference. While a major power is a main constituting part of the international *structure*, it may be at the same time in a confrontational, even antithetic relationship with the international *order*. The phenomenon of appeasement of a systemic nature appears in such a case as a possibility.

As to usefulness, if the '30s appeasement was in fact a unique process with only historical significance, a negative answer could be more valid. Yet the '30s process had apparently more fundamental and repetitive traits as to its genesis, forms, contents and self-and-system consuming 'natural course'. Appeasement has a tendency to reappear in *comparable* – not meaning identical – systemic circumstances. Their identification necessitates a theoretical effort.

Is there then an appeasement case of a systemic nature comparable to that of the '30s? Post-bipolar relations between the 'West' and the Russian Federation present fundamental similarities; however, the two periods differ from each other as regards the international structure (multipolar and – arguably – unipolar) as well as the ideology, aims and practises of the system-challenger regimes (the Third Reich and the Russian Federation). The similarities between the two cases

appear as a strong discontent of and increasing challenge to the international order based on a preceding 'injury'. The emergence of the system-challenge follows an intermediary period in both cases, in reference to the order. The challengers' general issues with the international order, such as sovereignty questions, irredentism and free hand demands are comparable. The reactions of the international order of the two periods resemble each other and consist of empathy conducive to active/passive appeasement. The consequences of these reactions, such as the challenger's commitment to escalation, the discredit of the order and the centrifugal effect on the third actors are quite common.

To build a theoretical framework for the study of the systemic appeasement, this paper shall attempt in its first section to define the system and the appeasement as a systemic phenomenon as necessary groundwork. Here, the structural realist terminology will be employed with adjustments, given its comprehensive, inherently 'systemic' understanding of the international relations on the one hand and its apparent lacunas at that on the other – stemming from its over-reductionist, 'microeconomic' assumptions. The said section will then proceed toward an account of the two 'cases' genetic background: The actor-order relationship's evolution toward the system-challenge and appeasement shall be debated from the perspective of the actor and of the custodians. The second section will deal with the phenomenon of appeasement itself as to its forms and contents again within the framework of the two cases, as well as with its consequences on the international order as it creates a system-consuming cycle of escalation-empathy-appeasement-centrifugality. Within the two separate sub-sections of this part, the *initial* phase – the first month – of the Russian invasion of Ukraine shall also be debated from the perspective of the systemic appeasement.

### **The system and the genetic background of the systemic appeasement**

#### *Defining the system and the appeasement as a systemic phenomenon*

Appeasement is bilateral. One actor appeases another actor on an issue of escalation. However, it may be related to a particular relationship between the actor and the system, from where the 'issue' that constitutes the object of appeasement stems as 'issue'. Yet the 'system' – international system – needs to be re-thought at that point, to be able to define the actor-system relationship more comprehensively.

Structural realism brings a definition of the international system by uniformising the actors through a series of common parameters as an adaptation of microeconomic agents, reducing the variables to 'power' and the relations to power-relations (Waltz 1979). As it is the case for microeconomy, it provides the research with a solid *Weltanschauung*. Still, while defining the general structure

is necessary for displaying how the actors are positioned within, it is not enough to explain the translation of the actor's basic position into political behaviour, acts of foreign policy. Here the structural realist ground does not support the entire *praxis* of international politics. Waltz's differentiation between the theory of international politics and the theory of foreign policy, one explaining 'why States similarly placed behave similarly despite their internal differences' and the other 'why States similarly placed in a system behave in different ways – differences in behaviour arising from differences of internal composition' is of note at that junction (Waltz 1996). Here, instead of revising its own framework, structural realism seems to make use of the 'internal composition', a sphere of arguably infinite variables, as a field where it may export behaviours incompatible with its construct, yet which are occurrences inherent to *praxis*.

There might, however, be another way to preserve the structural realist study ground without breaking up the connection between the two fields mentioned above. Actors that are similarly or differently placed in a system behave similarly or differently *within* the system, therefore in accordance with the relationship they build *with* the system. Here the system is a constant and the variable becomes the nature of the relationship, instead of the vague field of 'internal composition'. The 'internal composition', while it may be a causal precedent to the 'relationship', is not the relationship itself which is given in the *praxis* of the international politics. Now, how to express the actor-system relationship? To begin with, what is the system to which the actor relates itself in such and such manner?

The structure is unipolar, bipolar or a variant of multipolarity. The actor is a pole, a major power, a regional power, a minor power and so on. Structural realism restricts itself to these elements and consequently to defining the relationship between the actor and the structure. Yet the actor's relation to the system presents more contents than a forcedly objectivised power-classification and general behaviour patterns matched to it, still without omitting the structural framework. If not the structure, then what is the system to which the actor relates itself *individually*?

Hansen draws attention to the difference between the international structure and the international *order* (Hansen 2011: 7-8). Further advancing her proposal, it is possible to define the international order as the intersubjective, actual, lived appearance of the system, its substance, which the actor positions itself toward and with this reference to others, rather than a mere 'objective', neutral structure. The order would appear within the structure as *normative* substance, a 'canon', a meaning ground of the *praxis* of the international politics. The study of the actor's relationship with the *order*, not merely with the structure, unifies

the fields of the international relations theory and the foreign policy theory. The study of actors' *subjective* references to *intersubjective* international order may thus enhance the explicative function of the structural realism.

Then what would be the nature of the 'relationship'? Power defines the actor's position within the structure. Yet regarding the relationship with the order and consequently with other actors, power-relations take shape and meaning through 'normative' concordances or discordances. The study of the actor-order (system) relationship consequently forms the-still-structural realist – *systemic* – study of the *praxis* of the international politics, of the systemic phenomena. The normative addition in the form of actor-system relationship may complete the structural realist meaning ground in order to support the study of the *praxis*.

In which conditions may a confrontational/antithetic relation, expressed at normative level and reflecting on power relations, appear between a major power and the order itself? Revolutions may constitute a first category: 1789 and 1917 are examples of a major power's radical 'normative' change that fundamentally conflicted with the contemporary order, yet not with the 'structure'. In both cases, it is interesting that the initially contradictory relation between the actor and the order tended toward 'normalisation' through 'taming' – and not elimination – of the normative differences. The French 'Empire' became a normatively non-antithetic part of the 'usual' power-relations of its time's multipolarity which did not inherently exclude the phenomenon of general war, given that it had already occurred before (the Seven Years' War). The USSR, following the revolutionary war period – with its civil and external aspects – and its relatively short isolation from the interstate community, quickly developed bilateral and (less quickly) multilateral ties with non-socialist countries, became part of the Society of Nations, transforming into a not-antithetic element of its time's multipolarity.

On the other hand, in contrast with revolutions, the change of the order itself may create ground for a confrontational/antithetic actor-order relationship: The 'defeated' of the event that changed the order, which however retains the *intersubjective* status of major power, may *potentially* be the source of this dialectic, not necessarily because of the defeat but because of the new order's ensuing imposition by its 'custodians'. The actor-order relations may be conducted but through the custodians of the actual order. The imposition of the order – existentially since it gives the systemic reference and volitionally since the custodians' policies would follow this direction – would constitute the ground theme of this relationship, notwithstanding its actual form, be it the actor's attempt to integrate itself to the order or to confront it. The form might reflect the scale of the 'defeat' as well as the nature of the new order. In the example of the bipolar-

ity, the totality of Germany's and Japan's defeat and the bipolarity's own dialectic 'rigidity' apparently prevented any revisionist turn: The former firmly imposed integration upon the defeated and the latter defined and monopolised systemic confrontation as inherent to the very nature of the order (Waltz 1979: 168, 170-173). However and in contrast to this particular period, the actor-order relationship's dialectic evolution is visible during two other periods of order change, which constituted the ground for the systemic appeasement.

How to define the causality between the actor-order dialectic and the appeasement? The difference of nature and consequently of intentionality between the actor's and the custodians' positions may constitute an answer here: The actor's position would consist of clearer individual policy aims and contents within this dialectical relation, expressible as recovering the 'loss' and neutralising the environment that perpetuated the loss. On the other hand, the custodians' positions are to be vaguer within this framework, expressible as conserving the order, which would consist rather of a horizon, a multitude of forms and contents that would be fitting to the *normative* generalities of the order. The custodians' relative positional flexibility in conserving the order may engender appeasement as a valid option face to the immediacy of *individual* tensions. However, individual cases seemingly tend to become a self-perpetuating process as they but stem from the underlying actor-order relationship with consequences on the order itself, not only related to the custodians' positions but also to other, non-confrontational actor-order relations.

*The change of order and the late emergence of the system-challenger: The genetic background of the systemic appeasement in two cases*

At first glimpse, the international structure did not change radically after the First World War: The structure remained multipolar. Most of the major powers remained major powers; however, their 'qualitative edge' (Waltz 1979: 131) relative to each other changed (with the exception of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), since Germany and 'Russia' were reduced, arguably temporarily, to a weaker position. The *order* on the other hand, as intersubjective reference to the system, was radically altered in normative terms: Multilateralism within the League of Nations, non-interference, sovereign equality and avoidance of war largely defined the post-War international order, as established by its custodians, the victorious powers of the War. The actor-system relations were defined largely on these terms, deviations from them gained their meaning as 'deviations' also according to the same references.

The system-challenge/appeasement cycle of the '30s was not the immediate consequence of the 'injustice' of the treaties that ended the First World War.

Obviously, the peace regime inflicted a deep injury to Germany and to German-ethnicity in general. Germany lost large swathes of territory. Large ethnic-German communities, either part of Germany or the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were left in newly independent non-German countries (Suppan 2019: 11-20, 162-67; Blanke 1993: 9-31). The Wilsonian self-determination principle of the post-War international order was 'stretched' to the detriment of Germany for example in Upper Silesia (Heater 1994: 121-153; Finch 1922), Danzig and much of the Corridor as well as in prevention of the *Anschluss* (Shirer 1991: 295-296; Gould 1950). The Versailles Treaty reduced the German Army to a token existence, imposed war guilt and extremely heavy reparations<sup>3</sup>. Germany was marginalised by the post-War international order and surrounded by the founders and custodians of the Peace regime or by its direct beneficiaries which quickly developed their relations with the custodians.

The Weimar Republic's relationship with the post-War order was characterised by its integration effort which included, within this framework, a struggle for eroding the Versailles regime. When faced with additional disasters such as the Ruhr occupation (Roosevelt 1925; Cornebise 1972), the Republic tried to break its isolation through rapprochement with the other marginalised power of the international order, the USSR, as in the example of the Rapallo Treaty (Duroselle 1993: 68-69; Krüger 1993: 151-162; Hale 1989). It succeeded in integrating itself to the post-War order with the Locarno Pact in 1925 and with its membership to the League of Nations the following year (Krüger 1993: 269-300; Milza 1995: 62-63). It signed the Briand-Kellogg Pact in 1928 which 'outlawed' war. It participated in and supported the Disarmament Conference (Duroselle 1993: 162-168; Milza 1995: 65, 111-113). While doing these, it could avoid guaranteeing its disputed eastern borders during the Locarno negotiations (Jacobson 1972: 152-156; Hoeltje 1958; Turner 1963: 211-212) and preserve its 'Russian option' by fortifying Rapallo with the Treaty of Berlin (Turner 1963: 220-221). It could decrease its war reparations burden by its integration to the system, consequently weakening the anti-German circles of the system's custodians: It involved the US in, separated the British and French positions from each other and made the Dawes and Young Plans possible (Trachtenberg 1980; Mills 1931; Jacobson 1972: 156-167). It almost achieved their total suspension/abolition through the Lausanne Agreement of 1932 (Helbich 1959). It attracted the American capital and could revivify the German economy until the Great Depression as that capital inflow largely surpassed the reparation payments (Schuker 1988). As such, the Weimar Republic's integration to the post-War order significantly eroded the

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3 The Treaty of Versailles, accessed online: [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/versailles\\_menu.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/versailles_menu.asp).



burden of the Versailles regime without a system-challenge and without appeasement.

The regime 'to be appeased' came to power 14 years after the Treaty and turned to a policy of system-challenge. It did not only reject the normative canon of the international order but also tested the 'custodian powers' sanctification of lasting peace and stability. Soon after the regime change, Berlin quitted the Disarmament Conference, revealed its intention to rearm, quitted the League of Nations and denounced the Versailles Treaty restrictions. It built its relationship with the *order* on a confrontational basis, challenging the normative canon by its own normative proposals mostly based on its re-discovery of the injury inflicted to Germany, even when a significant part of it was already neutralised (Baynes 1969)<sup>4</sup>.

The dismemberment of the USSR and of its alliance structure was not the result of a war, nor accompanied by a Versailles-like Treaty. Yet the international structure was changed, from bipolarity into unipolarity or at least, to non-bipolarity (Ikenberry, Mastanduno & Wohlforth 2011: 1-32; Jervis 2009) in the sense of suppression of the fundamental systemic reference to the balance between two superpowers. On the other hand, the international *order* was even more radically changed: The normative position of the 'West'; democracy, rule of law, human rights and global market economy became the canon of the new order and the parameters of the actor-system relations appeared as confrontation, adherence or depending on the actor's capabilities 'coexistence' with the canon<sup>5</sup>.

Russia took over the main privileges of the USSR such as the UN Security Council membership and its nuclear arsenal as the successor state. Still, being successor, the losses of the USSR also meant, intersubjectively, Russia's losses: In this sense, Moscow lost large swathes of territory. Big Russian communities were left outside of the Russian borders, the *Anschluss* attempt in Crimea was prevented<sup>6</sup>, the economic system was utterly disrupted (Tikhomirov 2000; Hare et al. 1998<sup>7</sup>; also Leitzel 1995), the military establishment crumbled (Herspring 1995). Much like the Weimar Republic, the country found itself surrounded by the beneficiaries of the dismemberment, a part of which quickly sought and found prospects of alignment with the custodians of the new order.

Russia's relationship with the post-bipolar order was characterised by its integration effort which included, within this framework, a struggle for eroding

4 Particularly on Versailles' "war guilt clause", at a time it had but little meaning left.

5 When incompatibility with some part of the canon is balanced with compatibility with and contribution to another part, as in the examples of the Gulf States or China.

6 The Crimean Parliament's declaration of independence in May 1992 (subject to referendum which was prevented), accessed online: <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/06/world/crimea-parliament-votes-to-back-independence-from-ukraine.html>.

7 For the steady GDP decrease after the dismemberment of the USSR.

its uncontrolled (Russia-neglecting) expansion toward Moscow's (ex)-sphere of influence (Rumer 2007: 13-21; Aalto 2007). The Foreign Policy Concept of 1993 shows the Yeltsin-era logic of erosion/integration policy (Melville & Shakhleina 2005). This fundamental policy paper of the Federation, while mentioning possibilities of strategic partnership or alliance with the US, objected to its 'unipolar' tendency in particular against 'Russia's role in the countries of Russia's traditional influence' and stressed the necessity to 'firmly resist the US' possible relapses'. It advocated 'regionally centered power relations' with emphasis on the 'great power' identity of Russia. It warned against 'the states in adjacent regions' that were 'pursuing their own policies conspicuously aimed at taking advantage of the disintegration of the USSR' in relation to 'the former Soviet republics'.

Russia participated in the PFP in 1994 and concluded the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 (Melville & Shakhleina 2005: 75-84)<sup>8</sup>, which became the NATO-Russia Council in 2002. She engaged in reforms with a view to participate in or cooperate with the forthcoming international mechanisms of the 'West' such as the WTO<sup>9</sup>, the G-8 and the Council of Europe/ECHR system. Despite her domestic reforms' relatively slow pace (Westin 1999), Russia showed signs of recovery and firmer integration to the world trade a few years after the dismemberment. The trade with the West increased with significant surpluses (Hare et al. 1998). Simultaneously, Moscow advocated the establishment of an 'inclusive' security architecture that would replace or balance the bipolarity-inherited NATO (Smith 2003: 55-73), while clinging to an also bipolarity-inherited UN Security Council where Russia had its veto-capability and to the CSCE/OSCE. While criticising the NATO enlargement perspectives, she interfered in the politics of the western-inclined near-abroad countries, including support to the secessionist uprisings (Rywkin 2015<sup>10</sup>, Laenen2012: 17-38). She initiated the CIS and its appended economic/security integration processes in the ex-USSR geography, though with questionable progress and results (Olcott 1995; Kobrinskaya 2007; Vinokurov 2007; Willerton & Beznosov 2007).

The regime change began in August 1999, eight years after the dismemberment of the USSR, with Putin's appointment as 'acting Prime Minister' in parallel with the 1998 economic crisis, the Kosovo intervention of the 'unipolar' order and the continuing impasse in Chechnya that raised doubts about the viability of the Federation. The new regime deviated from the post-bipolar 'canon' first

8 NATO-Russia Founding Act, accessed online: [https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25468.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm).

9 Although the WTO membership took 18 years of negotiations including its suspension from 2008 until 2011 because of the Georgian blockage, accessed online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-16212643>.

10 For the Yeltsin-era background.

in the domestic field, quite in line with its reason of coming to power. Chechnya issue was 'solved' with determined military action (Russell 2007: 67-88). Moscow initiated a heavy-handed centralisation *or* 'stabilisation' throughout the Federation, progressively pacifying non-violent centrifugal tendencies as in the example of Tatarstan (Frombgen 1999; Dinc 2021) and gradually taming the political opposition in general (McNabb 2016: 45-47; also Sakwa 2020: 23-56; Levitsky & Way 2010: 5-23; Van Herpen 2013: 103-106). It imposed a *de facto* economic *dirigisme* (Sakwa 2020: 113-123). The steady increase of the oil prices and natural gas demand provided the change with means.

The foreign policy of the new regime began to evolve from the Yeltsin-era erosion/integration toward challenging the post-bipolar order, however slowly and gradually, compared to the Third Reich's direct actions. The three fundamental policy papers of 2000 outlined this change (Melville & Shakhleina 2005). The Foreign Policy Concept diagnosed 'a growing trend towards the establishment of a unipolar world order, with economic and power domination by the United States' that was 'devaluing the UN Security Council' and firmly refuted the 'humanitarian intervention' and 'limited sovereignty' concepts. It criticised the selectiveness of Euro-Atlantic integration processes and stressed that NATO's new Strategic Concept was contrary to Russia's security interests. It declared that Russia would promote a multipolar system of international relations. The Military Doctrine of the same year defined the NATO enlargement as an external security risk to Russia. The National Security Concept diagnosed two trends in international relations, one being the Russian-defined multipolarism/polycentrism and the second being the US/West's unipolarism/unilateralism which was circumventing 'the fundamental norms of international law'. It warned that 'ignoring Russia's interests when addressing major issues in international relations, including conflict situations' could 'undermine international security and stability'. It also depicted the eastward enlargement of NATO as a main threat. From there onwards the near-abroad concept gained even more emphasis, as Moscow's natural/historical influence zone (Babak 2000: 93-103; also see Toal 2017) to be *defended* against a hostile 'system' and its custodians.

### *Two forms of empathy*

As custodians of the post-War and the post-bipolar order, western democracies' approach toward Germany and Russia as 'victims' of the change of the international order included empathy. The nature and the outcomes of their empathy changed quite similarly in both cases, according to the state of relations of these actors with the international order, the integration/erosion and the system-challenge.

The custodians' empathy for the Weimar Republic did not suppress the injury but served Berlin's integration/erosion policy (Namier 1942 about imposing clauses at Versailles but being unwilling to enforce them), even from the Peace Conference onward (Fry 1998), with the main concern of reinforcing the post-War order. Here, the risk of a communist revolution in Germany, German rapprochement with the USSR, the Ruhr occupation's effect on the public opinion seem to have been influential at varying degrees and depending on the individual position of each custodian power (Corneise 1972). Empathy facilitated the evacuation of the German territory, the 'readmission' of Germany into the European system, the restructuring of war reparations and the influx of the US capital/loans to Germany. On the other hand, empathy accompanied by the integration/erosion policy also served to strengthen the post-War order by enhancing its flexibility, as long as Germany was willing to become a part of it (Jacobson 1972: 156<sup>11</sup>). Germany's membership to the League of Nations and its signature of the Briand-Kellogg Pact exemplify the complementarity between the custodians' empathy and German integration/erosion policy to the benefit of the post-War order.

The Third Reich's emergence as a system-challenger and its almost immediate acts against it such as quitting the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, denouncing the Versailles Treaty restrictions on rearmament and the actual modalities of war reparations obliged the custodians to make a choice between enforcement and appeasement. Here the custodians' avoidance of enforcement seems to have been facilitated by their practice of empathy. However, the avoidance, in its turn, seems to have altered the nature of empathy as well, in parallel to the new relation between the object of empathy, Germany, and the post-War order. Consequently, instead of reinforcing the post-War order in tandem with the integration/erosion policy, empathy began to assist dismantling the order by rationalising the German challenge (see for example Nicolson 1936) and on occasion, even directly aiding it as in the case of the very one-sided British-German Naval Agreement of 1935<sup>12</sup>. In a way, the custodians' empathy, instead of adjusting the system to increase its viability, began to accommodate it to Berlin's *faits accomplis*. This took the form of appeasement.

Empathy for the Russian Federation after the USSR's collapse resembled the case of the Weimar Republic as it aimed at assuring the post-bipolar/unipolar order. It was directed toward the Russian integration efforts to post-bipolar order and its normative canon, namely the domestic economic and politic reforms,

11 On the British "empathy" during Locarno process concerning Germany's "right" to revise its eastern borders.

12 The British-German Naval Agreement, accessed online: [http://www.navweaps.com/index\\_tech/tech-089\\_Anglo\\_German\\_Agreement\\_1935.php](http://www.navweaps.com/index_tech/tech-089_Anglo_German_Agreement_1935.php).

efforts to participate in the post-bipolar order's (once the Western bloc's) international mechanisms and becoming consequently an in-system partner (see also Rumer 2007: 18). However, it lacked injuries/injustices that would openly *contradict* with the current order like it was the case for the discriminatory Versailles Treaty clauses. It is true that the custodians of the post-bipolar order held Russia *relatively* at arm's length (Rumer 2007: 20; Aalto 2007) while they were rapidly developing their relations with the ex-Warsaw Pact and ex-Soviet republics of Europe: For example the PFP, in which Russia participated in 1994, had been *de facto* discriminatory among its partners, meaning for some countries an intermediary for NATO membership and for others, including Russia, a mere politico-military harmonisation mechanism with the West, including the post-bipolar order's normative canon. Developing cooperation with – and spreading the normative canon toward – countries that were within Moscow's ex-sphere of influence or direct domination did not constitute an injustice from the custodians' perspective or contradict the post-bipolar order. However, mostly in retention of the bipolar state of affairs, Moscow continued to consider these countries as its 'near abroad' where the post-bipolar order's custodians' activities as well as the local governments' tendencies were of direct concern for Russia (Lepingwell 1994; Shashenkov 1994). Also, the custodians' interventions in various parts of the world, which were based on the post-bipolar normative canon and mostly circumvented the bipolarity-inherited international mechanisms, in particular of the UN Security Council where Russia held her right to veto, deepened this difference of interpreting empathy between the two sides.

The post-Yeltsin regime appears to have solicited empathy on the same matters with the same impasses. What it gradually altered seems to be the margins of compromise with the post-bipolar order and therefore Yeltsin-era's integration efforts to the system. Face to continuing 'injury', Moscow adopted an increasingly litigious stance in its relationship with the order and its custodians as seen in the policy papers of 2000 in comparison with the Foreign Policy Concept of 1993. As such, certainly much more gradually, indirectly and even perhaps involuntarily, Russian foreign policy's transformation seems to have coincided with that of Germany of 1933. The fundamental difference between the two eras seems to be that while in the Weimar-case empathy and integration/erosion policy worked in tandem and reinforced the post-War order, in the Russian case the post-bipolar order steadily undermined the integration/erosion policy – therefore Russia's relationship with the order – due to the fundamental difference between the expected and granted empathy, which was amplified by the incomplete passage to post-bipolarity that partly carried bipolarity's mechanisms and practices into post-bipolarity.

Yet the ‘delayed’ appearance of 1933’s Germany in post-bipolarity may be placed, not to the regime-change of 1999-2000 but to Putin’s 2007 Munich Security Conference speech<sup>13</sup>, which frontally and determinedly warned the custodians about ‘unipolar/unilateral acts’ including enlargement policies. Between 2000 and 2007, despite growing tensions after the Kosovo intervention, the US-led coalition’s intervention in Iraq in 2003, the NATO enlargement toward the Baltic Republics in 2004, the coloured revolutions in the near-abroad (Mitchell 2012: 44-72, 168-186; Gerlach 2014: 39-44) or GUAM’s foundation in 2006 which favoured post-bipolar order and its institutions against Russian political influence (Simon 2008: 102-103)<sup>14</sup> and Russian integration efforts in the near-abroad (Eyvazov 2008) were not deterred: It furthered Russia’s understanding of ‘injury’ in its relationship with the post-bipolar order.

After Munich 2007, Russia’s self-assertion appeared to have been instrumental in some NATO members’ avoidance of granting MAPs to Ukraine and Georgia during the NATO Bucharest Summit of 2008, despite the US’ efforts (Arbuthnot 2008). The custodians thus *tacitly* accommodated themselves to Russian understanding of near-abroad, therefore to a *de facto* Russian say – if not veto right – over particular independent countries. The event marked a beginning of empathy which is detached from the custodians’ understanding of the post-bipolar order until then. Nor did it support the Russian integration/erosion policy which was eclipsed by its new, confrontational attitude which in fact brought the custodians to recognise, without approving, the Russian *Weltanschauung* of the post-bipolarity. The empathy *gradually* served; instead, to avoid confrontation with Russia – or support to ex-USSR countries – in its ‘near abroad’ first and then, again gradually, in the crisis areas where Russia appeared as a balancing power. In other words, empathy began; however, not with the same sharpness and pace of the ‘30s, to accommodate the post-bipolar order to Russia’s understanding and acts, if not by justifying them then at least by recognising them. This took the form of appeasement.

## Appeasement’s contents and course

### *Forms and issues of appeasement*

The forms and issues of appeasement have significant similarities in the German and the Russian cases. Lanyi’s active and passive appeasement notions are of particular importance for describing the form (Lanyi 1963): Active appeasement consists of the custodians’ negotiating with the system-challenger ‘by lending

13 Putin’s Munich speech, accessed online: <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

14 GUAM’s Charter, accessed online: <https://guam-organization.org/en/charter-of-organization-for-democracy-and-economic-development-guam/>.

a sympathetic ear' to its concrete demands that are incompatible with the order and ends by satisfying most of them. Passive appeasement means permitting the system-challenger to improve its position through acting against the order. Here the 'permission' may be disguised by *acting passively*, undeterred, for example by 'disapproving' the system-challenger or even, in our opinion, 'sanctioning' it ineffectively, without forcing it to alter its policy course.

The issues of appeasement of a systemic nature in the German and the Russian cases may be regrouped under 'sovereignty', 'irredentism' and 'free hand', still with differences between them as to their context and meaning. While they appear to be less overlapping for Germany, the *sui generis* meaning of sovereignty for Russia blurs the boundaries between them to an extent.

Versailles' discriminatory restrictions on German sovereignty were obvious. They constituted the first issues of Germany's challenge as it declared rearmament and denounced the war reparations. However these acts constituted open violations – and not erosions – of the Peace Regime, they were empathised with, not retaliated, and therefore passively appeased. When Germany quitted the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, it targeted both the institutional infrastructure and the evolutionary direction of the post-War international order. The custodians did not retaliate, giving another example of passive appeasement and of the changing nature of empathy. On the other hand, the irredentist move against Austria in 1934, (including Dollfuss' assassination) met immediate resistance; however, not from the custodians (Shirer 1991: 247-248; Churchill 2002: 117-122, 131-133). It was Italy, a system-challenger on its own merit, which 'dragged' the custodians under the Stresa Front for a brief time in 1935-1936 in reaction to *increased* German rearmament – a sovereignty issue – and interference to Austria – an irredentist attempt – forced Germany to a temporary halt in the second issue but not in the first one (Churchill 2002: 163-166, Shirer 1991: 252-254). Even here the custodians, instead of protecting on their own initiative the international order built by themselves, were reduced to the position of secondary actors to what became a mere bilateral confrontation between two system-challengers. When Italy invaded Ethiopia, western democracies took but weak bilateral and multilateral (League of Nations) countermeasures which did not deter Rome but disintegrated the Stresa Front (Churchill 2002: 202-206, 208-228; Shirer 1991: 256). If Berlin did not then attempt another irredentist move against Austria, this was mostly because the Italian position was not yet clarified on the matter (Churchill 2002: 249, for the Austro-German Pact of July 1936 for non-interference in the internal affairs of Austria *following* the occupation of Rhineland). Germany continued to rearm and occupied the demilitarised zone of Rhineland the same year, resolving another sovereignty

issue with direct action. The custodians of the post-War order passively appeased this latest violation of the Versailles regime as well (Shirer 1991: 256-261; Churchill 2002: 233-241).

In 1938, the German irredentism was again put in motion in Austria and the custodians repeated their passive appeasement (Churchill 2002: 308-324; Shirer 1991: 287-315). The *Anschluss*, which was prevented twice, was at last achieved. Even the Austrian insistence on a plebiscite and German refusal did not incite western democracies to active involvement. The custodians thus tacitly recognised and passively appeased German irredentism as well, opening the way to German demands on Sudetenland during the same year (Bruegel 1973) despite the fact that Czechoslovakia was guaranteed by France and the USSR, the latter guarantee becoming effective if France intervened (Churchill 2002: 326)<sup>15</sup>. The subsequent 'Munich process' constituted the arch-example to active appeasement. It resolved the legitimacy problem of the German irredentism, which was already taken into the sphere of empathy and appeasement with *Anschluss*. German demands and German *modalities* of satisfying them were made the bases of negotiations, accompanied by British and French pressure on Prague (Shirer 1991: 336, 340-360, 363-369; Churchill 2002: 326, 337-352; Adamthwaite 1968; Saroléa 2004). The USSR's anti-German position was neutralised through the non-fulfilment of the French guarantee and the Polish refusal to grant passage to Soviet troops through its territory (Shirer 1991: 359; Adams 1993: 97, 100-127). In the Munich Conference proper, merely the modalities of this active appeasement were decided upon, not even involving the Czechs themselves (Shirer 1991: 353-365, 369-376; Churchill 2002: 371-379). Ironically, at the time of Munich, the balance of power in Europe was still and almost absolutely in favour of the custodians of the post-War order, even without the USSR, should they choose not to appease Berlin (Ben-Arie 1990).

The next irredentist move, the German ultimatum of March 1939 to Lithuania for Memel (Shirer 1991: 383-384, 412-413), despite the city's being guaranteed by the UK, France, Italy and Japan, did not even necessitate active appeasement. The UK and France merely expressed their sympathies to Vilnius and Germany occupied Memel.

On the other hand, it is difficult to state that the German desire for a free-hand in Eastern Europe was empathised with (Ryder 1973: 317-380; Churchill 2002: 267-269). A partial exception to that may be the US' 'contemplation' of an economic zone of influence/preponderance for Berlin (Manne 1986; Offner 1977; Marks 1985). The free-hand was nevertheless sought as the natural conse-

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15 Still, the Chamberlain government declared its reluctance to support the guarantees to Czechoslovakia in March 1938 - so not to encourage France.



quence of the custodians' empathy and appeasement related to escalations on sovereignty and irredentism issues. As such, even without empathy and despite the custodians' renewed guarantees in Munich, Germany annexed the remaining parts of Czech territory in March 1939 (Boucek 1975; Shirer 1991: 383-384, 396-406) and created a satellite Slovakia (Boucek 1975; Procházka 1981; Shirer 1991: 391-396). This move was not retaliated either, therefore passively appeased. The custodians reacted rather 'discursively' (Boucek 1975; also Weinberg 1994: 465-534). However, this empathy-deprived *fait accompli* proved to be conducive to ending the cycle in the next German move concerning Danzig and the Corridor which amalgamated irredentism and the free-hand demand.

There were no Versailles-like restrictions against Russia's sovereignty. Yet sovereignty issues emerged from Russia's relationship with the post-bipolar order, which was built with the partial retention of the bipolar order's conceptions and practices. Within this framework they had a rather 'outwardly' meaning, both regarding the ex-Soviet countries and the *praxis* of international politics, including the post-bipolar order's normative canon. This 'outwardliness' seems to have occupied the niche of Germany's sovereignty issues in its relations with the post-War order.

The western 'democratism' for example, was depicted as a discursive tool of the unipolar/unilateral interventionism in particular during the post-Yeltsin times (Lukin 2018a: 3-8, 18-19, 27-29, 192; Michalski & Nilsson 2018), however this understanding was not absent within the earlier integration/erosion policy. The Putin-era concept of 'sovereign democracy' should perhaps be understood within this framework, not only as a laundering-motto of authoritarianism but also as a reference to the post-bipolar order's invasive norms (Van Herpen 2013: 180; Makarychev 2008; Casula 2013; also see Lo 2002: 67-72, 86-97). In this vein, the multipolarism/polycentrism concept has increasingly been promoted by Russia in tandem with the sovereign democracy from the very early phase of the regime change as an alternative to the intersubjective post-bipolar/'unipolar' *order* rather than to the objective post-bipolar/unipolar *structure* defined on the basis of power-statuses (Melville & Shakhleina 2005 for the three "fundamental policy papers" of 2000; Chebankova 2017; Lewis 2018).

The outwardly nature of Russian understanding of sovereignty naturally encompassed the near-abroad, as the custodians of the post-bipolar order found aspirations for NATO and EU membership there, therefore collaboration for reforms aiming at fully adopting the order's normative canon. Russia therefore applied weight to counter the 'westernisation' of the near-abroad, increasingly during the post-Yeltsin era yet also before that, openly supporting autocratic tendencies (Cameron & Orenstein; Babayan 2015), as long as they were friendly to Moscow (Way 2015).

Russian expectation of a *de facto* veto-right regarding the 'major issues in international relations, including conflict situations' (Melville & Shakhleina 2005, for the Foreign Policy Concept of 2000), therefore the international crises involving the custodians and their normative canon outside the near-abroad became another issue of 'outwardly' sovereignty. Opposition to western 'unilateral' interventions was gradually intensified. During the Kosovo intervention, tensions between Russia and NATO reached serious levels. Moscow ardently criticised the second Iraqi War and the Libya interventions. The opposition in its later phase took the form of direct military intervention in the Syrian War including close cooperation with Iranian interventionism there, and of intense political support to Venezuelan regime in another theatre, furthering the system-challenge through backing the 'opponents of the West' and its normative canon (see also Allison 2013; Pieper 2019).

The outwardly character of Russian sovereignty issues were largely overlooked by the custodians in their earlier phase (Van Herpen 2013: 104). It did not affect the dialogue or the willingness to cooperate with Moscow, yet within the framework of the post-bipolar order as understood by the western powers, therefore unsatisfactorily for Russia. It did not affect the flow of western investment toward Russia either, which continued to increase without serious political hindrance. During the Yeltsin-era, Moscow's 'warnings' expressing the nature of Russia-post bipolar order relationship or the emergence and successes of Russian-backed secessionism in the near-abroad in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia neither discouraged the West-near abroad rapprochement, nor incited the custodians to be more active in preventing Russian moves. The general overlook of Russian sovereignty issues continued into the Putin-era Russia, in sympathising with and encouraging alternative groupings in the near-abroad such as GUAM or pro-western/democratic coloured revolutions, yet without granting them any guarantee or effective support with the notable exception of the Baltic Republics' membership NATO and EU in 2004. Moreover, the multipolarist/polycentrist discourse has been empathised with at least by a significant part of the western intelligentsia and some western governments, apparently often confused with *multilateralism*. The frequent disregard or negligence of this discourse's reactionary nature to post-bipolar *order* has contributed to passive appeasement of the Russian policies.

As mentioned in the previous subsection, the 2007 Munich Security Conference seems to have changed this 'overlook' into the particular form of empathy conducive to appeasement. Moscow's immediate issue of NATO's granting MAPs to Ukraine and Georgia was passively appeased at the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit. Ironically, Russian-backed 'frozen conflicts' of the near abroad

constituted one of the NATO members' central arguments for empathising with and appeasing Russia on the matter (Arbuthnot 2008). Following the Russian warning of the previous year, the custodians appeared to have recognised the Russian understanding of 'sovereignty' at least as a valid factor in conducting relations with the near-abroad.

The empathy and the passive appeasement of the Bucharest Summit obviously contributed to the Russian move of August 2008, when Georgia intervened in its Russia-backed secessionist entity of South Ossetia. Russia riposted immediately, both within South Ossetia and in Georgia proper, using overwhelming force (Asmus 2010; Desseyn and Tchantouridze, 2012). Russia recognised the independencies of South Ossetia and Abkhazia right after the clashes. This move was also passively appeased by the custodians, after loud discursive reactions and some non-military aid to Tbilisi. In addition, the MAP issue – which was to be revised in December 2008 – was 'buried' both for Ukraine and Georgia. Even the token reaction was discontinued one year later as the US initiated the 'Reset' with Russia (see also Hahn 2013; Lazarević 2009).

In the circumstances it was initiated, the Reset seems to have two meanings: the passive appeasement related to the Georgian Crisis evolved into Russia's active appeasement through a new agenda that *indirectly* yet even further validated the Russian position in the near-abroad. Secondly, the very substance of the 'Reset' was related to cooperation in systemic-level issues between 'equal counterparts', as seen through its *positive* outcomes such as the new START or the coordination in the Afghanistan operation (Deyermond 2013). As such, the Russian sovereignty issues were more firmly imported into the sphere of empathy and appeasement at least until the Reset's collapse (Hahn 2013).

The Georgian and the Reset episodes of appeasement apparently encouraged Russian irredentism much like the German case; however, it overlapped with the 'sovereignty issues' (see also Alexander 2020; Miholjčić 2019) in contrast to the '30s. During the early years of post-bipolarity, the move of the Russian populations from the near abroad to Russia proper showed significant variances. While the emigration from the Caucasian and Central Asian republics reached important proportions of their Russian diaspora, exodus was weaker from the Baltic Republics, Belarus and Ukraine (Heleniak 2001; Peyrouse 2007). In the case of Moldova, the Russian-speaking part of the country seceded very early with Moscow's support. On the other hand, Russian minorities in the Baltics remained largely passive due to these countries' firm anchorage to the West and their ensuing NATO and EU membership (Pietrowsky 2020). As to Belarus, irredentism has always been irrelevant due to its firm alignment with Russia from

the beginning, which evolved toward a quasi-union between the two countries (Melville & Shakhleina 2005 for the “Union” document).

In the case of Ukraine, however, the Russian ethnicity balanced the Ukrainian one<sup>16</sup> and the division found its political expression as pro-western and pro-Russian factions with no clear majority. The power changed hands between the two factions, as seen in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution and then in the 2010 elections. These changes reflected on the main foreign policy issues, such as the NATO candidacy, which froze or thawed depending on the faction that held the power. However, the country came to a crossroads in 2013 which *necessitated* a choice between the mutually exclusive EU Association Agreement and the EAEU (Libman & Obydenkova 2018). The pro-Russian Yanukovich government went for the EAEU and the pro-western faction seized power. Russian-inclined Donetsk, Lugansk and Crimea rebelled and Russia intervened in force (Menon & Rumer 2015; Hahn 2018). However, in Donetsk and Lugansk new secessionist entities were created, Crimea was annexed by Russia, much comparably to a hypothetical German annexation of Sudetenland *without* even Munich. Here, Russia ironically had recourse to the landmark event of Kosovo as precedent (Ambrosio 2016).

Face to Russian irredentism in motion, overlapped with sovereignty issues, the custodians – and remarkably not the international community in general – imposed sanctions, which have proven to be inefficient in reversing the Russian move (Kholodilin & Netšunajev 2019). Even the EU investments to and trade with Russia began to recover quickly, added by newer projects in the all-important energy sector. As for Ukraine, besides the token military cooperation and sympathetic discourse, the custodians’ reluctance continued in the now-urgent matters of NATO-MAP or the EU integration. Meanwhile, Russia heavily militarised Crimea, rapidly increased its area-denial capability in the Black Sea (Åtland & Kabanenko, 2019; Wilk 2014; Sanders 2014) and displayed her determination to close the Azov Sea at will<sup>17</sup>, while maintaining its position in Lugansk and Donetsk. However, the Russian irredentism was not fully empathised with, the Ukrainian incident constituted an additional case of passive appeasement.

While the ‘free hand’ constituted a ‘sequel’ to sovereignty issues and irredentism for Germany as seen in the occupation of Czech territory in March 1939,

16 2001 Census figures, accessed online: <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>;

<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/>.

17 Kerch incident news as an example, accessed online: <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2018/the-kerch-strait-incident>;  
<https://www.ft.com/content/f5c68dd4-765c-11e9-be7d-6d846537acab>;  
<https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/ukraine-nato-in-talks-over-naval-escorts-through-kerch-strait>.

in the Russian case it appeared more synchronously with the other two issues, related to near-abroad in particular. The free hand also overlapped with the Russian outward-sovereignty issues in the spillover of the Russian system-challenge to other geographies, rather in the pursuit of challenging/balancing the post-bipolar order in the areas of crisis. Currently, the presence of Russian forces in Syria or of a Russian 'mercenary' organisation in Libya constitutes examples to efforts to prevent new Kosovo or Iraq cases. This makes the Russian 'free hand' appear more as the denial of free hand to the post-bipolar order, therefore more reactionary than the German free hand.

Also in contrast to the '30s Germany, the Russian overlap of free hand with 'outward' sovereignty in the near abroad<sup>18</sup> prevented more rigid reaction from the custodians of the post-bipolar order, since the sovereignty issues were *de facto* recognised or empathised with and in any case appeased. As to the crisis-areas of Syria and Libya, the overlap seems also to have engendered empathy and limited passive appeasement: The custodians avoided escalation and accepted a balance with Russia also in these areas, in contrast to their earlier, overwhelming interventions in various places.

Russian invasion of Ukraine compares surprisingly to the Winter War in Finland at least at the moment this sub-section is written, as the Russian army remains stalled for more than three weeks after the first days' advances. Currently, the sort of the war is obscure, but the aggressor has obviously not achieved its declared aims<sup>19</sup>, which may be boiled down to establishing a pro-Russian, Belarussian type regime in Kiev.

Yet how, from the perspective of the appeasement cycle, may the current war be interpreted? Moscow chose to take the ultimate step of invasion, with an amalgamated discourse of outward sovereignty (Ukrainian prospects of NATO membership), irredentism (oppression of, even genocide against the Russian-speaking people of Ukraine, arguments quite similar to 'Danzig, Corridor and Posen Germans') and related free hand demand (right to intervene)<sup>20</sup>. As such, Moscow apparently repeated Third Reich's gambles – in particular – of March and September 1939. In that, Moscow seems to have been encouraged by the relative ineffectiveness of the sanctions since 2014, absence of guarantees given to Kiev during the last phase of escalation – best expressed by the US'

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18 In the form of supporting secessionist movements and direct military intervention.

19 Accessed online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-authorises-military-operations-donbass-domestic-media-2022-02-24/>.

20 Accessed online: [https://mid.ru/en/press\\_service/spokesman/briefings/1800470/#4](https://mid.ru/en/press_service/spokesman/briefings/1800470/#4);  
[https://mid.ru/en/press\\_service/spokesman/briefings/1800470/#11](https://mid.ru/en/press_service/spokesman/briefings/1800470/#11);  
<https://tass.com/defense/1409813>.

President's exclusion of the *possibility* to deploy troops in Ukraine<sup>21</sup> – and the prevalence of the discourse of a 'diplomatic/negotiated solution'. The last element constitutes an example to the empathy as it expresses tacit validation of the system-challenger's escalation content as an 'issue', thus changing its very nature into an 'objective' problem which needs to be solved, much in resemblance to Czechoslovakia or even to Danzig-Corridor 'issues' until 1 September 1939. Apparently, Moscow's anticipation was a discursive and economic reaction from the custodians of the order that might be stronger yet by nature similar to 2014, which could gradually dissipate through empathy and become another example of passive appeasement after the snuffing out of the Ukrainian resistance, decapitation of the Kiev regime and the political completion of the military *fait accompli*.

### *System's deterioration*

*Centrifugality* was a phenomenon common to both post-War and post-bipolar periods, independently from the system-challenge and ensuing appeasement cycles. *Rigid* alignments characteristic to pre-First World War or bipolar environments loosened as their constitutive-dialectic disappeared as the system changed. Depending on the nature of the systemic change, *rigidification* as centrifugality's exact contrary is also possible, as was the case in the aftermath of the Second World War when multipolarity was replaced by a far less flexible bipolarity (see also Waltz 1979:168, 170-173). However, German and Russian system-challenge and ensuing appeasement cycles engendered a *second* phenomenon of centrifugality as a consequence of the current system's deterioration.

Many European actors gradually altered their relations both with Germany and with each other in the '30s, as appeasement progressively discredited the post-War order (Weinberg 1994: 4). The custodians' avoidance to retaliate the system-challenge encouraged for example the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, weak and failed retaliation of the invasion further encouraged Rome's move toward Germany. The escalation-empathy-appeasement cycle related to Germany steadily decreased the system's credibility as its custodians repeatedly avoided defending it. It was Italy, itself a system-challenger, which prevented *Anschluss* in 1934 and which 'permitted' *Anschluss* in 1938 (Robertson 1977; Adams 1993: 82) when, ironically, Schuschnigg's hopes lied – in vain – with Italy rather than with the post-War order and its custodians (Shirer 1991: 306-308; Eichstaedt 1955). Po-

21 Accessed online: [https://mid.ru/en/press\\_service/spokesman/briefings/1800470/#4](https://mid.ru/en/press_service/spokesman/briefings/1800470/#4);  
[https://mid.ru/en/press\\_service/spokesman/briefings/1800470/#11](https://mid.ru/en/press_service/spokesman/briefings/1800470/#11);  
<https://tass.com/defense/1409813>.

land's transition from its western-alliance toward a *de facto* rapprochement with Germany until the Danzig-Corridor crisis followed the episodes of appeasement (Sakwa 1973; Cienciala 1999). As late as the Munich period and emboldened by the appeasement process, Poland blocked the passage to USSR troops toward Czechoslovakia and occupied Teschen soon after (Churchill 2002: 391, 409-410; Shirer 1991: 336, 346, 375), months before becoming itself Germany's target. The deterioration of the post-War order encouraged Hungarian revisionism and its rapprochement with Germany (also see Pritz 2003). Again ironically, the same process in its later phases pushed the Trianon-beneficiary Romania, the natural target of the Hungarian revisionism, toward Berlin instead of the custodians, for the sake of a credible alignment in particular against the USSR. Bulgaria also shifted to revisionism and was attracted to Germany in parallel with the custodians' continuous failure to defend the post-War order. The last pre-War example of appeasement-produced centrifugality was the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 1939, including the additional protocol that defined each power's 'zone of influence': The isolation of the USSR by the custodians for the sake of appeasement during the Munich period and afterward (Churchill 2002: 435-444<sup>22</sup>) pushed Moscow to a revisionist-expansionist arrangement with Germany (Shirer 1991: 425-426).

The relative loosening of the Western alignment in post-bipolarity may certainly be considered as the natural result of the disappearance of its opponent (Simón 2013: 181-234; Sperling 2019). Still, NATO – and the EU – as alignment framework not only remained but was adapted to post-bipolarity. It reformulated its priorities and expanded, not only of its own volition but also due to the strong desire of its ex-opponents to adhere to it. It thus constituted the main drive of the post-bipolar order and its normative canon. However, with Russia's challenge declared in 2007 and the custodians' choice for appeasement in the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, the 'second' type of centrifugality emerged due to the decreasing credibility of the Western alignment. It was furthered by the passive appeasement of the Georgian crisis and the active appeasement of the 'Reset', apparently reproducing the 1930's European actors' positional changes in a wider scope yet with less intensity. The contrasted attitude of the non-Russian members of the BRICS between the earlier western-involved and later Russia-involved international crises could be taken as an example to ensuing and expanding centrifugality (Brosig 2019: 81-86, 149-151). As to the Russian near-abroad, the 2010 electoral triumph of pro-Russian Yanukovich may be considered as an early example to the phenomenon.

<sup>22</sup> Regarding the USSR's joint French-British-Soviet guarantee against aggression in Central Europe proposal of May 1939, which was turned down by France and the UK.

The passive appeasement of the Ukrainian crisis seems to have given a new impetus to centrifugality: The Russian-Chinese rapprochement, already having progressed fast after 2001<sup>23</sup>, gained further pace in May 2014 with a 400 billion USD worth natural gas agreement, added quickly by a further series of strategic-level projects of strategic scale (Overland & Kubayeva 2018). The bilateral trade volume leapt forward to reach 108 billion USD in 2018 with a declared aim of 200 billion by 2024<sup>24</sup>. In May 2015, during the Russia visit of Xi Jinping, the statement on cooperation between the EAEU and the Silk Road Economic Belt was signed (Lukin 2018a: 179; Lukin 2018b). Moreover, though the SCO Development Strategy until 2025 (2015) indicated that the SCO is not a political-military alliance or an economic integration milieu, changing attitudes as to the alignment of the SCO with the 'Belt' have been observed ever since (Fels 2018: 258-260). Furthermore, Russian entry into Syria and in 2015 and its continuing, undeterred presence there further spread centrifugality at both regional and systemic-levels. It not only attracted the Damascus regime and Iran toward Russian alignment but also enabled Russia to establish direct, 'bypassing' relations and arrangements with western-allied or neutral countries of the region.

Ironically, centrifugality among the western democracies appeared even in sanctioning Russia. Not only did the sanctions remain largely inefficient but also, as mentioned in the previous section, the Euro-Russian trade recovered and approached pre-2014 levels: The volume had declined sharply from 2014 to 2017 (from 326 billion euros to 191 billion), when it leapt to 231 and to 253 billion euros the following years with steadily increasing surpluses for Russia<sup>25</sup>. In terms of FDI, the EU stock in Russia continued to grow between 2014 and 2016 reaching 232 billion euros, then declined to 216 billion in 2017. In the same period, Russian investments in the EU increased from 51 billion to 83.6 billion euros<sup>26</sup>.

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23 Treaty of Good-Neighborhood and Friendly Cooperation as the Sino-Russian framework document which also defined a common world-view, stressing sovereignty and non-interference over the post-bipolar order's normative canon.

24 Accessed online: <http://en.russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2016-04/russian-trade-with-china-in-2014/>;  
<http://en.russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2016-05/russian-trade-with-china-in-2015/>;  
<http://en.russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2017-02/russian-trade-with-china-in-2016/>;  
<http://en.russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2018-02/russian-trade-with-china-in-2017/>;  
<http://en.russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2019-02/russian-trade-with-china-in-2018/>.  
<https://www.rt.com/business/466481-russia-china-200-billion-turnover/>.

25 Accessed online: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb\\_results/factsheets/country/details\\_russia\\_en.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_russia_en.pdf).

26 Accessed online: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb\\_results/factsheets/country/overview\\_russia\\_en.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/overview_russia_en.pdf).



On the other hand, the western democracies attempted also to counter their centrifugality face to the Russian challenge after the Ukrainian Crisis: The Summits of Wales 2014, Warsaw 2016 and Brussels 2018 displayed the political awareness of the situation. The mothballed-looking concepts belonging to the alliance-identity came forth (Burton 2018: 156-166; Larsen 2019). NATO initiated measures regarding the force readiness and deployment accordingly, through the Readiness Action Plan of the Wales Summit; the enhanced security measures with a focus on the Eastern Flank, the 'renewed emphasis on deterrence and collective defence' as well as the 'reliance to US forces' of the Warsaw Summit and the conventional deterrence commitment '30/30/30 over 30' of the Brussels Summit (Heisbourg 2020; Ringsmose & Rynning 2017). Additional measures were taken in the field of nuclear deterrence as well (Larsen 2019). Finally, the Brussels NATO Summit *Communiqué*<sup>27</sup> of June 2021 increased the tone against the Russian system-challenge, added China to the 'list' in stronger terms that it did previously, underlined NATO's anti-authoritarian (pro-normative canon) stance and heavily stressed collective security. However, the reinforcement of the NATO-members on their contact-zone with Russia face to its speedy military modernisation, capacity-building and demonstrations has so far been feeble (also see Giles 2017; Petersson 2019). Beyond the discourse, the commitment level of the allies in terms of burden-sharing and their determination face to escalation proved to be obscure. The issue of granting MAPs to Ukraine and Georgia, still a matter of strong inner divergences, did not offer much prospect even in the language of the last NATO Summit and no guarantee was granted to Ukraine during the last escalation prior to Russian invasion, except political support and relatively lower-level demonstrations of military cooperation.

The first month of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was completed when this part of the paper was written, has shown that the likelihood of empathy and centrifugality was *initially* reduced by Ukraine's success in recovering from the shock and in stalling the Russian advance in all three sub-theatres of the war. As cities did not fall and Russian military resorted to indiscriminate bombing of them, developing empathy for Moscow among the custodians has become more and more difficult. The custodians' initial reaction (heavy economic sanctions and limited yet significant transfer of military equipment to Kiev) has apparently taken root and has been increasing as a Russian defeat has become a possibility. Furthermore, as the war and current sanctions have shown so far the contrast between Russia's imaginary and real economic/mili-

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27 NATO Brussels Summit Communiqué, accessed online: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_185000.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm).

tary capabilities, centrifugality has been losing one of its motivations, which is Russia's means to balance the custodians. Consequently, the Western Alliance's 'recovery' seems to have gained momentum<sup>28</sup> and the third countries have become more reluctant to appear as Russia's open supporters, including China<sup>29</sup>.

Is this state-of-affairs stable? Is it possible to state that the Russian case of systemic appeasement has come to its end without bankrupting the system in contrast to the German one? Has Russia failed in its challenge to the order?

Current discourse of revivification of the custodians' unity and determination may prove to be false after all, despite all miscalculations, failures and proven aggression of Moscow until today. First, the nuclear balance reduces the threat of a general war to a suicidal non-policy and as such, Ukraine remains the only belligerent in the field directly facing the system-challenger's onslaught. After all, the invasion itself was encouraged by the absence of guarantees for Ukraine rather than Ukraine's already long-frozen candidature to NATO membership. Secondly, the likeness of the Ukrainian invasion to the Finnish Winter War may well extend to a similar end in the absence of massive military aid or intervention by the order, which is a compromise that would satisfy some of the Russian demands on Ukraine, namely plebiscites in Donetsk, Lugansk and Crimea as well as constitutional neutrality of Ukraine with a Moscow-involved monitoring and enforcement mechanism. The ongoing negotiations apparently include these and the Ukrainian side already voiced its possible consent to neutrality and arguably even plebiscites<sup>30</sup>. If the Ukrainian army will be unable to inflict a total military defeat upon Russia, which does not seem probable, a 'Finnish so-

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28 Statement by NATO Heads of State and Government, Brussels 24 March 2022, accessed online: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_193719.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_193719.htm).

29 News on China's attitude, accessed online: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/15/china-does-not-want-to-be-impacted-by-russia-sanctions-fm>; <https://www.economist.com/china/chinas-friendship-with-russia-has-boundaries-despite-what-their-leaders-say/21808197>;

<https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-03-18/china-indicates-to-biden-it-wont-send-weapons-to-russia-as-bloody-war-in-ukraine-grinds-on>.

30 News on the matters being discussed for ending hostilities: accessed online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/30/ukraine-offer-neutrality-meaning-constitution-russia-what-does-neutral-status-country-mean-how-would-it-work>;

<https://news.sky.com/story/ukraine-war-zelenskyy-says-ukraine-is-willing-to-consider-declaring-neutrality-and-offer-security-guarantees-to-russia-12576688>;

<https://www.ft.com/content/7b341e46-d375-4817-be67-802b7fa77ef1>;

<https://www.newsweek.com/russia-claims-dispute-over-crimea-donbas-settled-ukraine-1693474>;

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereksaul/2022/03/29/russia-ukraine-talks-ukraine-hints-at-progress-on-crimea-while-both-sides-optimistic-on-putin-zelensky-meeting/?sh=4f806e6e27d3>.

lution' in terms of territorial arrangements akin to that of the Winter War's end and in terms of neutrality similar to that of the Continuation War's end, is becoming more and more likely. The very Ukrainian 'consent' is susceptible to legitimate Crimea's and the two secessionist entities' statuses, thus eliminate the basis for the sanctions against Russia. Moreover, Ukrainian consent to neutrality would *impose* recognition of Russia's predominance in its self-declared near-abroad upon the custodians with repercussions on Georgia and Moldova as well as on Central Asia and the rest of the Caucasus. How individual defence guarantees, in particular if they would be conditional, would prevent a repetition of the Czechoslovakian affair is obscure. As such, Russian invasion's reduction to a stalemate, due to the peace solution it brings forward, appears *even* more deteriorating to the order than a complete achievement of the initial Russian goals in Ukraine, which would but perpetuate the new set of sanctions as well as the custodians' reversal of the centrifugality.

In other words, the current *systemic* impasse the custodians find themselves in is but the result of the appeasement cycle which is susceptible to self-perpetuate even against the appeasers' will. Years of appeasement, here in the form of failure to guarantee Ukraine, provided the system-challenger with a considerable margin of manoeuvre including advantageous results from a *militarily inconclusive aggression war*, while depriving the custodians from it, making their main tool to deter the system-challenger, the sanctions, vulnerable to compromise the aggressed side may have to make. Passive appeasement, as such, may become a situation – rather than policy – which imposes itself upon the-now-unwilling custodians.

In case the Russian regime proves to be a resilient face to the current wave of sanctions, the end of the war, however militarily humiliating, may still serve Moscow by completing the exclusion of the 'order' from its near-abroad for a foreseeable future, through the neutralisation of Ukraine that would immediately gain validity for all ex-Soviet Republics minus the three NATO-members. From there onward, in particular if the Ukrainian peace would suppress the sanctions as passive appeasement *forced* upon the custodians as the uncontrollable result of the previous appeasements, the system-challenge may but be reinvigorated, focus probably on shifting itself to third geographies in creating more Syria-type order-challenger balances with more centrifugality. The appeasement cycle, in such a case, may even lose its meaning, for the post-bipolar 'order' would likely lose its meaning, the normative canon being no more preponderant but reduced to an 'option' of the dialectic which replaces it, instead of constituting a deteriorating-yet-inner dynamic of it.

## Conclusion

Appeasement of a systemic nature is a phenomenon produced by the change of international order that sets a major power with *specifically* definable yet *systemic* issues against custodian-actors with much more flexible, vaguer concerns of preserving the order in general. Appeasement stems from this positional difference between the challenger and the challenged and it satisfies both sides for a time. However, it progresses in the form of escalation-(altered) empathy-appeasement-centrifugality cycle and stopping it becomes more and more difficult given the centrifugality's consequences on alignments and the appeasement's empowerment of the challenger within the framework of the antithetic actor-system relationship. As such, it reaches to a point where no more room remains for appeasement and no possibility for the system-challenger to stop escalation. As such, the cycle leads to its own bankruptcy together with that of the order. This happened in September 1939, when the custodians unilaterally guaranteed Poland and maintained their stance even when Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was signed (Gillard 2007: 157-177). Germany proved to be unable to cease its challenge as well, which would consequently contradict the very dynamics that brought it to its position from 1933 onwards as it would constitute an appeasement of its own.

Are we there now? The Russian 'cycle' progressed substantially as regards its outward sovereignty issues related to its 'near-abroad' and the 'matters of international importance', as regards its irredentism (passively appeased in the form of ineffective sanctions) and as regards its free hand demand as far as it overlapped with these two categories. Appeasement-incited centrifugality increased both among the western-anchored actors and the third countries despite the custodians' recovery efforts since the 2014 NATO Summit. Russian alignment became an option for the more authoritarian regimes, themselves system-challengers or by nature challenged by the system.

The process, however, committed Russia to its own momentum as it did to Germany in its time. The invasion of Ukraine appears as the most critical episode of the cycle so far and it is ongoing, with surprising military humiliation for Moscow yet with a significant systemic advantage stemming from this very stalemate, which is a peace that might provide Russia with limited yet *systemically* meaningful gains in Ukraine (neutrality and plebiscites) and with the consequent, if 'unwilling', lifting of the now-effective western sanctions. Such a peace is seemingly on the table, as the negotiations show, unless Russia is thoroughly defeated in its war. As such, the appeasement cycle may impose itself upon the custodians, now against their will. Yet it may be the last episode as well, such as it had been in March 1939, as there is now at least a will to stop the cycle

and awareness of a viable non-belligerent tool to struggle against the challenger, which is the now-proven efficiency of rigorous and comprehensive sanctions. Possibly not Ukraine but the upcoming episode is therefore susceptible to constitute the 'Danzig of our times'.



Y. EMRE ÖZİÇCI was born in 1975, Istanbul. He finished his doctoral studies at the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL) and he has been working at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2000. He is currently posted in Nairobi, Kenya.

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