

A Path Forward for the United States and Russia in Eurasia



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A PATH FORWARD FOR THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA IN EURASIA

The notion of “Eurasian security” has once again become a focal point in the context of intensifying great power rivalry. Russia and the United States are on their way to a tangible rapprochement and may finally agree on a sustainable format that would provide possibilities for cooperation and shared security based on mutual interest and respect. The primary geopolitical fault line runs precisely along the boundaries and intersections of the spheres of influence of the United States and Russia. The key question is simple in form, yet extremely complex in substance: How can a stable, mutually acceptable, and practically feasible coexistence among the region’s main actors be established—one that prevents destructive confrontation and, ideally, allows for a degree of cooperative security?

Before addressing this question, we must clarify what we actually mean by “Eurasia.” From a purely geographical standpoint, Eurasia stretches from Lisbon to the easternmost point of Kamchatka. However, in political terms this definition no longer applies. In the context of current geopolitical realities, Eurasia begins in Belarus, at the western edge of the Russian sphere of influence—thus, in political terms, Eurasia is Asia extending partly into Europe. Europe, conversely, now ends in Ukraine and the Baltic states. Consequently, “political Eurasia” consists primarily of the post-Soviet space, China, and their surrounding neighboring regions.

FOUR IN ONE: THE PARALLEL REALITIES OF EURASIA

Within this vast area, expert discourse distinguishes between three potential models of a Eurasian security order: Pax Russica, Pax Sinica, and Pax Turcica. Pax Russica refers to a Russia-dominated security structure seeking to maintain control over the post-Soviet space. Its main institutional pillars are the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The CSTO is sometimes labelled as the “Russian NATO,” though such a comparison is largely symbolic; its operational capacity and political cohesion fall far short of that of NATO. Its only significant [intervention](#) occurred in Kazakhstan in January 2022, while the organization [remained passive](#) during the crises in Armenia in 2020 and 2023.

Historically, the Russian model rested on pragmatic premises: to ensure uninterrupted trade between Europe and China, with transit states collecting revenue from transportation and Russia providing energy and raw materials to sustain both economies. The Northern Eurasian Corridor—supported by the EAEU—offered duty-free transit for goods moving from China to the European Union through Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus.

This system, however, disintegrated with the onset of the Russia–Ukraine war. Established transport [routes collapsed](#), forcing a restructuring of supply chains. As maritime instability spread across the Red Sea, part of global trade was redirected northward, accelerating the emergence of the Middle Corridor. This route, which runs through the member states of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), increasingly forms the economic and infrastructural backbone of a potential Pax Turcica.

The Middle Corridor carries the promise of transforming the region into a [security community](#)—a space where mutual trust and shared interests reduce the likelihood of conflict. At the 2024 meeting of national security council leaders, particular attention was devoted to issues of transport security and infrastructure development along the corridor, reflecting its growing strategic importance.

Joint military exercises have become a visible element of Turkic defense cooperation. The Birlestik-2024 (“Unity-2024”) drills, held in Kazakhstan in July 2024 with participation from four Central Asian states and

Azerbaijan, involved approximately 4,000 soldiers and 700 pieces of military equipment. Beyond military training, these exercises symbolized political solidarity and the will to construct institutional frameworks for joint defense. During the [OTS summit in Azerbaijan](#), President Ilham Aliyev explicitly called for the strengthening of military cooperation within the organization.

Despite this emerging coordination, the Turkic states remain politically diverse. Türkiye is a member of NATO, Azerbaijan maintains a policy of non-alignment, Uzbekistan suspended its CSTO membership in 2012, and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan continue to participate in both the CSTO and the EAEU. Except for Turkmenistan, all Central Asian countries—and all CSTO members except Armenia—are simultaneously members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where these various security architectures intersect.

This institutional “multi-homing” of Central Asian states is not a weakness but their main strategic resource. By simultaneously participating in CSTO, SCO, EAEU, OTS, and various Western formats, these states accumulate bargaining power and reduce the probability of any single external actor monopolizing their security agenda. On this basis, Central Asia could initiate a regional non-interference compact, in which the United States, Russia, China, Türkiye, and the EU formally pledge to refrain from using local crises for regime-change purposes. Such a compact would not eliminate rivalry, but it would narrow the toolkit to regulated competition and make the region a demonstrative case of practical multipolarity in action.

While China provides no explicit security guarantees, its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) requires regional stability as a precondition for success. Under its model of providing infrastructure to reap economic benefits, China does not contribute financially or physically to the security in its regions of interest but rather requires the recipients to ensure it, basically giving space to a Pax Sinica. The infrastructure [networks developed](#) under the BRI framework encourage integration projects that link Eurasian economies and transport systems—especially those overlapping with

the Middle Corridor. The SCO, which includes India and Pakistan among its members, is now the world's largest regional organization in both population and geographical scope. Although its security function remains limited, it plays an increasingly important stabilizing role, as demonstrated at the 2025 SCO Summit hosted by China.

Despite frequent demonstrations of friendship, China and Russia are de facto competitors in Central Asia. A pragmatic [division of labor](#) has long defined the relationship: China handles economics, Russia handles security. Yet this balance has begun to shift with the establishment of a Chinese military facility in Tajikistan. Given Russia's preoccupation with its war in Ukraine, Beijing's growing presence in terrorism-sensitive Tajikistan—bordering Afghanistan—has not provoked open opposition from Moscow. This is a point where Pax Sinica and Pax Russica coexist.

Eurasia east of Brest cannot be incorporated into a single, coherent security system. It represents a mosaic of overlapping power centers and competing interests, where cooperation and rivalry coexist in constant tension. In this environment, stability—rather than the promotion of liberal norms—remains the central objective. For most Eurasian governments, internal threats such as ethnic fragmentation, separatism, and religious radicalization are considered far more dangerous than external military challenges. Consequently, international risks are often interpreted through the lens of domestic stability: External influence is viewed as a catalyst for internal disorder.

During the unipolar moment following the Cold War, the United States not only maintained but also financed the liberal world order. The Pax Americana is a version of the U.S.-led international order grounded in liberal values, open markets, and security partnerships that was rolled into Central Europe, where it was most welcomed. The situation in Eastern Europe and further towards Asia, however, is somewhat different. The United States holds no direct territorial influence, and its strategic presence maintained through NATO, bilateral defense agreements, and political engagement with Eastern European and Central Asian partners is not as strong as in the former Warsaw Pact countries. The Pax Americana,

based on the doctrine of democracy promotion met deep resistance across what we may refer to as political Eurasia. In these societies, the liberal mission was not perceived as an emancipatory force but as an intrusion capable of dismantling local political systems and cultural identities. Russia interpreted the spread of the U.S.-led liberal order as a direct attempt to dismantle its own sphere of influence. The 2008 war in Georgia served as the first warning sign; the 2022 invasion of Ukraine became, from Moscow's perspective, the final confirmation of that perceived threat.

A durable accommodation between the United States and Russia is only possible if both sides recognize the unique character of Eurasian security challenges: Economic interdependence, cultural pluralism, and civilizational diversity prevail over ideological uniformity. Such an understanding requires the renunciation of messianic ambitions and the acknowledgment that the stability of the Eurasian heartland depends less on the export of values than on the management of interests. While this vision remains idealistic, it is not entirely impossible.

In practice, most Eurasian states already behave as if such a post-ideological order existed. They trade with all sides, selectively borrow norms from different civilizational models, and avoid siding “with the West” or “with the East.” For them, the key question is not whose values to adopt but how to prevent external projects from detonating internal ethnic, regional, or religious fault lines. Any U.S.–Russia framework that ignores this logic and returns to ideological conditionality will simply reproduce the cycles of confrontation that have defined the region since the 1990s.

The cooperation along the Middle Corridor among the Turkic states provides a feasible entry point for U.S. engagement. Türkiye, as the most powerful and influential state in the Turkic world, is also the second-largest military power in NATO. The strategic partnership between Ankara and Baku provides further leverage as Azerbaijan is a real bridge to Central Asia. The latter, however, is a landlocked region bordered by Russia, China, Afghanistan, and Iran, and the United States must attach exceptional strategic importance to the entire South Caucasus, including Georgia and Armenia, since it is a key transit corridor vital to stability. Consequently,

Washington is expected to make decisions soon both regarding the development of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) passing through southern Armenia and regarding Georgia's geopolitical position, including the future of the Anaklia Black Sea port. This combination of political, military, and transport considerations defines the potential avenues for American influence in the region and frames the operational logic of U.S. engagement consistent with the principles of a Pax Americana.

IT WORKS IN THEORY, BUT...

In this context, the [concept](#) of a “Eurasian Charter of Multipolarity and Diversity” was introduced at the third International Minsk Security Conference in 2024. This document seeks to articulate an alternative to the Western-centric security model by emphasizing civilizational pluralism, sovereign equality, and respect for international law within the framework of the United Nations. The proposed goal is the creation of an indivisible Eurasian security space based on justice, mutual trust, and equality, achieved through coordination among existing institutions such as the EAEU, CSTO, and SCO.

The principles of the charter echo points 6–10 of the [10 Principles for Perpetual Peace in the 21st Century](#) by the economist Jeffrey Sachs:

- The closure of overseas military bases, primarily by the United States and the United Kingdom
- The cessation of covert regime-change operations and the use of unilateral sanctions that violate state sovereignty
- Full compliance by all nuclear powers with the disarmament obligations enshrined in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
- The non-expansion of military alliances that could threaten neighboring countries, in accordance with the principles of the OSCE
- Cooperative protection of global public goods, including the achievement of climate targets and reform of the United Nations system

Although intellectually compelling, these principles are unrealistic under current geopolitical conditions. While the United States has partially retreated from its former global policing role, it remains unwilling to relinquish strategic influence. Points such as the closure of overseas bases or the non-expansion of military alliances are incompatible with existing security commitments. Likewise, the disarmament provisions are contradicted by [nuclear deployments in Belarus](#) and potential proliferation to [Japan](#) and [South Korea](#). The ban on interference is further undermined by the liberal interventionist tendencies that continue to dominate the EU's foreign policy framework.

The central question in the triangular relationship between the United States, Russia, and Eurasia concerns the role of Europe. Today's Europe, bound to the United States through NATO, defines itself in opposition to the Russo-Chinese conception of Eurasia, which it perceives as its principal security threat. The conflict in Ukraine has become the decisive factor shaping Eurasian security and U.S.–Russia relations alike. The eventual outcome of this war will, in all likelihood, determine the future configuration of the international order.

In the early stages of the conflict, Europe's strategic aim was clear: Russia's unequivocal defeat. Yet by 2025, fatigue, economic costs, and political fragmentation have made this goal increasingly unrealistic. A growing segment of European policymakers has begun to accept a “draw”—a stalemate that freezes territorial realities but prevents further escalation. Moscow, however, sees little incentive in accepting a frozen conflict under Western-imposed conditions. As long as punitive measures remain in force and the logic of containment prevails, Russia has no incentive to compromise.

This produces a structurally unstable triangle: The United States is increasingly tempted to “park” the conflict in order to pivot to Asia; parts of Europe are trapped between fear of Russian revisionism and fear of internal political backlash; Russia and Ukraine both remain locked into maximalist narratives that leave little space for face-saving compromise. In such a setting, any ceasefire not embedded in a wider Eurasian security

settlement will be fragile and reversible, turning Ukraine into a permanent testbed for coercive diplomacy and hybrid tools.

CAN WE MAKE IT WORK IN PRACTICE?

From a pragmatic perspective, a sustainable Eurasian security architecture can only arise through mutual accommodation—the acceptance that neither the United States nor Russia can unilaterally dominate the region. The first steps toward such an arrangement are the restoration of dialogue and the gradual rebuilding of trust:

1. Creation of a Tripartite Dialogue Platform among Russia, the United States, and the European Union, tasked with re-establishing direct channels of communication and regularized negotiation mechanisms.
2. Active involvement of China, India, and Türkiye in subsequent stages of the development of a new model of geopolitical and geoeconomic balance.
3. Implementation of Confidence- and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs)—for example, transparency regarding military exercises and the reactivation of arms control dialogues—to produce tangible short-term results and reduce misperceptions.
4. Development of Non-Dependent Economic Cooperation, including projects of shared interest such as joint extraction of rare earth minerals in Russia or Central Asia, and the establishment of energy consortia to stabilize Europe's energy supply.
5. Promotion of Joint Arctic Development involving the United States, China, and Russia, accompanied by mechanisms ensuring transparency of military presence and sustainable resource management.
6. Adoption of Mutual Non-Interference Guarantees whereby the United States and the EU refrain from intervening in the internal politics of post-Soviet states, and Russia, in turn, eases its restrictive policies toward civil society and transnational organizations.

7. Provision of Collective Security Guarantees for border and neutral countries of the region, including Ukraine, ensuring its defensive capabilities without the necessity of formal NATO or CSTO membership.
8. Gradual Nuclear De-escalation beginning with a U.S. commitment to forego nuclear deployments in East Asia and reciprocal withdrawal of Russian nuclear assets from Belarus.

The implementation of such steps would not resolve the systemic rivalry between great powers, but it could mark the beginning of a pragmatic *modus vivendi*—a transitional arrangement where controlled competition coexists with limited cooperation. The goal is to find a real path forward for the United States and Russia in Eurasia. For now, however, the vision of a multipolar and diverse Eurasian security system, one inclusive of the United States, Europe, and Russia, remains theoretical. As long as the war in Ukraine continues and the trust deficit persists, no comprehensive architecture can take shape. Economist John Maynard Keynes wrote that “in the long run, we are all dead,” but there is no solution in the short run, so we must focus on the long run. A genuine Eurasian *détente*—an updated version of the 1967 [Harmel formula](#) that combined deterrence with dialogue—has yet to materialize.



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