RETHINKING THE GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS AND SECURITY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

International relations in the twenty-first century have been marked by a sharp backlash against the optimism that characterised the post-Cold War decade. The 1990s were often framed as a moment of expanding global governance, consolidating institutions and progressive convergence around liberal norms. Yet the subsequent decades have revealed a more turbulent landscape in which geopolitical rivalry has returned, the use of force has re-emerged as an instrument of statecraft, and international cooperation is increasingly filtered through security logics.

Two widely held assumptions have been particularly shaken. First, the expectation that the spread of liberal democracy would translate into a more peaceful international environment has collided with patterns of democratic backsliding and autocratisation, alongside renewed polarisation within established democracies. Second, the belief that deep economic interdependence would make war irrational has been contradicted by the weaponisation of trade, finance, technology and energy, and by conflicts unfolding despite dense cross-border ties. As scholars seek to explain these dynamics, pressure has increased on international normative systems: foundational principles such as non-intervention, collective security, human rights protection and rules-based cooperation are increasingly contested, selectively invoked or strategically reinterpreted.

The situation in Venezuela illustrates, in a particularly stark way, how contemporary crises blur the lines between politics, ethics and legality. Prolonged institutional conflict and contested legitimacy have interacted with economic collapse and large-scale displacement, while external actors have oscillated between diplomacy, recognition strategies, targeted sanctions and broader coercive postures. The resulting debate raises hard questions that go to the core of international security in the twenty-first century: how to reconcile self-

determination with the protection of persons; how to assess the legality and morality of coercive measures when humanitarian impacts are foreseeable; and how to pursue accountability without normalising the idea that 'ends justify means' in international affairs.

It is against this background that the present Special Issue, titled *Geopolitics and International Security in the 21st Century*, invites a unifying question: in an era of renewed power politics and accelerated technological change, what legal and institutional conditions can still sustain security and cooperation when the rules themselves have become a terrain of contestation? The twelve articles assembled here approach this question from complementary perspectives, moving from energy and strategic thought, to the geopolitics of mobility, the foreign-policy consequences of populism and democratic erosion, the European Union's dilemmas of solidarity, border governance and information integrity, and, finally, the hard tests posed by armed conflict, accountability for aggression, and the prospects of militarisation associated with advances in artificial intelligence.

A first group explores the material and strategic foundations of geopolitical agency. **Goucha Soares**, in *Energy and Geopolitics, Global Power and the Struggle for Energy Resources*, revisits the enduring relationship between leadership, dependency and the control of energy resources. By mapping how different sources, from fossil fuels to nuclear power and renewables, have shaped balances of power, the article argues that the contemporary energy transition does not end geopolitical rivalry; it reconfigures it around new dependencies, infrastructures and chokepoints. This is an important reminder for legal debates on sanctions, trade restrictions, investment screening, and energy security: the governance of energy markets is inseparable from strategic competition.[1]

The strategic dimension is further developed by **Ramos** in *The Portuguese Strategic School at the Geopolitical Crossroads of the 21st Century: a contemporary approach*, which revisits Portugal's strategic thought as a framework for national agency under constraint. Combining external and internal perspectives, the article examines how strategic ideas can be operationalised as a coherent national posture, including the articulation of interests, priorities and capabilities. The contribution is particularly relevant for understanding how smaller and medium powers translate structural constraints into usable strategy, and how strategic culture can contribute to legal and institutional choices in areas such as defence, foreign policy and national resilience.[2]

If energy and national strategy are often discussed from the standpoint of major powers, the Special Issue also highlights how geography and mobility shape alternative geopolitical imaginaries. *From the vast solitude, a frontier is born: Nomadism and geopolitics in Mongolia*, by **Tavares Campos**, offers an original interpretation of frontiers and territoriality by treating nomadism as a historically grounded organisation of space. By combining geopolitical reasoning with historical-sociological analysis, the article challenges depictions of mobility as a security deficit and shows how forms of life can become strategic resources. The result is a valuable bridge between spatial politics and the legal grammar of borders, sovereignty and governance.[3]

A second cluster addresses the ideational drivers of insecurity: the political logics that challenge the liberal international order and reshape foreign policy practice. In *Populism and the decline of the liberal international order: a comparative analysis of disruptive strategies in the foreign policy of populist leaders*, **Gonzalez et al** examine how populist styles of mobilisation translate into external action. Through a comparative lens that includes cases such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Viktor Orban, the article maps recurring disruptive

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[2] RAMOS, L. (2026). The Portuguese Strategic School at the Geopolitical Crossroads of the 21st Century: a contemporary approach. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 258–276. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-12

[3] TAVARES CAMPOS, D. (2026). From the vast solitude, a frontier is born: Nomadism and geopolitics in Mongolia. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 27–42. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-2

moves that strain multilateral commitments and reframe diplomacy as a theatre of confrontation. The analysis highlights how sovereignty talk, distrust of institutions and performative leadership can affect compliance, alliance behaviour and the stability of cooperative regimes.[4]

At a finer-grained level, *Personalized Alliances and Informal Networks in Populist Foreign Policy: The Case of Viktor Orban*, written by **Kacziba et al**, focuses on the mechanisms through which foreign policy becomes personalised and networked. Drawing on a systematic analysis of Orban's public communication on X between June 2023 and June 2025, the article shows how partnerships are narrated through individuals, informal connections and affectively charged characterisations, rather than through stable institutional commitments. This perspective helps explain why populist foreign policy can be simultaneously opportunistic and durable: it leverages interpersonal legitimacy and media logic to sustain alignment, contestation and repositioning across shifting circumstances.[5]

These dynamics raise a further question: what happens when populist disruption is followed by attempts at institutional restoration? In *Re-democratization of Poland: Transition from Kaczynski's Authoritarian Populism to a Liberal Democracy*, **Kimla** et al analyse the difficult mechanics of democratic recovery and emphasise how legal and institutional constraints can slow the reversal of illiberal reforms even after electoral change. The article underscores the long shadows cast by rule-of-law erosion: reforms can be blocked by entrenched networks and contested institutions, while legal uncertainty and politicised adjudication complicate democratic repair. For European governance,

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[4] GONZALEZ, C., DUARTE HERRERA, L., PEDRAZA BELEÑO, J., TRUJILLO RINCÓN, J., & MESA BEDOYA, J. C. (2026). Populism and the decline of the liberal international order: a comparative analysis of disruptive strategies in the foreign policy of populist leaders. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 76–104. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-4

[5] KACZIBA, P., & MURÁNYI, K. (2026). Personalized Alliances and Informal Networks in Populist Foreign Policy: The Case of Viktor Orbán. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 213–238. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-10

the contribution clarifies why the defence of liberal democracy is not only a normative aspiration but also a demanding institutional project.[6]

A third cluster places the European Union at the centre of a governance puzzle: how to sustain solidarity and protect political communities under conditions of crisis, contestation and hybrid pressure. The author of *Cohesion and territorial solidarity as a legal response to the crisis of multilateralism: the challenge of the European Union in the new international governance*, **Neves Pérez**, argues that cohesion and territorial solidarity are not only distributive principles. They can function as legal strategies through which the Union projects credible commitments in a fragmented international order. By tracing how cohesion has evolved and how solidarity is operationalised, the article clarifies the legal and political stakes of keeping the Union together when external shocks and internal divergences converge.[7]

The Union's security dilemmas are equally visible at its borders. *The Emotional Politics of Security in the EU's Migration Management*, presented by **Levy**, revisits securitisation theory through the lens of the emotional turn in international relations, focusing on how fear, pity and compassion operate in speech acts and border practices. By examining the 2015-2016 refugee crisis and the 2023-2024 implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the article shows how affective framing can legitimise restrictive measures while also generating normative claims of protection and responsibility. The analysis invites a complex legal question: if emotions help determine what is perceived as necessary, proportionate or reasonable, can legal evaluation ignore the affective conditions under which norms are invoked and enforced?[8]

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[6] KIMLA, P., & CITKOWSKA-KIMLA, A. (2026). Re-democratization of Poland: Transition from Kaczyński's Authoritarian Populism to a Liberal Democracy. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 198–212. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-9

[7] NEVES PÉREZ, H. (2026). Cohesion and territorial solidarity as a legal response to the crisis of multilateralism: the challenge of the European Union in the new international governance. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 172–197. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-8

[8] LEVY, C. (2026). Emotions at the Border: The EU's Affective Governance of Migration. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 105–127. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-5

Additionally, **Zinenko et al** bring us the analysis on how security also depends on information integrity and institutional resilience. In *EU Policy on Countering Disinformation and its Impact on the Information Security of Member States*, they examine the EU's evolving toolkit against disinformation and assesses its implications for national information security. By connecting policy instruments and regulatory frameworks, including measures such as the Code of Practice, the Digital Services Act and cybersecurity-oriented initiatives, to member states' information environments, the article clarifies how counter-disinformation is increasingly treated as part of a wider security architecture. It also brings into focus the persistent tension between protection and rights: effective governance must contend with pluralism, media freedom and due process while responding to strategic manipulation.[9]

Armed conflict remains the hardest test of the international legal order, and this Special Issue confronts it through the lens of accountability brought by **Saraiva**. *The Crime of Aggression and Human Security* revisits the debate reignited by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine over how, where and under what conditions the crime of aggression can be prosecuted. By discussing jurisdictional constraints that limit the International Criminal Court's capacity to prosecute aggression in that context and by examining alternative avenues of accountability, the article advances a broader normative claim: aggression should be analysed not only as a violation of interstate order but also through a human security lens that foregrounds the protection of persons and communities.[10]

Also concerning the military dimension, **Tyshchuk et al**, in *General Artificial Intelligence and the US-PRC Arms Race: Reflections on Global Militarization*, push the debate toward the next horizon of international security: the strategic and legal implications of AI-enabled militarisation. By focusing on the diffusion of autonomous systems and the way official doctrines adapt to technological acceleration, the contribution raises questions about escalation control, attribution and responsibility, and the capacity of existing legal

[9] ZINENKO, A., SVOBODA, I., DERESHCHUK, T., SHEVCHENKO, N., & SHAPOVALENKO, M. (2026). EU Policy on Countering Disinformation and its Impact on the Information Security of Member States. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 147–171. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-7

[10] SARAIVA, M. F. (2026). The Crime of Aggression and Human Security. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 128–146. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-6

frameworks to keep pace with innovation. The article's central insight is that technological shifts can reshape the conditions of deterrence and the tempo of conflict, which in turn amplifies the importance of legal clarity, normative restraint and governance mechanisms that reduce the risks of miscalculation.[11]

In *Legal liability for environmental damage caused by armed conflict: international and national legal aspects (the case of Ukraine)*, **Strelnyk et al** bring the environmental dimension of contemporary warfare to the centre of international security debates, arguing that accountability gaps persist precisely where harm is most durable: in the long-term degradation of ecosystems, public health, and economic recovery prospects. Using Ukraine as a case study, the article shows how existing international frameworks remain uneven in ensuring the inevitability of responsibility and reparation for wartime environmental harm, not least because evidentiary standards, causal complexity, and threshold tests often obstruct effective litigation. The authors discuss pathways for strengthening accountability, including the evolving debate around "ecocide", the role of international and domestic proceedings, and the operational challenge of translating condemnation into credible mechanisms for compensation and restoration.[12]

Read together, these twelve articles offer three broader lines of thought. First, security is no longer best captured through a single lens: material resources, strategic cultures, domestic political logics and technological infrastructures co-produce contemporary risk. Second, law operates simultaneously as constraint and as instrument, enabling cooperation while also becoming a site of competitive reinterpretation. Third, the most pressing dilemmas emerge precisely at the seams between domains - between energy and sovereignty, between borders and rights, between information integrity and

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[11] TYSHCHUK, V., & KHALYMON, S. (2026). General Artificial Intelligence and the US–PRC Arms Race: Reflections on Global Militarization. Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 43–75. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-3

[12] STRELNYK, V., VOLCHENKO, N., BONDAR, N., & KUZNETSOVA, M. (2026). Legal liability for environmental damage caused by armed conflict: international and national legal aspects (the case of Ukraine). Revista Jurídica Portucalense, 1(39), 239–257. https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(39.1)2026.ic-11

democratic pluralism, and between technological acceleration and legal accountability. This Special Issue is therefore an invitation to read across boundaries and to reflect on what the coming years may demand from law, institutions and political leadership.

This systemic backlash is not simply a cyclical correction. It has exposed structural tensions in the post–Cold War settlement: the gap between the universal language of norms and the uneven distribution of power; the fragility of multilateral bargains when domestic politics polarise; and the growing willingness of actors to contest, bypass, or selectively invoke international rules. Academics and practitioners continue to debate the deeper causes of this turbulence, but the symptoms are increasingly clear with intensified security dilemmas, fragmented cooperation, and sustained pressure on the international normative system that is meant to structure restraint.

The cost of incoherence has become one of the most corrosive forces acting on the credibility of the state blocs that, since the 1990s, claimed to stad for a rules-based international order. What our Special Issue has shown is that at stake is not merely a rhetorical mismatch, but a cumulative erosion of normative authority when the protection of life and human dignity appears unevenly prioritised across theatres of suffering. The contrast is striking: the war in Ukraine has mobilised robust diplomatic, economic, and legal responses; the devastation in Palestine has generated far more fragmented political language and contested red lines; and the protracted catastrophe in Sudan has too often remained peripheral to the strategic imagination of those same actors. When principles, such as sovereignty, civilian protection, proportionality, accountability are invoked with visibly different intensity and consequence depending on geography, alliances, or media salience, the promise of universality that supports the international normative system is weakened from within.

This inconsistency matters because the rules-based order has always depended on more than material power. Its resilience rests on the capacity of leading actors to persuade others that their preferences are anchored in generalisable principles rather than contingent interests. Once that persuasion falters, the system's adhesive is no longer legitimacy but transaction, and

transaction is fragile. In practical terms, double standards feed a widening interpretive gap: many audiences no longer distinguish between normative commitment and strategic narrative, and the language of human rights and international humanitarian law risks being perceived as selective advocacy rather than common constraint. The result is a deeper crisis than the failure to enforce particular rules: it is the perception that rules themselves are instruments of differentiation of whose lives count, whose suffering merits urgency, and whose violations trigger real costs.

One of the most immediate geopolitical consequences is the growing diplomatic non-alignment, or selective alignment, of many states in the Global South. This is often presented, in simplified form, as opportunism or hedging. Yet it also reflects a structural political incentive: the ability to point to stark incoherence provides a credible basis for resisting alignment pressures and for contesting the moral hierarchy that has implicitly shaped global governance. In multilateral arenas, this translates into harder bargaining, more abstentions or tactical voting, and a greater willingness to withhold cooperation on sanctions, investigations, or peace initiatives perceived as selective. It also fosters alternative coalitions, as states seek spaces where their positions are less likely to be judged through asymmetrical standards. In this sense, the legitimacy deficit is not merely reputational; on the contrary, it has operational effects that reduce the capacity to build stable coalitions for humanitarian response, conflict prevention, and accountability.

Revisionist or system-contesting actors may not be the origin of this fragmentation, but they benefit from it. China, in particular, has strong reasons to observe the disaggregation of normative consensus with strategic satisfaction: each visible inconsistency reduces the capacity of Western actors to mobilise broad support, dilutes the stigma associated with violations, and normalises a more plural and more permissive international environment. This is not simply a matter of propaganda. It is a competitive advantage in agenda-setting: when trust in the universality of norms erodes, the space opens for rival narratives that privilege sovereignty as insulation, development as a substitute for rights, and order as stability rather than accountability. The more the guardians of the post-1990 equilibrium appear unable to embody their own proclaimed standards, the

easier it becomes for contesting powers to argue that the era of liberal primacy is ending not because it is being defeated, but because it is discrediting itself.

Against this backdrop, the contributions assembled in this Special Issue can be read as contributions across diverse objects: energy and resource competition, strategic thought, mobility and frontiers, the militarisation of emerging technologies, disinformation and information security, populism's disruptive foreign policy, re-democratisation, EU solidarity and border governance, the crime of aggression and the human security paradigm, and accountability for the environmental consequences of war. These articles converge on a shared concern. The core problem is not the absence of rules; it is the weakening of the social and political conditions that make rules authoritative: consistency, reciprocity, institutional trust, and the belief that law constrains power rather than merely reflecting it.

There is, therefore, a final normative and practical imperative that runs beyond any single conflict. The world is different, the density of crises is greater, and the margin for complacency is thinner. The editorial team and the authors of this Special Issue have sought to bring analytical clarity to delicate and complex matters not as an academic luxury, but as a prerequisite for responsible public reasoning. If multilateralism is to move beyond its current critical phase, it will require more than institutional reform; it will require the restoration of credibility through principled coherence; an insistence that dignity is not contingent, that civilian lives are not graded by strategic relevance, and that accountability cannot be selectively activated without damaging the very order it purports to defend. Only under conditions of renewed trust grounded in human dignity, human security, development, prosperity, cooperation, and genuine multilateral commitment will the international community be able to confront the threats that continue to endanger the planet's future, from the escalation of armed conflict to the accelerating pressures of environmental collapse.

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