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Political instability as a driver of international system transformation

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This article examines the transformation of the international political system. This crisis is manifested in the declining effectiveness of international institutions, the erosion of international legal norms, and the fragmentation of traditional governance mechanisms. A key aspect of this shift is the growing activity of actors dissatisfied with their current position in the international system, alongside the ambitions of new centers of power, seeking to revise the existing rules through both conventional and asymmetric instruments available to them. Hybrid warfare has emerged as a characteristic symptom of this transformation, reflecting a broader trend toward the blurring of boundaries between war and peace, legality and illegality. It has become a normalized element of political reality. In this context, established governance models based on stability and predictability are proving inadequate. The author argues that systemic international-political instability is not merely a byproduct of isolated crises or conflicts, but rather a symptom of profound structural change in the global political landscape. The failure of the international community to acknowledge or adequately respond to these changes creates opportunities for irresponsible actors to exploit institutional loopholes, avoid accountability, and maneuver in ways that would have been either impossible or immediately curtailed within the framework of a stable and rules-based order. The study emphasizes the interdependence of strategic uncertainty, institutional fragility, and the instrumental use of instability as a tool of influence. Rather than viewing instability solely as a threat, the article proposes to reconsider it as a resource for navigating systemic change and shaping a more adaptive global order.

Key words: geopolitical transformation, international political order, asymmetric influence, institutional fragility, systemic crisis, hybrid warfare, political instability.

Introduction. The phenomenon of uncertainty has long been an inherent feature of the international political order, stemming from limited access to complete information and the difficulty of predicting the outcomes of political decisions. However, in the contemporary era, the scale and intensity of uncertainty in the international sphere have taken on a qualitatively new dimension. The current world order is undergoing a profound transformation, reflected in the growing polarization of the international system, the erosion of legal boundaries, the proliferation of interpretations of fundamental principles of international coexistence, and the increasing role of political uncertainty.

Under such conditions, there is a growing need to reconsider the role of uncertainty in contemporary international politics not merely as a threat or a destabilizing factor, but as a potential resource for adapting to a changing international landscape and for shaping more effective models of global order. While these trends undermine the conventional mechanisms of international cooperation, dismantle established norms, and disrupt the functioning of the global system, they also create strategic “windows of opportunity”. In this context, political actors can operate with greater flexibility, circumvent established norms, exploit regulatory gaps, and promote new rules that align with their own interests. Instability is utilized differently by various actors: revisionist powers may actively manufacture it to challenge the existing order, rising powers may harness it to formalize their new status, while weaker and non-state actors often seek to exploit it to gain disproportionate influence.

Purpose and Objectives. The purpose of this article is to analyze the transformational crisis of the modern international political system and to examine political uncertainty as a key factor in this transformation. The objectives are to explore the main shifts occurring within the system of international relations and to analyze political uncertainty and instability as integral elements of the emerging international reality, rather than merely as threats or disruptions to the established order. The article also aims to assess the impact of strategic uncertainty on classical models of global governance, which are increasingly proving ineffective under current conditions.

Methodology. This study employs a qualitative, theoretical-explanatory methodology for analyzing how political instability operates within broader processes of international transformation. The research draws from systems theory and institutional approaches to interpret instability not as mere disruption, but as a functional catalyst for systemic adaptation.

The analytical framework is constructed through the operationalization of key concepts such as “strategic uncertainty” and “institutional instability”. These categories are used to link the relationship between systemic instability and shifts in governance logics and actor behavior. Furthermore, the study employs illustrative reasoning, drawing on observable patterns and scenarios in global politics to ground its theoretical propositions in empirical reality.

Ultimately, the integration of conceptual analysis grounded in systems and institutional theory with

an illustrative logic that draws on observable patterns provides a robust methodological foundation for this study. This framework enables the construction of a structured analytical model designed to elucidate the structural role of instability in the evolution of the international political order. Such an approach permits an analysis that transcends the mere identification of crisis, instead examining instability as a functional catalyst for institutional adaptation, shifting behavioral norms, and the redistribution of influence across the global system.

Discussion. The current dynamics of international political processes suggest that classic models of global governance that relied on stability, legal certainty and predictability are increasingly proving unable to respond to new challenges. International institutions have not had time to adapt to rapidly evolving conflicts that are taking on increasingly hybrid forms [2, p. 30]. Today's world order is undergoing significant transformation and is marked by a high degree of uncertainty, exacerbated by the erosion and breakdown of institutions and norms [2, p. 7]. This transformation is reflected not only in a shift in the balance of power but also in a fundamental rethinking of the basic principles underpinning international interaction. The traditional approach to international legal stability, which assumes predictability, rule-based behavior, and established diplomatic channels, is proving increasingly inadequate in the face of contemporary, complex threats.

In the modern international environment, both revisionist sentiments among traditional political actors [8] and the destabilizing ambitions of new players dissatisfied with the current distribution of power and status in the world system [3] are becoming increasingly apparent. These actors increasingly challenge established rules [7, p. IX], opting out of international obligations and long-term agreements in favor of situational interactions based on their own interpretation of political expediency. This trend significantly undermines the predictability and stability of the global order.

Hybrid war is one of the most characteristic symptoms of the transformation of the international order amid a systemic crisis. It serves as a clear marker of the inadequacy of traditional approaches to global governance and underscores the need for a conceptual renewal of security strategies in the 21st century. In a broad sense, this form of confrontation involves a combination of military and non-military methods, ranging from information campaigns and cyber operations to economic coercion, political destabilization, and interference in domestic affairs through proxy actors.

A key precondition for the proliferation of this type of warfare in the modern world has been the formal prohibition of war under international law [12, p. 326].

However, restrictions on conducting "traditional" wars have not eliminated their root causes, such as interstate competition, territorial disputes, and political rivalries. The primary aim of hybrid warfare is to circumvent legal accountability while exploiting the limited capacity, and often limited political will, of the international community to respond effectively to unconventional threats.

In this context, the study of cognitive limitations and emotional factors influencing the behavior of political actors under conditions of uncertainty becomes increasingly relevant. Leaders of modern states are confronted with blurred strategic signals, a multiplicity of possible developments, and a significantly reduced capacity for long-term forecasting, which complicate decision-making and undermine the ability to implement rational and consistent foreign policy in the traditional sense.

Information overload, time constraints, and the constant presence of layered and manipulative hybrid threats contribute to a growing reliance on heuristics, intuitive models, and situational impulses rather than comprehensive analytical reasoning. As a result, political decisions are increasingly shaped by bounded rationality and cognitive-emotional distortions, reflecting a broader environment of rising political uncertainty [4, pp. 49–52; 9, pp. 5–8]. It is precisely this environment of cognitive overload and the paralysis of traditional analytical models that incentivizes political actors to abandon cumbersome formal procedures. When rational long-term forecasting becomes impossible, pragmatic, short-term political experiments emerge not merely as an option, but as a rational survival strategy.

Despite the widespread perception of political instability as a threat, the current transformation of the international order calls for an alternative analytical perspective. Research shows that systems evolving through adaptation, experimentation, and trial-and-error processes tend to be more resilient and viable over time [13, pp. 10–22]. Therefore, it becomes increasingly relevant to interpret political turbulence not solely as a challenge or byproduct of systemic crisis, but as a potential resource that can be consciously harnessed for institutional adaptation and strategic flexibility.

In the context of the international system's transformation, political actors increasingly operate outside established norms and frameworks often without formally violating them. This dynamic invites a reassessment of political instability, framing it not merely as a sign of disorder, but as a critical indicator of regulatory evolution. Instability can expose latent gaps in existing institutional arrangements and open pathways for their revision, improvement, and adaptation to new geopolitical realities. Moreover political instability provides a critical opening for traditionally weaker and informal actors to enhance

their political agency on the global stage. This dynamic helps to emerge of alternative centers of influence, thereby offsetting structural inequalities and enabling the creation of more adaptive and effective leadership strategies.

A key consequence of international political instability is the emergence of opportunities for political experimentation. During periods of crisis, when established norms and institutions are ineffective, new spaces open up for piloting informal modes of international engagement. The main benefit of these formats is their ability to work beyond the formal restrictions of international law and protocol. This flexibility reduces the political and reputational risks of failure for participants, enabling more innovative approaches to complex global challenges.

At the same time, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all instability is productive. The line between functional instability, which leads to adaptation, and destructive chaos, which triggers systemic collapse, is often very thin. Whether instability produces transformation or breakdown frequently depends on auxiliary conditions: a minimal consensus on the need for system preservation among key actors, the resilience of underlying social and economic infrastructures, and the presence of political agents capable of framing and channeling volatility toward constructive ends.

A stark counterexample to the successful adaptation of the G20 format is the situation in Libya after 2011 [5]. In that case, international intervention, which was also an experiment of sorts, and the overthrow of an authoritarian regime did not lead to the formation of a new order. Instead, these actions caused the collapse of statehood, a protracted civil war, and the country's transformation into an arena for proxy conflicts. This case demonstrates that the outcome of instability critically depends on initial conditions: the presence of resilient domestic institutions and a long-term strategy among external actors, rather than merely a tactical desire for regime change. Thus, only under certain conditions does instability become a resource for transformation rather than a source of uncontrollable chaos.

Yet, under certain conditions, instability can act not only as a stressor but as a driver of institutional renewal and innovation. When appropriately navigated, periods of disruption may create windows for adaptive reconfiguration rather than uncontrolled disintegration. The following examples illustrate cases where instability has, thus far, catalyzed adaptive responses rather than outright collapse.

For example, the 2008 elevation of the Group of Twenty (G20) to a leaders-level summit provides a compelling illustration [6]. The global financial crisis revealed the limitations of the Group of Eight (G8), whose narrow composition and sluggish response mechanisms proved ill-suited to the scale and urgency

of the problem. In response to this institutional shortcoming, the G20, now including key emerging economies, was elevated to serve as the world's principal forum for crisis consultation [1]. As an informal body, it enabled rapid policy coordination without the bureaucratic inertia typically associated with formal international organizations, thereby reducing risks while accelerating the search for effective solutions.

Consequently, institutional innovation can be stimulated by instability. Developing more adaptive and sustainable global governance models that can respond to rapidly evolving global realities is a priority for pragmatic experiments like the G20.

Beyond fostering experimentation, political instability also opens a more radical window of opportunity for the systemic restructuring of the global order. The collapse of old models during periods of acute crisis creates favorable conditions for a paradigm shift in the evolution of the international system. This change that is typically blocked during times of stability by institutional inertia and the resistance of status quo-oriented actors.

Much like in natural ecosystems, external shocks and systemic imbalances compel the international system to shed dysfunctional components and structures that have become maladaptive or obstructive to further progress.

A vivid illustration of this process is the ongoing crisis in global security architecture, triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The invasion exposed the functional paralysis of one of the system's central pillars: the UN Security Council, rendered powerless by the aggressor's veto power [11]. This deadlock forced the international community to explore alternative avenues for collective response. Notably, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) has been reactivated through the invocation of the "Uniting for Peace" resolution [10], enabling condemnation of aggression and the establishment of accountability mechanisms. Simultaneously, the crisis has amplified global demands for meaningful Security Council reform, a clear sign of the system's self-correcting impulse to either transform or marginalize the elements that undermine its legitimacy and viability.

Thus, acute crises should not be viewed merely as anomalies within the international system, but rather as essential mechanisms of its evolution. They act as catalysts that precipitate the dismantling of outdated structures and open space for the emergence of a more flexible, resilient, and context-responsive global order.

Conclusion. This study has established that international political instability is not a mere byproduct of systemic crisis, but a primary driver transforming the international order. The analysis demonstrated that instability operates as an active instrument, deliberately wielded by actors to advance

their interests when traditional mechanisms of global governance falter.

The article identified two distinct levels at which instability catalyzes change. The first involves “political experimentation”, where agile, informal formats like the G20 emerge to tackle urgent challenges that legacy institutions are ill-equipped to handle. The second, more profound level is “systemic restructuring”, where acute crises, such as the paralysis of the UN Security Council, reveal fundamental dysfunctions at the system’s core, compelling the international community to pursue remedies through the reform or marginalization of non-viable components.

This paper’s primary contribution is the reframing of instability not simply as a threat, but as a resource and a new dimension of power. In an environment of uncertainty, strategic advantage shifts to actors defined by their capacity for rapid adaptation and non-linear action, enabling even weaker players to enhance their international agency. Consequently, the ability to navigate instability, not merely the possession of material resources, is becoming a decisive currency of influence in the contemporary world.

The study’s findings suggest several promising directions for future inquiry. Further research is warranted into the cognitive and behavioral models of decision-making under uncertainty, alongside the development of integrated frameworks for studying instability that account for its narrative and informational drivers.

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Політична нестабільність як рушій трансформації міжнародно-політичної системи

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У статті досліджено трансформацію міжнародно-політичної системи. Ця криза проявляється у зниженні ефективності міжнародних інституцій, ерозії міжнародно-правових норм та фрагментації традиційних механізмів управління. Ключовим аспектом цього зсуву виступає зростання активності класичних та нових політичних акторів, незадоволених своїм поточним становищем у міжнародній системі. Важливим аспектом нестабільності також є зростання нових центрів сили, що прагнуть переглянути існуючі правила за допомогою доступних їм як конвенційних, так і асиметричних інструментів. Характерним симптомом цієї трансформації стала гібридна війна, що відображає ширшу тенденцію до розмивання меж між війною та миром, законністю та її порушенням. Вона стала нормалізованим елементом політичної реальності. У цьому контексті усталені моделі управління, що ґрунтуються на стабільності та передбачуваності, виявляються неадекватними. Автор зазначає, що системна міжнародно-політична нестабільність є не лише побічним продуктом глобальних криз чи конфліктів, а скоріше симптомом глибоких структурних змін у глобальному політичному ландшафті. Неспроможність міжнародної спільноти визнати ці зміни або адекватно на них реагувати створює можливості для безвідповідальних акторів використовувати інституційні прогалини, уникати відповідальності та маневрувати у спосіб, який був би неможливим або був би негайно припинений у межах стабільного, заснованого на правилах порядку. Дослідження підкреслює взаємозв'язок між стратегічною невизначеністю, інституційною крихкістю та інструментальним використанням нестабільності як інструменту впливу. Замість того, щоб розглядати нестабільність виключно як загрозу, стаття пропонує переосмислити її як ресурс механізм для навігації в умовах системних змін та формування більш адаптивного глобального порядку.

Ключові слова: геополітична трансформація, міжнародно-політичний порядок, асиметричний вплив, інституційна крихкість, системна криза, гібридна війна, політична нестабільність.