**Better to be Godzilla than Bambi**

[Jean-Marie Choffray](https://www.amazon.com/kindle-dbs/entity/author/B00DNUGN64?_encoding=UTF8&node=283155&offset=0&pageSize=12&searchAlias=stripbooks&sort=author-sidecar-rank&page=1&langFilter=default#formatSelectorHeader)\*

Liège, September 10, 2023.

In international relations, **better to be Godzilla than Bambi**! In a recent paper, [John Mearsheimer](https://www.mearsheimer.com/) analyses **great power** rivalries. For him: “When assessing the geopolitical landscape, the primary aim of any state, whether **democratic** or **authoritarian**, is to ensure its own **survival**. That comes down to military might and alliances […] Europe would be in far better shape today if **realist logic** had carried the day and NATO had not expanded eastward, and especially not committed itself to eventually including Ukraine. But the die is now cast: **unipolarity** has given way to **multipolarity** and the US and its allies are now engaged in serious geopolitical rivalries with both **China** and **Russia**. These new **cold wars** are at least as dangerous as the original one, and maybe more so” (emphasis mine). Rather than rewriting what [John Mearsheimer](https://www.mearsheimer.com/) expressed precisely, I have chosen to share my summary of this [exceptional analysis](https://mondediplo.com/2023/08/02great-powers).

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*In fact, Russia’s position is akin to America’s Monroe Doctrine, which says that no distant great power is allowed to station military forces in its backyard.*

John Mearsheimer

*Without a doubt,* [*John Mearsheimer*](https://www.mearsheimer.com/) *is not wrong, but… is he completely right?*

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Key excerpts from John Mearsheimer’s exceptional and courageous paper; [Great power rivalries: the case for realism](https://mondediplo.com/2023/08/02great-powers) (emphasis mine).

“Three decades ago, many experts in the West believed we had reached **the end of history** […] That illusion has been shattered.”

“**Realism** is the best **theory** for understanding **world politics**. States are the key actors in the realist story, and they coexist in a world where there is no supreme authority that can protect them from each other […] As Clausewitz argues, war is a continuation of politics by other means.”

“**Security competition** among the great powers is an unalterable fact of life and inevitably leads to tragic results.”

“The one exception is the ‘**unipolar moment**’ (1991-2017), when both Democratic and Republican administrations abandoned **realism** and tried to create a global order based on the values of **liberal democracy** – rule of law, market economies and human rights – under the benign leadership of the US. Unfortunately, this strategy of ‘**liberal hegemony**’ was a near-total failure.”

“The starting point is recognizing that states operate in an **anarchic system**, where there is no all-powerful protector to call upon if another state threatens them […] Furthermore, it is difficult if not impossible to be certain that another state has benign **intentions**, mainly because **intentions** – unlike capabilities – are hidden inside the minds of policymakers and cannot be fully discerned.”

“In short, **great-power** politics is characterized by relentless **security competition**.”

“The ideal situation for a **great power** is to be a **regional hegemon** – to dominate its area of the world – while making sure that no other power, medium or great, is able to challenge it ” (cf. America’s **Monroe Doctrine**).

“The **great powers** write the [… international] institutions’ rules to suit their own interests, and under no circumstances can institutions coerce a great power to act in ways that threaten its **security**. In such cases, a great power will simply violate the rules or rewrite them in its favor.”

“Ironically, **liberal** approaches to foreign policy contain a decidedly **illiberal** element […] They act as if they know for certain what type of regime would be best for every country.”

“**China** and the US are destined to compete ever more intensely for power in the foreseeable future […] The US helped to create this perilous rivalry by ignoring realist principles […] **Engagement** was a colossal strategic blunder.”

“While there is no question **Russia** attacked **Ukraine**, it is equally clear that the conflict was provoked by the US and its European allies when they decided to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia’s borders […] The US ambassador to Moscow [… William Joseph Burns, current CIA director] in April 2008, when the decision was made to bring Ukraine into NATO, said in a memo to then secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, ‘Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players... I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests’.”

“Putin launched a preventive war aimed at keeping Ukraine out of NATO. Moscow views this as a war of self-defense, not a war of conquest.”

“Like the misguided policy of **engagement** with China, **NATO enlargement** was a component of the **liberal hegemony** project […] But the die is now cast: **unipolarity** has given way to **multipolarity** and the US and its allies are now engaged in serious geopolitical rivalries with both **China** and **Russia**. These new **cold wars** are at least as dangerous as the original one, and maybe more so.”

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“*The world faces not just one great-power rivalry, as it did during the cold war, but two: the US vs Russia in eastern Europe (over Ukraine) and the US vs China in East Asia (over Taiwan). Both security competitions could easily turn into hot wars.*”

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*Bossuet, in his* [*Discours sur l’Histoire Universelle*](https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark%3A/12148/bpt6k6523760k)*, has an alternative theory: « Les révolutions des empires sont réglées par la providence, et servent à humilier les princes […] Qui veut entendre à fond les choses humaines doit les reprendre de plus haut […] Quelque effort que fassent les hommes, leur néant paraît partout […] La corruption était déjà trop universelle, l’abondance avait introduit trop de dérèglement dans les mœurs […] Celui qui sait conserver et affermir un état a trouvé un plus haut point de sagesse que celui qui sait conquérir et gagner des batailles […] N’y ayant rien de plus libre ni de plus indépendant qu’un homme qui sait vivre de peu […] Ils attribuaient au hasard, selon la coutume des hommes, les effets dont les causes ne leur étaient pas connues […] Vous voyez les causes des divisions de la république, et finalement de sa chute, dans les jalousies de ses citoyens, et dans l’amour de la liberté poussé jusqu’à un excès et une délicatesse insupportable […] En un mot, il n’y a point de puissance humaine qui ne serve malgré elle à d’autres desseins que les siens […] Pendant que vous les verrez tomber presque tous d’eux-mêmes, et que vous verrez la religion se soutenir par sa propre force, vous connaîtrez aisément quelle est la solide grandeur, et où un homme sensé doit mettre son espérance. »*

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