

# The New Anatomy of Power: Geography as Destiny and Strategy in a Multipolar World

## Turkey, Iran, and the Balancing of Threats in the Era of Realist Constructivism

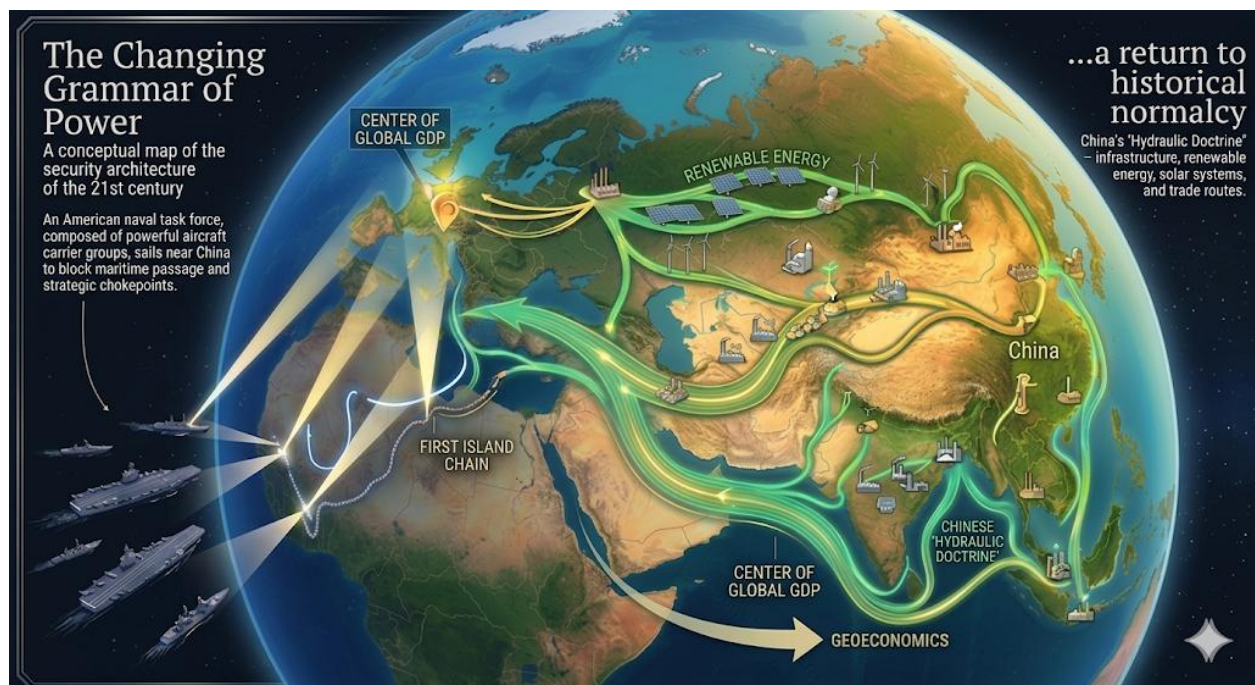
By Prof. Dr. Aleksandar Ivanov

(University of St Kliment Ohridski Bitola, Faculty of Security, Skopje, North Macedonia)

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To understand the architecture of the emerging global order, one must first look at the map of world wealth — and then at the map of the world's seas.

After more than a century in which the geographic center of global gross domestic product was firmly anchored somewhere between Europe and North America, the economic center of gravity is shifting inexorably back toward Asia. This eastward movement is not a

historical accident. It is, rather, a return to a historical norm in which China, for centuries, accounted for roughly 20 to 25 percent of global wealth creation.

Yet this tectonic economic transition is not unfolding in isolation from the existing architecture of global security — an architecture still largely designed according to the strategic rules of the twentieth century.

It is precisely within this gap between economic reality and security architecture that the contemporary form of the Thucydides Trap emerges. The Thucydides Trap describes the tendency toward conflict between a relatively declining power — the United States, which still defines and polices the existing order — and a rising power — the People’s Republic of China, which demands strategic space commensurate with its economic weight. Today, this conflict is increasingly being fought through the control of logistics.

As a hegemon, the United States may be losing certain industrial battles — in drones, batteries, and shipbuilding capacity — but it still possesses undisputed and unparalleled control over global maritime routes. This dominance allows Washington to use the world’s oceans and strategic straits as powerful levers of pressure: instruments for limiting, sanctioning, and containing the potential of any challenger.

Aware of this maritime vulnerability, China is not attempting to confront the U.S. Navy head-on. Although its shipbuilding capacity has already significantly surpassed that of the United States, China remains strategically constrained within the “First Island Chain.”

Instead, Beijing applies a logic that could be described as the “doctrine of water”: it does not try to break the stone in front of it; it flows around it, filling the gaps through the sheer weight of its own geoeconomics.

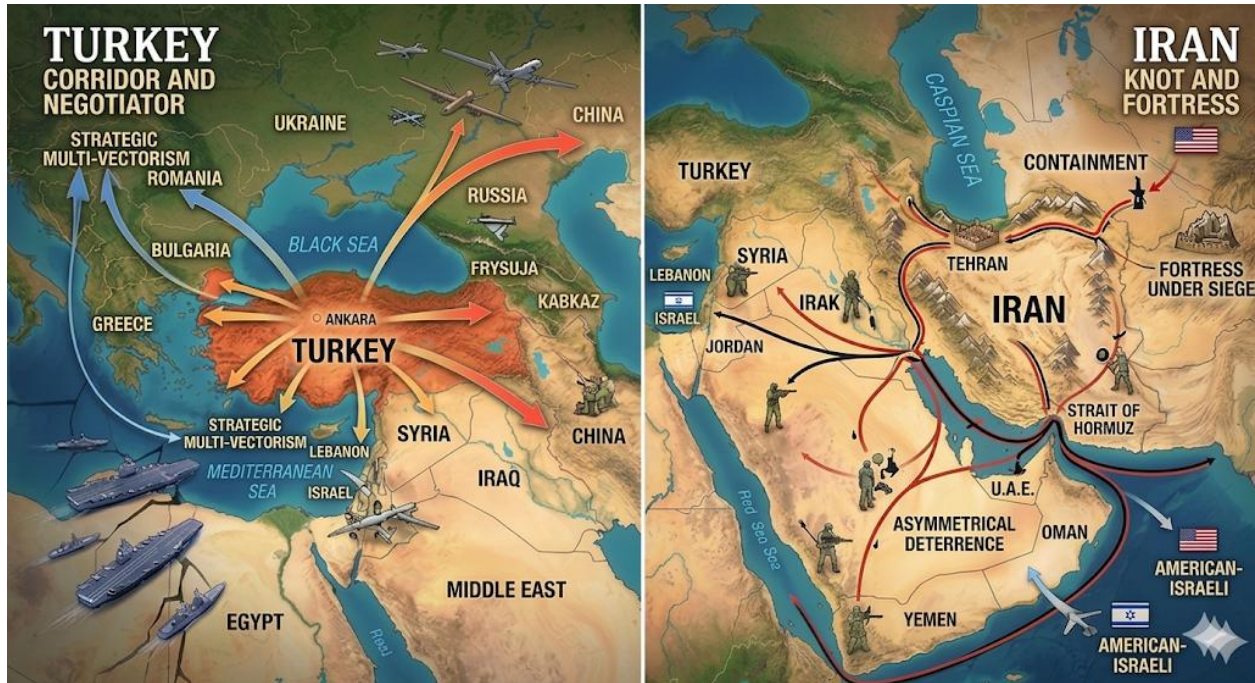
The clearest evidence of this is not only the grand overland infrastructure designed to bridge continents, but something even more fundamental: China’s extraordinarily rapid transition toward green energy.

In Western discourse, the green transition is most often interpreted almost exclusively through the prism of climate responsibility. In Chinese strategic thinking, however, it is also a question of survival. China suffers from a chronic shortage of domestic energy resources and an excessive dependence on imported oil that travels through precisely those maritime chokepoints that Washington could, in a crisis, threaten or close.

Massive investments in solar panels, wind turbines, battery technologies, and electric vehicles are therefore not merely ecological measures. They are the fastest route toward greater energy autonomy. With every additional megawatt of electricity produced at home, the geopolitical blackmail that comes from the sea is reduced.

Once the larger picture is framed in this way — maritime dominance on one side and geoeconomic expansion designed to bypass it on the other — it becomes clear that the center of

gravity of the global confrontation falls upon those states that physically connect these two worlds. These are states that are neither American protectorates nor Chinese satellites, but autonomous nodes of power. They are the so-called global swing states. In this new grammar of world politics, where geography is once again read as political destiny, two actors stand out because of their specific weight and their diametrically opposed strategies: Turkey and Iran.



### Turkey: A Geopolitical Tollgate and Strategic Multivectorism

If balancing states are among the most characteristic actors of the new global order, then Turkey is perhaps their most illustrative form. It is not merely a middle power tactically maneuvering among greater powers. It is a state that inhabits several “geopolitical worlds” at once — and it derives its greatest bargaining advantage precisely from the fragmentation of the international order.

In Turkey’s case, geography is not the background of politics; it is politics’ primary and enduring logic. Few states are located at such a dense point of contact between different security spaces. For Ankara, control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, its position between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, and its proximity to the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East are not merely geographical facts. They constitute a geopolitical border crossing for numerous states, regions, and interests.

Turkey therefore positions itself as a kind of geopolitical tollgate, charging for its indispensability to multiple worlds at once. This position produces a distinct type of state self-awareness: Turkey is not only a territory to be defended, but also a passage to be controlled. Its power lies precisely in its ability to condition the power projection of others. This can be seen in

the EU–Turkey relationship on migration policy, as well as in the status and strategic potential of U.S. military installations on Turkish territory.

This self-awareness has generated a tectonic shift in Turkish national strategy. During the Cold War, Turkey was primarily understood as the southern flank of the West — a disciplined geographic pillar whose role was to limit Soviet projection toward warm seas. The multipolar moment, however, has transformed that consciousness. Turkey no longer accepts the role of a peripheral line in someone else’s strategy; it claims the status of a central state.

Today, Turkey is a balancing state of exceptional importance, an actor practicing strategic multivectorism. It remains within NATO while simultaneously purchasing large quantities of Russian energy and maintaining pragmatic relations with Moscow. It also carefully monitors China’s geoeconomic rise, while refusing exclusive strategic subordination to any single center of power. Its affiliation with Western alliances is therefore less a matter of value-based discipline than an instrument of strategic advantage.

Military production offers a particularly clear example. The Turkish defense industry could not have become as advanced or as expansive without critical components and technologies obtained from the West. Yet Turkey increasingly uses that technological base to expand its own room for maneuver rather than to deepen dependency.

Unlike many other middle powers that build their autonomy almost exclusively on diplomatic rhetoric, Turkey’s ambition rests on a serious material foundation. This autonomy is protected by hard power: the second-largest army in NATO, an increasingly assertive domestic defense industry, and a military presence that directly projects influence in Qatar, Libya, and Somalia. At the same time, its reach is calibrated through soft power — through cultural, educational, and developmental penetration in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Africa.

This dual architecture enables Turkey to be more than a factor that appears at the height of crises. It is an actor that shapes conditions on the ground and remains deeply embedded after crises subside.

A sober geopolitical reading of Turkey must, however, also register its limitations. Geopolitical autonomy is an expensive project, and in the Turkish case it is often paid for through domestic economic vulnerability. Serious economic pressures, monetary turbulence, and deep internal polarization are harsh reminders that balancing states may profit from the fragmentation of the world, but they are also exposed to its shocks.

Turkey is therefore an exceptionally influential, but not omnipotent, example of the new era: confident enough to exploit the cracks in the order, yet constantly at risk of overstretching its own ambition.

## **Iran: The Impenetrable Fortress**

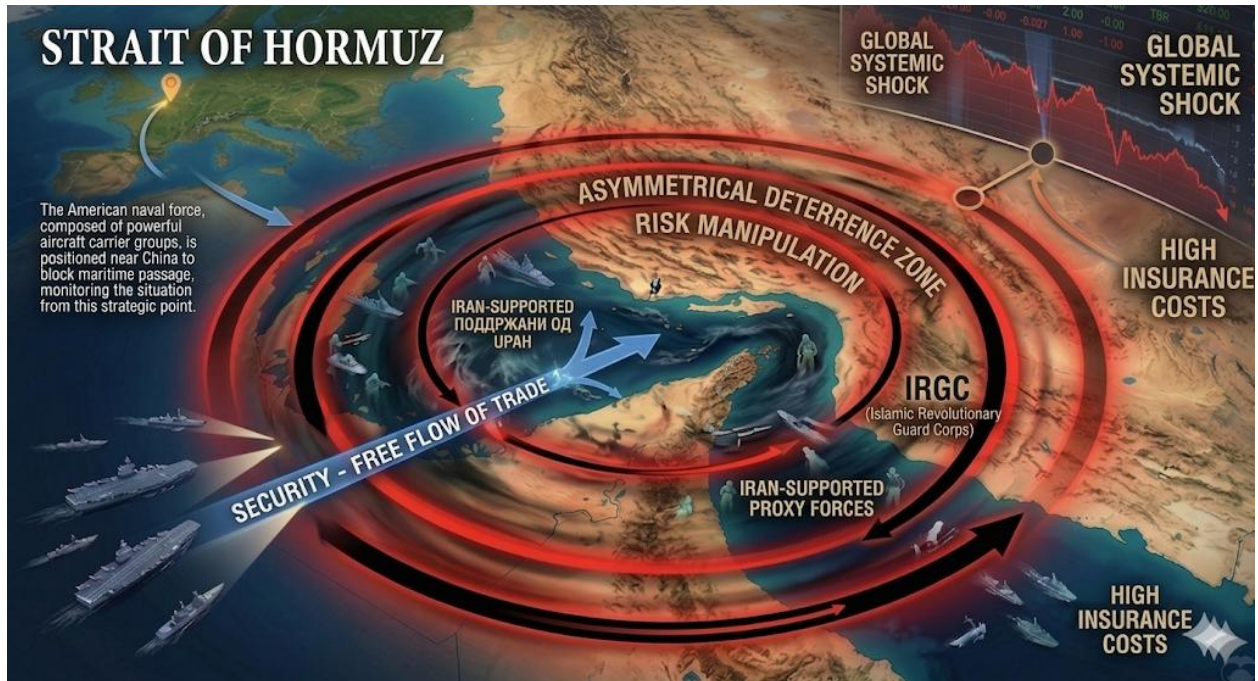
If Turkey represents the balancing state that uses geography to open corridors and expand its own room for maneuver, Iran represents an equally important but diametrically opposite logic: a state that turns geography into an impenetrable fortress. Its strategic weight derives not only from its demographic size or energy capacity, but from the fact that it lies at the crossroads of the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Basin, the Caucasus, and the routes toward South and Central Asia.

In that sense, Iran has long ceased to be merely a Middle Eastern actor. It is a true land-and-sea node of Eurasia, which explains the persistence with which great powers have sought either to win it over or to suffocate it completely.

Unlike states that survive through openness, the Iranian state has historically endured through closure. Its topography — vast mountain ranges and a difficult interior marked by deserts and harsh conditions — gives it a distinctive form of strategic endurance. Iran is not an open plain that can be conquered quickly; it is a system that has learned to absorb coercion and transform it into long-term resilience. Tehran therefore does not see itself as a marginal player in orders designed by others, but as a civilizational constant with a natural right to its own security space.

The most obvious expression of Iran's geographic advantage is the Strait of Hormuz. A vast share of global oil and liquefied natural gas flows through this maritime artery. Yet the essence of Iranian power does not lie in the physical closure of the strait, but in the manipulation of risk. It is enough for Hormuz merely to become contested for a systemic shock to be generated across global markets.

By turning the approaches to Hormuz into a zone of permanent uncertainty, Iran raises insurance costs, increases the price of risk, and can paralyze energy markets without necessarily firing the first shot. This is geography converted into global leverage: even when Iran cannot fully control the game, it can make the game unbearably expensive for everyone else.



For years, this logic of pressure was complemented by a network of asymmetric deterrence. Through partners and proxy actors in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, Iran created strategic depth and a doctrine of “forward defense” — managing conflict as far away from its own territory as possible. While classical armies fight for the control of territory, the Iranian network fought for the control of chaos.

However, the dynamics after 2024 have shown that this model is reaching its limits, forcing Iran increasingly to step out of the shadow of proxy warfare and risk more direct forms of confrontation.

Aware of these constraints, and of the pressure created by Western sanctions, Iran has made a strategic pivot toward Eurasia. Its accession to BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is not merely symbolic. It represents an attempt at civilizational and economic reintegration outside the Western framework.

Projects such as the International North–South Transport Corridor are part of Iran’s effort to become an indispensable logistical bridge between Russia and India, as well as an energy bulwark feeding Chinese industry. In this way, any future attempt to isolate Iran would become impossible without imposing serious geoeconomic costs on Beijing and Moscow as well.

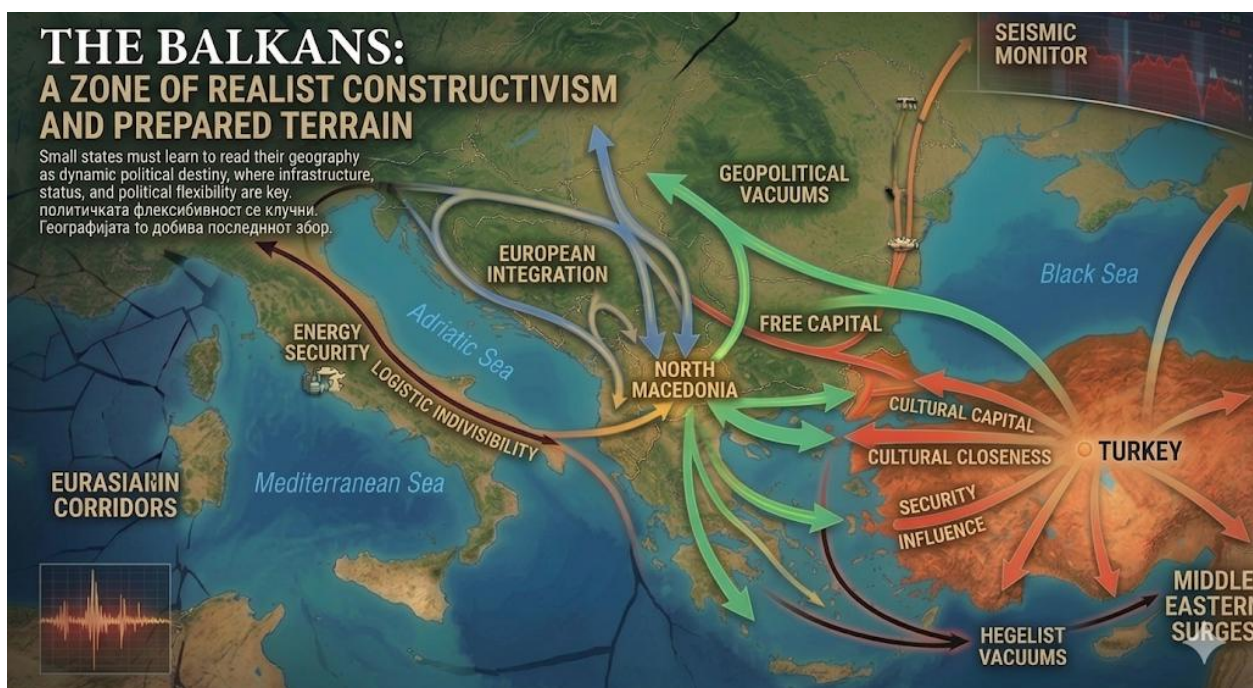
Yet herein lies the key paradox of Iran’s position. The more Tehran uses its geography, straits, and non-Western formats to increase its resilience, the more firmly its rivals come to perceive it as a fortress that must be broken before it becomes too powerful.

This is the classic security dilemma: the success of Iranian deterrence creates an incentive for even stronger containment. Iran today is therefore a besieged fortress — a state that draws

strength from surviving under pressure, but precisely because of that strength continually generates new circles of siege around itself.

## The Realist Constructivism of the New Order and the Lesson for the Balkans

If Turkey is an example of a state that uses geography to open multiple vectors of action and monetizes its indispensability through connectivity, Iran is the paradigm of a state that uses geography as a fortress, asserting its importance through its capacity for disruption. One is a corridor and a negotiator; the other is a node and a bulwark. Yet however different their strategies may be, both powers send the same message: the world can no longer be understood through the old two-color maps of formal Cold War alliances.



This emerging architecture of international relations requires the abandonment of outdated analytical templates. In a multipolar world, where material capacities, critical resources, and deeply rooted perceptions of national insecurity intertwine, a form of “realist constructivism” comes to the fore.

States no longer build their behavior solely around abstract value blocs. Their strategic identities are constructed around far more tangible variables: control over energy corridors, logistical chokepoints, transport routes, and, above all, the balancing of threats. In this new order, the winner is not always the actor with the highest gross domestic product, but the one capable of turning an intermediate position — or even a vulnerability — into a strategic asset.

For great powers such as the United States and China, this means that the struggle for global dominance will not be waged only through aircraft carriers, tariff wars, or technological

competition. It will also be waged through the effort to win over, neutralize, or contain geographic nodes. For small states, especially those located in historically volatile regions, the lesson is much harsher and more direct.

The world is entering a phase in which strategic chokepoints and land routes are once again becoming among the most valuable currencies in international politics. This means that small states, too, must learn to reread their own geography — not as a static classroom map, but as a dynamic political destiny.

For the Balkans, and particularly for North Macedonia, this new grammar of power carries serious warnings. The region must not delude itself that it can live in some form of sterile European isolation. Nor can it afford to allow geopolitical vacuums to be filled spontaneously and without strategy. While European integration often moves at an indecisive pace, actors such as Turkey demonstrate their ability to enter these gaps quickly, pragmatically, and consistently — bringing with them mobile capital, cultural proximity, and security influence.

At the same time, the wider shockwaves from the Middle East and the Eurasian corridors inevitably reach the Balkan space, reminding us that energy security and logistical security are indivisible.

A sober reading of this new multipolar world requires small states to stop basing their foreign policy on romanticism or automatic fear. What is needed is a fundamental understanding of the balance of threats. The future order will not be managed only by classical hegemons, but by a complex network of mobile nodes in which infrastructure, status, and political flexibility will be of primary importance.

Iran and Turkey may be among the clearest symptoms of this new world, but they are only the beginning of a broader transformation in which geography, for the umpteenth time in history, has the final word.