

Globalizations: The Shape of Things to Come

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Abstract

This article summarises key arguments from *Globalizations: The Shape of Things to Come* (2025), a collection of essays that examines the forces that are shaping world politics in the early 21st century. The book's main concern is the determination and openness of global history, as well as the potential for collective learning and institutional transformation. The article highlights three major areas of analysis: the political economy of global developments and crises; the securitisation of international relations, with a focus on the war in Ukraine; and the prospects for more democratic global governance. Rather than offering predictions, the book is grounded in ontological realism and reflexive anticipation. From this perspective, it explores how interpretations, actions, and normative commitments also shape global futures. By synthesising insights across disciplinary boundaries, the article and book contribute to ongoing debates about the global political economy, security, and the political imagination necessary for creating a more sustainable, inclusive world system than the current one.

Keywords

globalisation, global political economy, securitisation, reflexivity, global governance, emancipatory futures

Introduction

In this article, I offer a summary of my recent book, *Globalizations: The Shape of Things to Come* (Patomäki, 2025), which brings together a selection of my scholarly work published between 2005 and 2024. The book explores the dynamics of global historical change through three central themes: the return of war and questions of global security; the structural transformations and crises of political economy; and normative political theory concerning justice, democracy, and global agency. The aim is to understand how past and present developments shape the range of possible futures — and how anticipatory practices, learning, and reflexivity can alter those futures. Drawing on a critical realist perspective, I argue that social systems are open and historically contingent, and that the interplay between structure and agency

allows for meaningful political change. This article outlines the key arguments of the book and reflects on how they may help us navigate the turbulent global transformations of the 2020s and 2030s.

Methodology

The methodology of this study is grounded in critical realism and the notion of open social systems, emphasising the interplay between structural conditions, agency, and reflexivity. Rather than predictive modelling, the approach employs reflexive anticipation, combining mechanism-based explanations with an exploration of potential trajectories under conditions of uncertainty. Historical-comparative analysis and process tracing are applied to case studies such as the war in Ukraine and the Helsinki process/OSCE, with a particular focus on mechanisms of securitisation and escalation. In the domain of political economy, the research adopts interdisciplinary triangulation, drawing on post-Keynesian, Minskyan, and Marxian perspectives to analyse stagnation, inequality, and financial instability.

Scenario analysis is used to map a range of plausible and undesirable futures, acknowledging the performative nature of economic theories and the absence of event regularities. Counterfactual reasoning is further employed to test alternative developmental pathways and to assess conditions under which escalation might have been avoided. This methodology thereby integrates theoretical, historical, and empirical dimensions in order to generate robust anticipations of global political and economic transformations.

Results and Discussion

The Dynamics of World Politics in Three Parts

The ancient Greek word *dúnamis* means “power” and *dunamikós* “powerful”. In the modern sense, the term was introduced by German mathematician and philosopher Gottfried Leibnitz (1646–1716) in the 1690s, emphasising the fundamental role of force, motion, activity, and intrinsic principles in the behaviour of entities (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2024; McDonough, 2021). In English, the term became common in the 19th century and popular in the 20th century. With the development of natural sciences, scientific realism became increasingly dominant. Methodologically, my approach to the dynamics of world politics is based on critical realism, which is a synthesis of critical theories and scientific realism (see Bhaskar 2009).

The collection of articles, originally published between 2005 and 2024, aims to shed light on whether we have learned anything since the early 2000s, or can learn, about the dynamics of world politics and the drivers of global history. What is the role of political economy, political ideologies, or war and peace? Based on two decades of explorations and what we may have learned, is there anything we can say about the shape of things to come, the probability of different possibilities, and the reflexivity of such anticipations?

The first section of the book deals with the current state of global (in) security and especially the return of war to Europe, close to the traditional core areas of the world economy (“Part I: War and peace: the cases of Ukraine and the OSCE”). It is structured around three main themes: war and peace, focusing on the case of Ukraine and the OSCE; political economy and the drivers of historical change; and political theory, including justice, democracy, and global agency and institutions. The book stresses future orientation, emphasising how past and present developments influence possible futures and the role of learning in shaping those futures. A central theme throughout is reflexivity — the idea that human actions and interpretations shape history in open systems characterised by uncertainty.

The discussions of the first part (the first two of them with Tuomas Forsberg) are future-oriented. Adopting a global perspective, the first two papers focus on the possible and likely consequences of the war and ways the war could come to an end. The third article of Part I deals with the Helsinki process and its lessons. Although history never repeats itself as such, I argue that some of the lessons and OSCE conceptions are applicable in the 2020s and 2030s — and not only in Europe but also in East Asia. Profound reforms and changes take time. Under the circumstances of the 2020s, it would be important to buy time for real changes with dialogue, confidence-building measures, de-escalation, and various concessions.

The second part goes deeper into the analysis of the driving forces and dynamics of global history. It consists of five articles, the first three of which deal with the slowdown in growth and economic crises in recent decades and their potential and actual consequences, also in terms of war and peace. The remaining two papers reflect upon some of the methodological and theoretical problems of identifying and explaining the drivers of global history. The underlying premise of all these articles is that social systems are open, and thus history must always remain open as well. Is it possible nonetheless to find some recurring patterns and relatively enduring, transfactually efficacious social or political economy mechanisms?

My answer is a cautious yes. I employ claims about such patterns and mechanisms in my explanations and anticipations. Yet, Part II also shows the sometimes dramatic effects of openness and reflexivity, as well as those of epistemological relativism. Neoclassical economics is more performative than explanatory. The Minskyan financial instability hypothesis does not provide any simple predictions. Post-Keynesian and other claims about trends in the world economy or upward and downward waves are theory-laden and contested. Unexpected events (e.g. COVID-19), learning, and reflexive responses can intervene and prevent the realisation of an outcome expected on the basis of a well-established recurring pattern. The Marxian theory — while useful for some purposes — does not fare any better. For example, most versions of the labour theory of value fail, and thus Marxian anticipations based on the alleged tendency for the rate of profit to fall fail as well.

The third part of the book deals with world political theory: global justice and democracy, civil society and the world party, and the future of the university. It starts from the basics of value theory, namely the meaning of justice and how it is based on the metaphor of moral accounting and the notion of abstract value, in a manner that connects it directly with the last article of Part II. The basic thrust is to move toward a dialogical, pluralist, and democratic — yet epistemologically critical — account of normative theory and practice. I argue that emancipation from unnecessary, unneeded and unwanted sources of determination requires global transformative agency and planetary visions about alternatives.

Part I: War and Peace: The Cases of Ukraine and the OSCE

The analysis of war and peace is particularly crucial in understanding the effects of the globalisation processes of the past few decades. Hence, the war in Ukraine is examined not just as a regional conflict but as part of much broader global dynamics. The Ukraine section of this book consists of two papers with Tuomas Forsberg. The first is a co-written introduction to the special forum in issue 7/2023 of the journal *Globalizations*, and the second, in the same forum, continues the dialogue of the book *Debating the War in Ukraine* (Forsberg & Patomäki, 2023). In our further dialogue, we focus quite a lot on the methodology of futures studies.

Forsberg points out that he has correctly predicted a protracted war leading to a stalemate, whereas I stress that futures studies are not about prediction, but reflexive anticipation. Anticipations can fail in two ways: they may get the principal structures, powers, mechanisms, and processes wrong, or they may fail to harness resources and activities in trying to avoid an undesirable outcome, or in trying to realise a more desirable one. We need to take reflexivity into account also in terms of our background assumptions. Our normative and

theoretical commitments are closely related to how we assess counterfactuals and anticipate possible and likely futures. If the starting point is that justice should not be compromised, and if justice means that Russia must withdraw from all Ukrainian territories and be punished for its criminal wrongdoings, then the only options are (i) to defeat Russia by military means or (ii) a drastic (and probably unconstitutional) regime change inside Russia. Given the asymmetric resources of Russia and Ukraine, the West's limited capacity for supporting Ukraine, Russia's nuclear weapons, and the resilience and apparent though possibly deceptive popularity of Putin's regime, both seem unlikely. The "prediction" of protracted war leading to a stalemate follows from these background assumptions and is thus, from a NATO/Western viewpoint, a self-fulfilling prophecy. The situation also has a built-in tendency towards further conflict escalation.

From a global perspective, the war in Ukraine is not the only important conflict. Despite the 20-year history of gradually deteriorating relations with Russia, in the US, it is China that is seen as the main adversary and primary threat. In East Asia, there are other interwoven conflicts concerning historical memory, parts and aspects of the South China Sea, the endlessly continuing yet frozen Korean War, and nuclear weapons. In the book, China-US relations are discussed in terms of systemic imbalances. Another key security complex concerns the Middle East, which in the book is discussed briefly in terms of colonial history, declining rates of growth and rising inequalities, and the war in Iraq, which was a turning point in the dynamics of world politics. The approach of the articles in this book, and my research in general, is to try to understand the political economy processes and mechanisms that trigger or reinforce processes of securitisation and tend to generate military confrontations.

Another key point is to see how these various conflicts are interconnected not only through common or related causes but also directly. This is obvious, for instance, when one considers the actual or potential role of countries such as Brazil, China, India or Turkey in the war between Russia and Ukraine, as the special issue 7/2023 of the journal *Globalizations* does. For example, Feng Zhang (2023) argues that it is unlikely that China could have realistically changed Putin's or his inner circle's mind about the war in 2022, since any plausible counterfactual would depend on the (in that context) improbable condition of good Sino-American relations.

In the final paper of Part 1, "The Relevance of the Helsinki Process and the Charter of Paris for Future Security Policies and Institutions," I suggest, among other things, that the OSCE documents do not appear to grant an absolute right to ally militarily or, for that matter, to enlarge NATO. Instead, these documents underscore the importance of collective and cooperative security involving disarmament, which can be interpreted in a minimalistic manner consistent with the standard liberal no-harm principle (derived from John Stuart Mill). The expansion of NATO towards Russia's borders and the related shifts in terms of relative power may be perceived as causing harm in a situation where it was clearly understood that Russia would not be joining NATO, where nuclear deterrence between the US and Russia continued to define their relationship, and where trust between Russia and NATO/the US had begun to erode. It is important to acknowledge the potential negative impact that NATO expansion might have had on these relationships, particularly in successive situations where there has been a notable increase in rivalry, and then enmity, over time.

Further, I argue that anticipations of Russia as a potential enemy by new NATO members have had constitutive effects on the formation of relations between Russia and the West (cf. Guzzini, 2012). The process has involved an effect of negative "altercasting" (which may be unintended rather than purposeful). Altercasting works through persuading the other by positioning the other in a particular way in relation to oneself and by proposing a particular relationship so that the other will be inclined to act per that positioning. Anticipations are

subject to contradictory and complementary determinations, while in this case, it seems likely that the net result has been a self-fulfilling tendency, even though in the 1990s and 2000s, NATO attempted to strike a compromise between admitting new members and co-operating with Russia in various ways. The irony is that after the 2022 invasion, the negative expectations widely shared in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War era, appear to stand vindicated.

The further the mutual collapse of trust goes, the more one begins to believe that the other's behaviour can be modified by force and deterrence only. This is the essence of deterrence theory, and it was also the basis of Putin's coercive diplomacy in 2021. However, as I point out in chapter 3, citing Robert Jervis (1976) and Richard Ned Lebow (2020), in many crises since the 20th century, deterrence has not only failed to prevent the threat but has also often contributed to provoking the very behaviour it was intended to prevent. In some other contexts, deterrence appears to have been irrelevant. Only rarely, it seems to have worked in the intended way. In open systems, however, it is not possible to rely on any simple event regularities.

The alternative spiral model of escalation seems better grounded in general, but there is no guarantee that the outcome follows any well-defined regularities, whether deterministic or probabilistic. While the spiral model indicates that it is usually reasonable to strive for dialogue, make concessions, and be ready for compromises, the problem, according to Jervis, is that in some cases, relevant (historically constructed) actors may see efforts to conduct dialogue and make compromises as a sign of weakness. Systems are open, and the future is uncertain. The same available evidence can be interpreted in many different ways, while typically amid a major conflict, much haziness, confusion, and uncertainty surround the available evidence. This does not mean that all interpretations are equally plausible or that no rational judgements can be made. However, as there are no event regularities in the world, there can never be complete certainty, and trust-building takes time.

The Helsinki Final Act was signed in the summer of 1975. In the final paper of Part I, I contend that a key historical lesson of the Helsinki process is that it provided time for other changes to take place. For humanity to survive the current historical phase as well, a process involving elements similar to those that comprised détente and the Helsinki process is urgently needed, from dialogue and confidence-building measures to de-escalation of the war in Ukraine and mutual concessions. Many of the most important reforms in the 2020s and 2030s concern the governance of the world economy, technological developments, and ecological problems (see Patomäki, 2023). Interconnected and overlapping transformations in terms of functional governance systems can contribute to transforming the overall context, thus enabling the establishment of fundamentally new norms and principles, not least regarding the control of weapons of mass destruction (ch 6). The future of humanity depends on our ability to learn (also from history) and build common institutions on a sustainable and legitimate basis.

Part II: Political Economy

What are the fundamental forces, intrinsic principles of entities, activities, and changes that have driven world history during the past decades and continue to do so in the 2020s and 2030s? Despite a long and rich International Relations tradition of studying both the political economy conditions of war, peace and security and the impact of security concerns and war on economic developments (for a summary, Patomäki, 2016), the late 20th and early 21st-century academic division of labour and fragmentation encourage seeing society in terms of disjointed sectors such as economy and security, with only limited overlap.

My research has gone against the prevailing trend. As a general rule, when we seek to explain a phenomenon related to war and peace or security (contrastive semi-regularity, episode, process, or outcome), especially in the modern industrial world, the forces and mechanisms of political economy are involved in many ways in the processual causal complex that can explain that phenomenon. The field of state reason and interstate relations is in no way reducible to political economy, and the overall movement of world history involves also other processes such as collective learning, but the world is not divided into separate sectors either. Put simply, political economy should not be seen as a separate, self-contained field that occasionally interacts with other areas; instead, it is a central part of the broader dynamics of global history, and any meaningful analysis must bring this role clearly into focus.

By 2003–4, I was increasingly aware of the neoconservative turn in world history and felt that this called for a realism-informed systematic analysis of its likely consequences. So, I began to develop systematic global scenarios from a critical-realist political economy point of view on the premise that we need some insight into possible and likely futures, not only desirable futures. One of the initial outcomes of that work was the first paper of Part II, “The Long Downward Wave of the World Economy and the Future of Global Conflict”, originally published in 2005. The basic observation is that while globalisation as a political project rests on claims that liberalisation and economic interdependence are conducive to peace and prosperity, in fact, more “globalisation” seems to have meant less economic growth and more inequalities. Based on a variety of sources noting a declining trend in rates of growth and a rising trend for inequalities, I wrote that “[t]he world economic growth has steadily slowed down, probably drastically, and that inequalities have been on the rise — and in many contexts quite dramatically so — since the 1970s”. The argument was a bit too straightforward and crude, especially as I also claimed that “in the early twenty-first century, the world economy is vacillating between zero per capita growth and deepening deflation and recession. Many signs point towards the latter.” Zero per capita growth was an exaggeration and, also, the argument did not take into account the acceleration of exponential growth, which implies that absolute growth can remain roughly constant even when the rates of growth are declining. However, the main focus on slowing growth, especially in the traditional core areas of the global economy, was right, as were the observations on the rapid increase in inequality. Such developments have consequences.

In short, in “The Long Downward Wave”, I suggested that the world may have been set onto a path towards a new major catastrophe that might even resemble WWI. The process involves pathological learning and is characterised by attempts to create or maintain imperial preferences or something analogical (concerning e.g. the position of the US dollar in the world economy), in a world-political context where unilateralism and resort to force prevail (often sustained by double standards). In 2005, I suggested that apart from various violent conflicts in the global South, it is possible that the logic of violence and war returns also to the core areas of the world economy, suspecting that the liberal dream of eternal peace will collapse once again (this point was developed more systematically in a book a couple of years later; Patomäki, 2008). Usually, I did not specifically focus on Russia, although I did note (i) the impact of the Asian crisis of 1997–98 on Russia, and (ii) that the fastest-ever recorded changes in income inequality took place in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (including the former Soviet states in Central Asia) in the 1990s. In retrospect, there was some degree of inconsistency with the arguments I made, and this pertains especially to the role of Russia in future conflicts. In some of my works, I warned about the escalation of the conflict between Russia and the West, but in my main global scenarios of the mid-to-late 2000s, Russia usually played only a secondary role. This could have been influenced not only by the lack of space and the complexity of the whole but also by the fact that Russia’s phase of politico-economic chaos and weakness only ended around 2003–7.

In general, the second part on political economy delves into the structural forces shaping global history, particularly economic trends, tendencies, and crises. I critique the dominant neoliberal framework, arguing that economic stagnation, rising inequalities, and financial instability are not anomalies but symptoms of deeper systemic issues. The articles of Part II draw on multiple economic theories, including post-Keynesian, Marxian, and Minskian perspectives, to analyse how crises emerge and evolve. My argument is that economic downturns, financial instability, and geopolitical conflicts are interconnected, creating cycles of growth and decline that shape globalisation in complex ways. Reflexivity plays a crucial role here, as economic actors — governments, corporations, and individuals — respond to anticipated development, influencing the trajectory of the global economy (for two different takes on reflexivity, see Soros, 2013; Lawson, 2013). The financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath — especially the Eurocrisis, which also affected Ukraine and contributed to what happened in 2013-14 (see Patomäki, 2018, chapter 3) — serve as a key case study, demonstrating how economic policies and financial structures interact to produce systemic vulnerabilities. The book also examines the COVID-19 pandemic as an economic crisis, showing how global interdependencies shaped the responses and consequences of the crisis.

The analysis emphasises that economic transformations are not merely technical but involve ideological struggles and policy choices that shape the future. The book also discusses possible scenarios for the 2020s and 2030s. It warns of the risks of repeating past mistakes — not only excessive reliance on financial markets and austerity policies but also policies that generate tit-for-tat responses and security dilemmas — and advocates for global Keynesian reforms to ensure sustainable and equitable economic growth. The book considers alternative political-economic possibilities that could address systemic vulnerabilities, including cooperative and solidarity-based economies, and explores the role of global institutions in regulating and taxing economic actors to promote more just and sustainable outcomes.

Part III: Political Theory

The final section addresses normative questions about justice, democracy, and the role of civil society in shaping global governance. It critiques existing models of global governance that prioritise market efficiency over democratic accountability and social justice. The book proposes alternative frameworks based on democracy and global political cooperation. One of the central arguments is that justice is historically and metaphorically constructed (about the latter, see Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, ch 14), and the sense of justice tends to be shaped by economic and political structures. Many of our deep moral disagreements arise from conflicts between two or more of these models of justice (also, application requires interpretation; a classic in this regard is Perelman, 1963). My analysis of global justice theories highlights how different models of fairness — whether liberal, Marxian, or social democratic — can be assessed. I develop an argument in favour of the relative priority of democracy over justice. This implies, however, a commitment to transform the structure of global institutions and the characters and powers of actors to reduce powerlessness and vulnerability. In other words, the recognition of the relativist nature of struggles between models and sentiments of justice gives rise to a quest to democratise systems of global governance.

In the book, I also critically discuss Samir Amin's (2007) idea of the fourth international and suggest instead the idea of a global political party as a transformative force capable of reshaping global governance. Drawing on historical examples of transnational movements and parties, I examine the potential for democratic and pluralist global institutions in terms of rational economic policy, social justice, sustainability, and peace. These discussions highlight the limitations of existing institutions such as the United

Nations (UN), however important they may be in the current context where disintegrative tendencies and conflicts prevail and meaningful reforms are difficult to achieve (for an argument of the continued relevance of the UN despite its problems, Kanninen and Patomäki, forthcoming). The role of civil society movements is examined as both an opportunity and a limitation, as grassroots activism can push for change but often lacks the institutional mechanisms to implement systemic reforms. The book suggests that global governance should assume new functions and powers, and accordingly, it must evolve to accommodate new forms of democratic participation and accountability, recognising the interconnected nature of global risks. While humanity's existential risks can be resolved, history is always open, and no solution is final.

The discussion in the final chapter on the future of universities is equally relevant in the context of globalisation, as knowledge production and dissemination play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and policy decisions (cf. the epistemic communities perspective of Haas, 1992). A key critical point is that the increasing corporatisation of higher education, which prioritises profitability and market-driven research over critical inquiry and social responsibility, is detrimental to the collective learning of humanity. Thus, I argue for reorienting universities toward their historical mission of fostering independent thought, critical analysis, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The analysis includes proposals for new arrangements of metagovernance (the concept is adopted from Jessop, 2016) that could support a more democratic and inclusive model of organising higher education and research, emphasising the need for academic institutions to engage with global risks and issues in a meaningful way.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout the book, the central themes of globalisation and political economy dynamics guide my analysis of the drivers of world history. By critically examining past and present developments, we can anticipate and shape alternative futures. The point is, however, that history is not deterministic; it is shaped by human agency, learning, and institutional structures.

The book calls for a shift in perspective through the concept of reflexivity — from passive observation to active engagement in shaping the future. In the book, I highlight time and again the role of intellectuals, policymakers, and civil society in envisioning and realising alternative possibilities for global politics and the world economy. By understanding the dynamics of history through a reflexive lens, we can work towards emancipatory global futures even under the current circumstances that appear to foreshadow a global catastrophe. The shape of things to come is not fully determined yet but depends on collective choices, institutional arrangements, and the capacity for critical learning and transformation.

The chapters in this book, except for chapters 3 and 6, were originally published in the journal *Globalizations*. Previously, chapter 3 was available only in Japan and chapter 6 in Finnish. The book comes with a new introduction (the next-to-final version is available [here](#)), which develops some of the themes of this paper further. Despite its nature as a collection, I hope and believe that the book as a whole is much more than the sum of its parts.

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