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Is history repeating itself under the idea of "peace through strength"?



Last week's two major international events seemed (at least, at first glance) to echo the tensions of a bygone era.

China **hosted** a grand military parade in Beijing to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. Russia, **represented** by Vladimir Putin himself, was a major guest.

Subsequently, European nations **held** a "Coalition of the Willing" summit in Paris, focused on supporting Ukraine's defence against Russia.

These events resonate in a major way with the history of the last century, prompting some to draw parallels with the prelude of a new global conflict.

Images are being conjured of the Allied and Axis Powers facing each other in total war eight decades ago. People are asking themselves if they are witnessing a repetition of history at its most awful, with global peace teetering on the brink.

Despite the gravity of these moments, I'm feeling a heavy dose of scepticism towards such fears. The fundamentals of contemporary geopolitics, while fraught, are quite different from the 1930s and 40s. A closer look at the events in question reveals why.

A spectacle of military might

The Beijing parade on September 3, 2025, was a spectacle of military might, with Chinese President Xi Jinping presiding over a display of advanced weaponry and disciplined formations.

Joined by leaders from major non-Western nations, such as India's Narendra Modi and Russia's Vladimir Putin (as well as rogue regimes – such as North Korea's Kim Jong-un), Xi used the occasion to project China's growing influence.

"The victory in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression demonstrated the unyielding spirit of the Chinese people and our

commitment to peace through strength," he **declared**.

The "peace through strength" part immediately resonated with any seasoned observer of the Russian-Ukrainian War. Formulated literally in the same words, this idea is the key pillar in Ukraine's current **roadmap** to "just peace".

The absence of most Western leaders, who boycotted the event due to geopolitical tensions, underscored the divide between East and West

Volodymyr Zelenskyy **made** this "peace through strength" formula his major vision of achieving peace between Russia and Ukraine.

But what Ukraine's leader meant was the intention to unite the West in the efforts to limit the ability of Russia to conduct its aggression.

Obviously, Xi put a different meaning in these words, touting the strength of China and its allies, rather than the West.

This rhetoric, while celebratory, carried an undertone of defiance, especially as Putin, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Xi, **used** the platform to deflect blame for the war against Ukraine: "The conflict in Ukraine was not sparked by Russia but by Western machinations."

The absence of most Western leaders, who **boycotted** the event due to geopolitical tensions, underscored the divide between East and West – perhaps, at a level unseen since the Cold War.

However, could this parade be less about signalling imminent conflict and more about China flexing its diplomatic and military muscle, reinforcing its role as a counterweight to Western influence?

Upholding the principles of sovereignty and freedom

Meanwhile, in Paris on September 4, the “Coalition of the Willing”—a group of 39 nations **led** by the UK and France—convened to discuss security guarantees for Ukraine amid its ongoing war with Russia.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as a central figure at the summit, **emphasised** the need for robust support, stating, “Peace cannot come without strength, and Ukraine’s strength depends on the unwavering commitment of our allies.”



Supporting Ukraine is not just about defending a nation; it's about upholding the principles of sovereignty and freedom that define our collective security - Mark Rutte

The coalition representatives, with leaders like French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte present, **aimed** to finalise frameworks for long-term military and economic aid to Kyiv.

Rutte, addressing the summit, **underscored** the stakes: “Supporting Ukraine is not just about defending a nation; it’s about upholding the principles of sovereignty and freedom that define our collective security.”

The juxtaposition of these military-diplomatic tour-de-forces from both sides might suggest a world teetering on the edge of global conflict, perhaps a repeat of the pre-WW2 late 1930s. Yet, upon closer inspection, a much more fitting analogy is the more recent Cold War – with a major twist.

Fearing nuclear Armageddon

To the previous era’s nuclear deterrents, which continue to **keep** the major powers from directly engaging each other on the battlefield, the contemporary globalised world adds a bewildering array of economic interdependencies between all the nations of the world.

These interdependencies are so robust that in the fourth year of the war, Ukraine and its EU allies still **buy** Indian fuel refined from Russian oil, while Russian high-tech weapons are still **produced** using smuggled Western components.

Despite being engaged in a deadly fight, the two sides are still co-entwined by the complex modern supply chains, something unthinkable for a total war WW2-era, for example.

More deeply, while the opposing coalitions of today do possess genuine ideological differences, they are smaller and shallower than those between the capitalist and communist camps during the Cold War.

The West and its allies are liberal-democratic and (mostly) committed to upholding human rights. China, Russia and their allies (should we call them “The East”?) tend to be authoritarian (though not necessarily – e.g., India is a major exception) and prioritising political stability over the protection of human rights.

It seems the current Russian-Ukrainian War might go down in history as something similar to the Korean War of the 1950s

These differences in political ideologies are very much reminiscent of the Cold War, but there’s a major twist – both the Western and the “Eastern” camps are capitalist market economies, eager to do business and generate profits.

The communist prohibitions on entrepreneurship and private property, which

made life in the communist camp truly alien compared to the capitalist camp during the Cold War, are long discredited and gone.

It seems the current Russian-Ukrainian War might go down in history as something similar to the Korean War of the 1950s, the first major international conflict of the Cold War.

Korea heralded the start of the new era, where the two camps would try to outmanoeuvre and outperform each other in almost every sphere of human activity but, fearing nuclear Armageddon, do everything they could to avoid direct military engagement.

The similarities have been noted multiple times by many observers, both within Ukraine and foreign. And, while South Korea has suffered immensely during the war, Western support and firm integration into the capitalist camp have allowed it to **develop** from one of the world's poorest nations to a mature industrialised economy, whose technology competes with the West itself on an equal basis.

In an era of global conflict, that's quite an achievement for a nation right in the middle of it. This idea too is not lost on many in Ukraine.