

Strategic Compression as a Catalyst for Hegemonic Wars: Historical Cycles and Contemporary Implications

David Murrin

Founder and CEO, Global Forecaster (United Kingdom)

Email: david@davidmurrin.co.uk

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2195-8274>

Murrin, David (2025) Strategic Compression as a Catalyst for Hegemonic Wars: Historical Cycles and Contemporary Implications. *Ukrainian Policymaker*, Volume 17, 78-90. <https://doi.org/.....>

This article explores strategic compression as a structural catalyst for hegemonic wars. Expansionary momentum – driven by demographic growth, economic vitality, and national cohesion – inevitably collides with systemic resistance from established powers. The resulting compression narrows strategic options, fostering premature aggression at suboptimal moments. Historical case studies, including Revolutionary France, Germany in 1914, Nazi Germany in 1939, and Japan in 1941, illustrate this recurring pattern. The analysis situates compression within Kondratiev Waves and the 108–112-year hegemonic war cycle, highlighting their predictive value. Contemporary application highlights China’s strategic environment and Ukraine’s regional experience, demonstrating the universality of compression dynamics. The article concludes with policy recommendations for Ukraine and Eastern Europe, emphasising resilience, foresight, and cooperative strategies to mitigate systemic pressures.

Keywords: Strategic Compression, Hegemonic War Cycle, Kondratiev Wave, Geopolitics, Expansionary Momentum, China, Ukraine, Global Order

Received: 07 September 2025 / Accepted: 20 December 2025 / Published: 30 December 2025

Introduction

The study of hegemonic wars has long sought to explain why major conflicts erupt at seemingly predictable intervals. Scholar such as Robert Gilpin, in *War and Change in World Politics* (1981), argues that major wars tend to erupt during periods of hegemonic decline, when the costs of sustaining the international order begin to outweigh the benefits for the dominant power, triggering systemic conflict and eventual reordering. George Modelski, in *Long Cycles in World Politics* (1987), similarly conceptualises global politics as operating through long cycles

© Murrin, David, 2025.

of roughly 80–120 years, with hegemonic wars serving as the decisive transitions between successive leading powers. Immanuel Wallerstein, in *The Modern World-System* (1974), places major conflicts within deeper structural crises of the capitalist world-system, in which economic, political, and military power realign during periods of systemic downturn. Taken together, these scholars emphasise that recurring cycles of power transition and global restructuring do not make war inevitable, but repeatedly increase the likelihood of major systemic conflict.

David Murrin's concept of *strategic compression based on* (*Breaking the Code of History*, 2010; *Five Phase Life Cycle of Empires*, 2016) and his more recent study of Hegemonic war cycles every 108-112 years, adds a critical dimension to this literature: that wars are not necessarily launched at the peak of strength of the hegemonic challenger but at moments when rising powers perceive that their strategic window of strategic capability advantage is closing.

Eastern European scholarship has contributed significantly to the study of cyclical geopolitics and systemic wars. Ukrainian analysts such as Yurii Pavlenko (*n.d.*) and Mykola Riabchuk (2019) have examined how empires expand and contract, often producing compression effects on smaller states caught between great powers. Polish historian Andrzej Chwalba (2014) highlights how the First World War emerged from systemic pressures in Central and Eastern Europe, while Russian economist Nikolai Kondratiev's foundational work on long economic waves (*The Long Waves in Economic Life*, 1935) remains central to understanding 54–56-year cyclical dynamics.

More recently, Ukrainian scholars such as Volodymyr Horbulin (*Ukrainian Front of the Hybrid World*, 2018) and Oleg Rafalskyi (*Civilizational Choice of Ukraine*, 2023) have extended classical theories of hegemonic transition by applying them directly to Ukraine's post-Cold War experience. Their work argues that Ukraine has been structurally "compressed" between competing power systems – caught at the fault line between a declining post-Soviet imperial order and an expanding Euro-Atlantic one. David Murrin, however, would argue that the compression was driven by Chinese expansion, which enabled Putin's regional ambitions. Thus, rather than being a peripheral or accidental battleground, Ukraine is presented as a critical stress point where the systemic contradictions of the international order manifest most violently. Rafalskyi deepens this argument by focusing on Ukraine's *civilizational choice*, contending that Ukraine's efforts to align with Western political, legal, and cultural norms triggered intense counter-pressure from Russia, which perceived this shift as an existential threat to its own hegemonic identity.

From this perspective, Ukraine's security dilemma is not merely territorial but one of a civilizational clash that David Murrin has described as being between the decline of the super Western Christian empire and the Rise of the Asian super empire led by China.

Together, these scholars argue that Ukraine's national security strategy has been shaped less by autonomous policy preference than by relentless systemic external empire driven pressure exerted by rival power blocs. Ukraine's war is thus interpreted not only as a national struggle for sovereignty, but as a revealing case study of how states located at geopolitical fault lines are forced to absorb the shockwaves of global power transitions. In this sense, Ukraine becomes both a victim of, and a window into, the broader dynamics of hegemonic decline, hybrid conflict, and the reordering of the post-Cold War international system.

This article synthesises Murrin's theory with historical evidence and situates it within both Western and Eastern European scholarship. It argues that strategic compression is a recurring structural condition that transforms expansionary intent into breakout wars, often at suboptimal moments, and that understanding this mechanism is essential for policymakers seeking to anticipate systemic risks. For Ukraine and its neighbours, the framework offers a valuable lens

for interpreting the pressures of greatpower rivalry and for designing resilient strategies in an era of renewed global confrontation.

Part 1. The Theory of Strategic Compression

1.1. Expansionary Momentum

Rising empires are propelled outward by internal forces: demographic vitality, economic growth, and national cohesion. These drivers generate what David Murrin terms “antientropic energy” (Murrin, 2010), a surplus of ambition and capacity that seeks release through expansion. Historically, this momentum has manifested in the outward push of empires seeking markets, resources, and influence (Gilpin, 1981). Expansion is thus less a matter of discretionary choice than of structural compulsion.

Ukrainian scholars have noted similar dynamics in Eastern Europe, where demographic surges and economic modernisation repeatedly produced outward pressures on regional states (Pavlenko, n.d.). This perspective underscores that expansionary momentum is not unique to global hegemonies but can also be observed in smaller regional states striving to secure autonomy within contested geopolitical spaces.

1.2. Collision with Established Powers

Expansion inevitably collides with the interests of established states. Defensive coalitions, alliances, and containment strategies emerge to block or slow the challenger’s ascent (Modelski, 1987). This friction produces what Murrin defines as *strategic compression*: the narrowing of military options for expansion as external constraints intensify from Status Quo powers while internal pressures demand outward motion.

Wallerstein’s worldsystems analysis similarly emphasises how core powers resist the ascent of semiperipheral challengers (Wallerstein, 1974). In the Ukrainian context, Riabchuk (2019) has described how smaller states are often compressed between rival empires, their strategic space narrowed by external pressures beyond their control. This demonstrates that compression is not only a phenomenon of great-power rivalry but also a recurring condition for states located at geopolitical fault lines.

1.3. Compression as Catalyst

Strategic compression is not merely inconvenient; it is often decisive. When leaders perceive their options shrinking, they may adopt a “now or never” psychology, launching wars prematurely in the belief that delay will worsen their position (Murrin, 2016). This explains why wars of expansion are frequently initiated at suboptimal moments, surprising observers who expect rising powers to wait until fully prepared.

Horbulin (2018), in *Ukrainian Front of the Hybrid World*, emphasises that Ukraine’s security environment reflects compression dynamics, where narrowing options have historically forced premature strategic decisions. This highlights the universality of compression: whether in global hegemonic struggles or regional contests, the narrowing of strategic space fosters high-risk behaviour.

1.4. Cyclical Context

Compression aligns with broader systemic rhythms. The Kondratiev Wave (K-wave), a 54–56-year economic cycle, has been linked to peaks of inflation, societal friction and conflict (Kondratiev & Stolper, 1935). More profoundly, David Murrin’s 108–112-year hegemonic war

cycle recognizes the regular commencement of hegemonic wars and the subsequent reshaping of the global hierarchy, producing great global wars such as the France-Spanish war, the Napoleonic War, the first world war that then extended to the second World Wars, and the current cycle of the Chinese challenge to the American led world order.

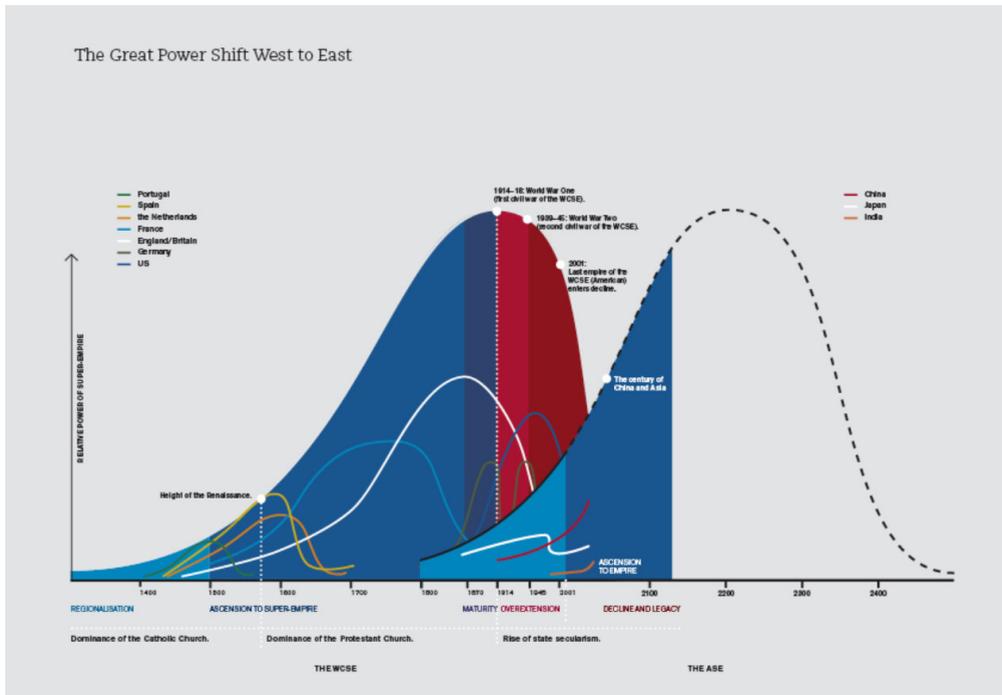
Whilst tectonic forces that precede such great clashes take at least two decades to build, their release into conflict is almost always triggered by strategic compression, accompanied by a *casus belli* – Latin for “case for war” – an act, event, or situation used to justify the initiation of war.

Thus, the phenomenon of Strategic compression operates within predictable temporal structures, offering a framework for forecasting conflict. Ukrainian analysts have increasingly applied cyclical models to understand the recurrence of systemic crises in Eastern Europe (Rafalskyi, 2023). This integration of global and regional perspectives demonstrates that strategic compression manifests as both a universal and a locally experienced phenomenon.

1.5. Empire Cycles and Entropy Pulses

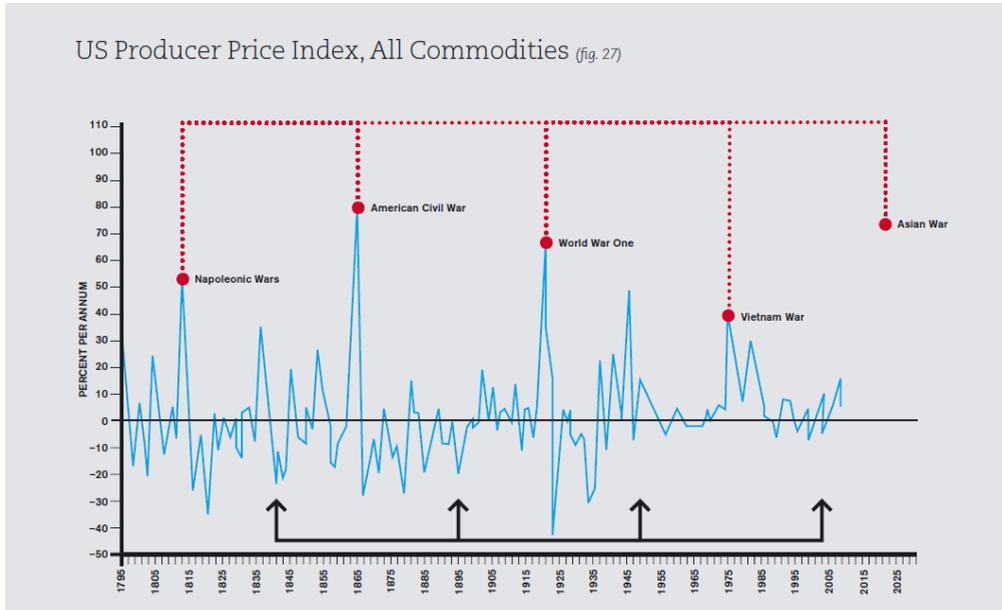
The timing of strategic compression today can be illustrated by two diagrams.

The great power shift from west to east and the Chinese hegemonic challenge



The K-wave cycle and the Asian war (this diagram was made in 2009) have, in the past two decades, predicted the onset of war in 2022. Note the 54–56-year K-wave segments with alternating peaks marked as “Cold War” or “Hegemonic War.” At each peak, compression intensifies, producing either limited confrontation or a fully blown hegemonic war. The larger 108–112-year cycle is shown as a super cycle encompassing two K-waves, marking the recurrence

of hegemonic wars, i.e., the Napoleonic wars and First World War were hegemonic war cycles, and the timing of the American Civil War, which masked the real Cold War of that cycle between Napoleon III and Great Britain. A standoff that peaked with the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. The next lesser cycle was the Cold War, which peaked in 1970 with the Vietnam War.



To make the theory vivid, strategic compression can be illustrated through two metaphors with respect to human systems dynamics:

- **Expansion as release of a buildup of expansive anti-entropic of national Energy:** Expansion resembles a heated kettle building steam. Demographic growth and economic vitality generate pressure inside the system. When the kettle whistles, the energy must escape through outward expansion, often in conflict.
- **Compression as Tectonic Stress:** The forces that drive compression can be likened to tectonic plates pressing against one another. As pressure builds along fault lines, the system appears stable until a sudden rupture occurs. The earthquake represents war: a violent release of accumulated stress.

In effect, as an expansionist empire demonstrates its capacity for military growth, it induces a secondary defensive response from status-quo powers. The old powers then seek to match that military capability in order to maintain deterrence, a process that compresses – and may ultimately narrow – the challenger’s strategic advantage.

Part 2. Historical Case Studies

Strategic compression has repeatedly manifested across history, producing wars that reshaped the global order. The following case studies illustrate how rising or ambitious powers, constrained by external resistance and internal pressures, launched breakout conflicts at suboptimal moments. Each case demonstrates the paradox of compression: leaders sought to escape what they perceived to be containment or even encirclement, yet their gambles often

produced catastrophic unintended consequences. Importantly, each conflict also had profound repercussions for Eastern Europe and Ukraine, underscoring the relevance of compression theory for the region.

2.1. The Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815)

The French Revolution unleashed profound demographic and ideological energy, transforming France into a dynamic expansionary power. Revolutionary France mobilised mass armies through the *levée en masse*, projecting its influence across Europe (Blanning, 1996). Britain, Austria, and Prussia perceived this expansion as a direct threat to their security and balance of power. Strategic compression emerged as France's ambitions collided with coalitions determined to contain its rise. Napoleon's campaigns sought to break out of encirclement and secure continental dominance. Yet Britain's maritime supremacy and financial depth enabled sustained resistance (Kennedy, 1976).

For Eastern Europe, Napoleonic expansion and compression had direct consequences. The Duchy of Warsaw, created under Napoleon's influence, became a focal point of Polish aspirations, while Ukrainian lands under the Russian Empire were drawn into the continental struggle. The mobilisation of resources and manpower from Ukraine and Poland reflected how peripheral regions were compressed between great powers, their strategic space narrowed by external rivalry. Ukrainian historians have noted that Napoleonic campaigns accelerated the integration of Ukrainian territories into imperial military systems, foreshadowing later cycles of compression that would impact the Fortunes of Ukraine (Pavlenko, n.d.).

2.2. The First World War (1914–1918)

Germany's rise in the late nineteenth century was driven by empire expansion that manifested in industrialisation, demographic growth, and military modernisation (Craig, 1978). By 1914, German leaders perceived encirclement by France, Russia, and Britain. Strategic compression intensified as alliances and military planning narrowed Germany's options.

On the eve of the First World War, Imperial Germany was driven toward conflict by intense strategic compression, created by a tightening ring of powerful rivals and the rapid erosion of its strategic advantages. Surrounded by a hostile France, a resurgent Russia and a British Empire dominating the seas and aligning diplomatically against it, Germany felt increasingly encircled and outpaced. The most destabilising factor was France's financing of Russia's new military railways, which slashed Russian mobilisation times from months to mere weeks, collapsing the foundation of the Schlieffen Plan and eliminating Germany's margin of safety in a two-front war. With Russia's demographic and industrial surge promising overwhelming future superiority and Britain blocking Germany's colonial and maritime ambitions, Berlin concluded that its strategic window was closing fast. By 1914, German leaders believed war "now" was safer than war "later," and the July Crisis became the trigger for a preventive strike born not of confidence but of desperation. Strategic compression thus transformed perceived encirclement into urgent action, pushing Germany into a war it believed unavoidable.

The Schlieffen Plan embodied the "now or never" psychology: a preventive strike against France intended to avoid a two-front war (Strachan, 2001) when Russia's rapid mobilisation proved more formidable than expected and thanks to the resistance of Belgium liege fots and the bold little British Expeditionary Force, Germany failed to take Paris. Hence the plan's execution created precisely the two-front struggle Germany feared. A situation that was exacerbated when, unexpectedly, for the Kaiser, Britain entered the war, transforming

a regional conflict into a global one. Compression thus catalysed premature aggression, producing catastrophic consequences for Germany and Europe as a whole.

For Ukraine, the First World War was a moment of profound compression. Ukrainian lands were divided between the AustroHungarian and Russian Empires, both of which mobilised Ukrainian soldiers into their armies. The war's pressures created opportunities for Ukrainian national mobilisation, culminating in the brief independence of the Ukrainian People's Republic in 1917–1921 (Riabchuk, 2019). Yet compression also meant vulnerability: Ukraine became a battleground for competing empires, its strategic space narrowed by external rivalry. The war demonstrated how systemic compression at the global level translated into existential challenges for smaller nations caught between great powers.

2.3. The Second World War (1939–1945)

On the eve of WW2, Germany under Hitler faced acute economic pressures. The Four-Year Plan sought rapid rearmament and resource acquisition, but by 1939 the regime perceived time running out (Tooze, 2006). Strategic compression emerged as Germany confronted encirclement by Britain and France, while fearing Soviet mobilisation. The invasion of Poland was intended as a short, contained conflict to secure more vital resources and stabilise the Reich. Instead, it triggered declarations of war by Britain and France, escalating into global conflict. Germany's attempt to break out of compression produced its destruction, confirming the paradox of premature war under the forces of hegemonic expansionary pressure.

For Ukraine and Eastern Europe, the Second World War was catastrophic. Ukrainian lands became the epicentre of the Nazi–Soviet confrontation following the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Compression manifested in the dual occupation of Ukraine: first by the Soviets in 1939, then by the Nazis in 1941. Millions of Ukrainians were mobilised, displaced, or killed, as the region became the decisive theatre of the war (Snyder, 2010). The compression of Germany's expansionary ambitions as Russia sought to rearm, collided with Soviet defensive resistance, produced devastation across Ukraine. The war reshaped Eastern Europe's geopolitical landscape, embedding Ukraine within the Soviet sphere for decades thereafter.

2.4. Japan and the Pacific War (1941–1945)

Japan's expansion into China and Southeast Asia collided with US containment strategies, including embargoes on oil and raw materials (Iriye, 1987). Strategic compression intensified as Japan's economic survival appeared threatened. The attack on Pearl Harbour represented a breakout attempt: a preemptive strike designed to neutralise US power and secure access to resources. Yet the operation unified American public opinion, unleashed US industrial might, and ensured Japan's defeat (Hastings, 2007). Compression thus transformed Japan's expansionary intent into a gamble that produced catastrophic unintended consequences.

Although the Pacific War was geographically distant, its consequences reverberated in Eastern Europe. The globalisation of the conflict meant that Ukraine, already compressed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, became part of a truly worldwide struggle. The eventual Allied victory, facilitated by US mobilisation against Japan, contributed to the Soviet Union's consolidation of power in Eastern Europe. For Ukraine, this meant incorporation into the postwar Soviet bloc, with compression manifesting in the narrowing of national sovereignty under Cold War bipolarity (Horbulin, 2018). Thus, even distant theatres of war reinforced the systemic compression of Eastern European states.

2.5. Lessons from Historical Compression

Across these cases, several patterns emerge:

- Expansion was driven by internal pressures rather than discretionary choice.
- Compression narrowed options, fostering premature aggression.
- Breakout hegemonic wars were launched at suboptimal moments, surprising observers.
- Outcomes were often catastrophic, producing consequences worse than the scenarios leaders sought to avoid.
- For Ukraine and Eastern Europe, strategic compression dynamics of hegemonic power struggles always translated into regional vulnerability, as smaller states were repeatedly caught between great powers.

These lessons underscore the predictive value of strategic compression as a structural mechanism within hegemonic cycles to predict the timing of great power conflicts (Murrin, 2010; Gilpin, 1981; Pavlenko, n.d.; Riabchuk, 2019).

Part 3. Cyclical Dynamics: K-Waves and the Hegemonic War Cycle

3.1. Kondratiev Waves and Economic Rhythms

The Russian economist Nikolai Kondratiev first articulated the concept of long economic waves in the 1920s, later published in English as *The Long Waves in Economic Life* (Kondratiev & Stolper, 1935). Kondratiev argued that capitalist economies experience cycles of approximately 45–60 years, marked by alternating phases of expansion and stagnation. These “Kwaves” are closely linked to technological innovation, investment cycles, and systemic restructuring.

Although contested in mainstream economics, the theory remains influential in geopolitical analysis, particularly in explaining the timing of major conflicts. David Murrin builds on Kondratiev’s insights, arguing that the peaks of Kwaves coincide with periods of heightened hegemonic friction, producing strategic compression and war (Murrin, 2010). As each wave reaches its apex, demographic, economic, and geopolitical tensions converge, narrowing strategic options and catalysing conflict.

3.2. The 108–112 Year Hegemonic War Cycle

Beyond the shorter K-waves, Murrin identifies a deeper hegemonic war cycle of approximately 108–112 years. This supercycle encompasses two K-waves and culminates in systemic wars that reshape the global hierarchy. Examples include:

- The Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815);
- The First and Second World Wars (1914–1945);
- The emerging SinoWestern confrontation (2022–2032).

These cycles demonstrate that hegemonic wars are not isolated but embedded within longterm structural rhythms (Gilpin, 1981; Modelski, 1987; Wallerstein, 1974). The recurrence of systemic wars at roughly centurylong intervals underscores the predictive value of compression theory when integrated with cyclical analysis.

3.3. Eastern European Perspectives on Cyclical Compression

Ukrainian and Eastern European scholars have applied cyclical frameworks to their own geopolitical contexts. Oleg Rafalskyi (2023) emphasises how Ukraine’s civilisational trajectory reflects recurring cycles of compression between East and West. Grygorii Shamborovskyi (2013) highlights how economic regionalisation produces systemic pressures that narrow Ukraine’s strategic space. These perspectives align with Kondratiev’s and Murrin’s theories, showing that compression is not only a global phenomenon but also a regional reality for states caught between empires.

3.4. Comparative Table

To make the analysis accessible, the following comparative table contrasts Western hegemonic cycles with Eastern European compression episodes:

- **Western Hegemonic Cycles**
 - Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815): France vs. coalitions, Britain’s maritime supremacy;
 - First World War (1914–1918): Germany’s encirclement, Schlieffen Plan failure;
 - Second World War (1939–1945): Germany’s premature aggression, global escalation;
 - Cold War peaks (1970s): systemic rivalry without direct hegemonic war;
 - Emerging SinoWestern confrontation (2022–2032): China’s compression under US containment.
- **Eastern European Compression Episodes**
 - Napoleonic Wars: Ukraine and Poland mobilised under imperial systems;
 - First World War: Ukraine divided between AustroHungarian and Russian Empires, compressed into battleground;
 - Second World War: Ukraine as epicentre of Nazi–Soviet confrontation, dual occupation;
 - Cold War: Ukraine compressed within Soviet bloc, sovereignty narrowed;
 - Post2014: Ukraine compressed between Russian aggression and Western integration, reflecting early systemic pressures of the current hegemonic cycle,. Specifically catalyzed by the as the Revolution of Dignity that’s put a pro-western government into power. An action to which Putin responded by invasion as he felt strategically compressed.

This comparative structure highlights how global hegemonic cycles translate into regional compression episodes, demonstrating the interconnectedness of systemic dynamics. It also underscores that Ukraine’s experience is not anomalous but part of a recurring pattern in which smaller states are compressed between larger powers during periods of systemic transition.

Part 4. Contemporary Application: China’s Strategic Environment and Ukraine’s Experience

4.1. China’s Strategic Compression

China’s trajectory in the early twentyfirst century reflects familiar compression dynamics. Following decades of rapid economic growth and technological modernisation, China has built formidable military capabilities, including antiship ballistic missiles, hypersonic glide

vehicles, and the world's largest navy (Murrin, 2010). Yet this expansionary momentum collides with external constraints: US alliances across the Pacific, Japanese rearmament, and regional resistance in Taiwan and South Korea.

Strategic compression manifests in several ways:

- **Demographic decline:** China's ageing population narrows its longterm growth potential.
- **Encirclement:** The First and Second Island Chains, reinforced by US and Japanese deployments, restrict China's maritime access.
- **Political vulnerability:** Internal challenges, including leadership legitimacy and economic slowdown, intensify the perception of narrowing options.

Murrin argues that these pressures will foster a "now or never" psychology, compelling China to act prematurely to secure its strategic objectives (Murrin, 2016). Neutral framing emphasises that this is not unique to China: similar dynamics have historically affected Germany, Japan, and France. Compression is a structural condition, not a moral judgement.

4.2. Ukraine's Strategic Compression

Ukraine offers a regional case study of the consequences of compression at the intersection of greatpower rivalry. Since independence in 1991, Ukraine has faced recurring pressures from both Russia and the West. The 2014 annexation of Crimea and subsequent war in Donbas exemplify how external constraints narrowed Ukraine's strategic space, forcing premature decisions about alignment and defence (Horbulin, 2018).

Hegemonic Compression in Ukraine has manifested through:

- **Geopolitical encirclement:** Russian military pressure combined with delayed Western integration;
- **Economic vulnerability:** Dependence on external markets and energy supplies;
- **Political instability:** Internal divisions exploited by external actors.

Like China, Ukraine's compression reflects systemic forces rather than isolated events. Both cases demonstrate how narrowing options produce highrisk decisionmaking, whether in the form of premature aggression (China's potential breakout) or premature defence mobilisation (Ukraine's response to Russian aggression).

4.3. Comparative Case Study: China vs. Ukraine

A comparative lens highlights the universality of compression dynamics:

- **Expansionary Drivers:**
 - *China:* Economic growth, technological modernisation, military buildup.
 - *Ukraine:* Democratic mobilisation, European integration, national identity consolidation.
- **External Constraints:**
 - *China:* US alliances, Japanese rearmament, Taiwan's resilience.
 - *Ukraine:* Russian aggression, delayed NATO/EU accession, economic dependency.
- **Compression Outcomes:**
 - *China:* Risk of premature aggression to break out of encirclement.
 - *Ukraine:* Premature defence mobilisation under existential threat.
- **Systemic Context:**

- *China*: Embedded in the 108–112-year hegemonic war cycle, reflecting global systemic pressures (Gilpin, 1981; Modelski, 1987; Wallerstein, 1974).
- *Ukraine*: Embedded in regional cycles of empire and compression, reflecting Eastern Europe’s recurring vulnerability (Pavlenko, n.d.; Riabchuk, 2019).

This comparative case study demonstrates that compression theory applies both globally and regionally. China’s experience illustrates how rising powers confront systemic constraints, while Ukraine’s experience shows how smaller states are compressed between great powers. Both cases underscore the importance of recognising compression as a structural phenomenon that shapes strategic behaviour across scales.

Part 5. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

5.1. Synthesis of Lessons

The theory of strategic compression provides a powerful lens for understanding the timing and causes of the onset of hegemonic wars. From the Napoleonic Wars to the First and Second World Wars, and Japan’s Pacific War, history demonstrates that expansionary momentum collides with systemic resistance, producing strategic compression that narrows options of the expansive power and fosters premature aggression. These wars were not launched at moments of maximum strength but at points when leaders perceived their strategic window of opportunity is closing.

Contemporary analysis shows that China faces similar compression today, with demographic decline, regional encirclement, and political vulnerabilities intensifying systemic pressures.

Ukraine, though not a rising hegemon, has and will continue to experience the consequences of the current great power hegemonic conflict that is being enabled by China through Russia. The next critical point where strategic compression will impact Ukraine is when China is forced to go to war under its paradigm, and Chinese soldiers are sent to reinforce those of Russia on the front lines. Drawing NATO into the fight alongside the Ukrainian forces.

5.2. Policy Recommendations for Ukraine and Eastern Europe

For policymakers in Ukraine and Eastern Europe, recognising compression as a structural phenomenon yields actionable insights:

- **Anticipate systemic cycles** Integrate Kondratiev Waves and hegemonic war cycles into national security planning. Recognise that compression intensifies at predictable intervals (Kondratiev & Stolper, 1935; Murrin, 2010). Embed this construct into national intelligence and planning that does so over the whole 112-year cycle.
- **Strengthen resilience under compression.** secure finance, weapons, energy supplies, and invest in defensive capabilities. Ukraine must increase resilience and plan for China’s arrival on the front lines.
- **Leverage international awareness** by framing its security challenges within strategic compression theory, Ukraine can communicate its predicament to allies more effectively. This situates Ukraine’s struggle within global systemic dynamics (Pavlenko, n.d.).
- **Promote regional cooperation.** Eastern European states share vulnerability to strategic compression between larger powers. Building cooperative frameworks –

economic, military, and cultural – can mitigate compression by expanding collective strategic space (Rafalskyi, 2023).

- **Invest in strategic foresight for the 112-year cycle.** Ukraine should institutionalise scenario planning and foresight analysis, drawing on both Western and Eastern European scholarship. This will enable policymakers to anticipate compression points and design proactive strategies. This structure should be embedded into society for the 120-year cycle and be built into law, so that it cannot be disabled in the predictable peace lulls of the cycle.

5.3. Closing Reflection

Strategic compression is the geopolitical equivalent of extreme tectonic stress just before an earthquake: invisible until rupture occurs, except that, unlike earthquakes, this cycle is yet predictable in its rhythm. For Ukraine and Eastern Europe, recognising compression as a recurring structural condition is essential for survival and sovereignty. By learning from historical cycles and applying foresight to contemporary challenges, policymakers can transform vulnerability into resilience, ensuring that compression does not translate into catastrophe.

References

- Blanning, T. C. W. (1996) *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787–1802*. London: Arnold. Available online: https://archive.org/details/frenchrevolution0000blan_g4s3
- Chwalba, A. (2014) 1914-1918. An Anatomy of Global Conflict. Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press. Available online: <https://archive.org/details/19141918anatomyo0000chwa>
- Craig, G. A. (1978) *Germany 1866–1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available online: <https://archive.org/details/germany1866194500crai>
- Gilpin, R. (1981) *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available online: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/war-and-change-in-world-politics/3A41732AFF3F08687A9FEDA2AF1E6A5D>
- Hastings, M. (2007) *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944–45*. London: HarperPress. Available online: <https://archive.org/details/retributionbattl00hast>
- Horbulin, V. (2018) Ukrainian Front of the Hybrid World. *Strategic Panorama*, 1: 3-6. Available online: <https://niss-panorama.com/index.php/journal/article/view/18/18>
- Iriye, A. (1987) *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific*. London: Longman. Available online: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315836577/origins-second-world-war-asia-pacific-akira-iriye>
- Kennedy, P. (1976) *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*. London: Allen Lane. Available online: <https://archive.org/details/risefallofbritis0000kenn>
- Kondratiev, N. D., and Stolper, W. F. (1935) *The Long Waves in Economic Life*. *The Review of Economic Statistics*, 17(6): 105-115. Available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1928486>
- Modelski, G. (1987) *Long Cycles in World Politics*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Available online: <https://archive.org/details/longcyclesinworl0000mode>
- Murrin, D. (2010) *Breaking the Code of History*. London: Selfpublished. Available online: <https://www.davidmurrin.co.uk/breaking-the-code-of-history>
- Murrin, D. (2016) *The Five Phase Life Cycle of Empires*. Available online: <https://www.davidmurrin.co.uk/article/5-phase-life-cycle>

- Pavlenko, Y. (n.d.) *The Formation of the Structure of World Civilization and the Planetary Ecosystem*. Kyiv: Institute of World History, NAS of Ukraine. Available online: <https://biopolitics.gr/biowp/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Kiev-pavlenko.pdf>
- Rafalskyi, O. (2023) *Civilizational Choice of Ukraine*. Kyiv: NAS of Ukraine. Available online: https://ispcjournal.org/journals/2023/01/PhC_30_Rafalskyi.pdf
- Riabchuk, M. (2019) *Two Ukraines Reconsidered: The End of Ukrainian Ambivalence?* Kyiv: Krytyka. Available online: https://shron1.chtyvo.org.ua/Riabchuk/Two_Ukraines_Reconsidered_The_End_of_Ukrainian_Ambivalence7_anhl.pdf
- Shamborovskyi, G. (2013) Transformation of civilizational values of Ukrainians in terms of the regionalization of the world economy. *Skhid*, 3(123): 65-69. Available online: [https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2013.3\(123\).15168](https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2013.3(123).15168)
- Snyder, T. (2010) *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books. Available online: https://archive.org/details/bloodlandseurope0000snyd_s7g9
- Strachan, H. (2001) *The First World War: Volume I – To Arms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available online: https://books.google.ch/books/about/The_First_World_War.html?id=ChpqA02Sa10C&redir_esc=y
- Tooze, A. (2006) *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*. London: Allen Lane. Available online: <https://adamtooze.com/the-wages-of-destruction/>
- Wallerstein, I. (1974) *The Modern World-System*. New York: Academic Press. Available online: <https://archive.org/details/modernworldsyste00wall>