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# The Devolution of American Power

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The theory that the world is moving from a unipolar order, dominated by the United States, to a multipolar distribution of power has led to a robust debate concerning the consequences of this change on the international order. However, the global power distribution is currently following a different pattern. Instead of what is conventionally addressed as a *global* unipolar to multipolar shift, in fact *rising powers are mainly regional powers, not global ones*, although they may have global reach. This pattern should be expected to continue in the near future and should be accounted for in order to make sound policy.

It follows that the movement away from a unipolar world should not be equated with one in which more global powers contend with each other; nor should it be equated with a world in which new powers take over from an old, declining power. Moreover, it should not be assumed that the world will be less ordered. Instead, to a significant extent, the change seems to be toward more regional autonomy, or increased *devolution*, and greater variety in the relationships between the United States and regional powers. These relationships may see regional powers serve as *junior partners* to the global power and assume some of the global power's regional responsibilities. Or these relationships may produce *junior adversarial* regional powers that seek greater relative regional control in defiance of the United States, but seek at most limited realignment of power on the global stage.

In the process of devolution, the increase in regional self-government and pluralism are much less challenging to the global power than

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the redistribution of power implied by multipolarity. Indeed, as junior regional powers increasingly act as partners and assume regional responsibilities, they enable the global power to scale back its global commitments without losing much of its weight in international developments. Similarly, the desire for regional control among rising powers can be more readily accommodated than aspirations to challenge the United States as a global superpower.

It must be noted that the notion of devolution as used here is that of an ideal,<sup>1</sup> and as such there will be significant variation in its real-world instantiations. However, the process of devolution suggests a logical pattern of behavior for all actors involved, upon which various powers can construct a viable strategy.

While the movement from a uni- to a multipolar distribution of global power is considered by some to be “positive” and more supportive of international institutions,<sup>2</sup> others consider it as “negative” and likely to lead to confrontation between the declining power and the rising ones.<sup>3</sup>

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In truth, the move to a higher level of regional pluralism is a double-edged sword. The effect of the transformation depends on the particular accommodation pattern that develops between each regional power and the global power. As indicated previously, this pattern can vary from that of a junior partner to that of a regional antagonist.

Stated in other terms, if unipolarity is compared to hierarchy and multipolarity is compared to flat systems or networks, regional pluralism is analogous to increased subsidiarity.

Importantly, the accommodation pattern between the global superpower and regional powers is fundamentally different from the one between declining and rising global powers. In the former case, the regional powers do not seek to modify or replace the global rules or change the global distribution of public goods. Instead, they aim merely to gain local exemptions from the rules, variants in the ways they are applied, or increases in their share of distributed benefits. Superpowers may prove unwilling to accommodate such regional challenges and regional challengers may hold that they have been insufficiently accommodated.

However, such global/regional accommodations are, in general, easier to reach than the global/global accommodations between declining and rising global powers, and thus are less likely to lead to outright conflicts. With devolution, the central power yields, therefore risking much less when pluralism increases than when a transition from uni- to multipolarity takes place. This is one of the principle strengths of pluralism.

Devolution differs significantly from arguments put forth in the 1980s in favor of burden-sharing.<sup>4</sup> Burden-sharing only occurs between a superpower and that power's junior regional partners. However, devolution involves increased autonomy on the part of both junior partners and those who may have interests distinct from, or against those of, the presiding global power; there is no predilection towards according a greater regional role to allies over other neutral states. In this sense, devolution is characteristic of the post-Cold War environment, where a majority of states are neither explicitly pro-American nor anti-American, but instead maintain a far more complex relationship with the global superpower.<sup>5</sup>

#### COMPETING HYPOTHESES

In order to apply this theory, it is possible to use the fairly wide consensus that U.S. power is declining, or at least that the power of other nations is rising in comparison. The *decline of U.S. power* is largely attributed to its economic difficulties,<sup>6</sup> its political gridlock and polarization,<sup>7</sup> the side-effects of its prolonged involvement in two wars,<sup>8</sup> and the decline of its "soft power."<sup>9</sup> However, whether one agrees that U.S. power is declining or how the cause and scope of decline is assessed, the question of whether the new powers are mainly regional or global ones and the nature of their relationship with the United States remains important.

In fact, a fair number of scholars embrace the hypothesis that the *world is moving toward a multipolar order*. As far back as the early 1990s, Samuel Huntington predicted "a truly multipolar 21st century."<sup>10</sup> Robert Kagan observed that "when most people think of a post-American world, they think of a return to multipolarity—an international configuration of power where several powers exist in rough parity."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, John Ikenberry observed that "we are in the transition from 'America, Inc.' to 'Worldco,'" which will have "a new board of directors and stakeholders."<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, some analysts of the changing world order, such as Shi Yinhong and Yan Xuetong, believe that we are not moving towards multipolarity, but *towards bipolarity*. They argue that if the United States is declining and China is rising more quickly than any other potential power

contenders, then the United States and China may become roughly equal powers.<sup>13</sup>

Still other scholars contend that, although other nations are rising, they are not nearly as powerful as the United States. In *The Post-American World*, Fareed Zakaria acknowledges that unipolarity is waning due to a broader global diffusion of power, but argues that “the notion of a multipolar world, with four or five players of roughly equal weight, does not describe reality today or in the near future.” Citing the European Union’s inability to “act militarily or politically as one” and the fact that China and India are still very much developing countries, Zakaria writes that the international system is “more accurately described by . . . [the] term ‘unimultipolarity,’ or what Chinese geopoliticians call ‘many powers and one superpower.’”<sup>14</sup> Joseph Nye Jr. sees a shift toward multipolarity in some aspects of the international order and the continuity of unipolarity in others.<sup>15</sup> Yet, all view the new powers as major global actors.

Richard Haass challenges this notion of multipolarity, arguing that we are actually entering an “age of nonpolarity” because, although the United States is declining, other nations will not be able to fill the vacuum in power.<sup>16</sup> Niall Ferguson similarly refers to the rise of “apolarity” and a coming era in which “instead of a balance of power, there [will be] an absence of power.” He worries that the “alternative to a single superpower is not a multilateral utopia, but the anarchic nightmare of a new Dark Age.”<sup>17</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski holds that the United States decline will not foster the rise of new global powers that will support order, but will lead to a decline in world order and increased nuclear proliferation.<sup>18</sup> Finally, Kagan also predicts that a U.S. decline would likely result in armed conflict as rising nations jostle for power, democracy declines due to the rise of authoritarian China, and nations retreat from the global free-market economy and freedom of the seas.<sup>19</sup>

The National Intelligence Council, however, acknowledges the possibility that a multipolar system could lead to greater burden-sharing and revitalize multilateralism and global institutions.<sup>20</sup> Zakaria also predicts that the new world order will be “more democratic, more dynamic, more open.”<sup>21</sup>

However, a different pattern is developing in the relationship between the United States as the superpower and rising powers. This can be seen in the cases of China, the European Union, India, and Russia—powers considered to be on the ascendancy or previous challengers to a U.S.-dominated unipolar world. The pattern follows that: (a) so far the nations frequently considered to be rising global powers are nations that have mainly increased

their potential—not actual—power; (b) the increase in actual power that has occurred is largely regional, although it typically has some global implications; and (c) the main question for the foreseeable future is not whether the rising powers will replace the United States as a global power, but what the nature of the pattern of accommodation will be between the global and regional powers. Ultimately, the question will then be whether the United States will accept increased regional autonomy and whether the new powers will find the increased regional freedom and accommodations sufficient.

## CHINA

The nation most often cited as driving the global power shift from unipolar to bipolar or multipolar is China. Many view China as well on its way to becoming a global power, one that may contest—and according to some, supplant—the power of the United States. Elizabeth Economy holds that “Beijing has launched a ‘go out’ strategy designed to remake global norms and institutions.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Barry Buzan finds that “China is currently the most fashionable potential superpower and the one whose degree of alienation from the dominant international society makes it the most obvious political challenger.”<sup>23</sup> A recent study shows that in fifteen of twenty-two nations surveyed, the majority of the public believes that China either already has or eventually will replace the United States as the world’s leading superpower.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss have acknowledged China as “an undisputed global power.”<sup>25</sup>

In line with power transition theory, some predict that the United States and China are bound to engage in major armed conflict in the future.<sup>26</sup>

Kagan holds that “wars tend to break out as a result of large-scale shifts in the power equation, when the upward trajectory of a rising power comes close to intersecting the downward trajectory of a declining power.”<sup>27</sup> Historians point to major cases substantiating this concept—the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, the Napoleonic Wars, and in particular the conflict for power between Great Britain and Germany during World War II—and predict that a similar struggle could break out between China and the United States.<sup>28</sup> Other

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notable scholars of international relations understand the risks associated with a “power transition” in East Asia as America’s major geopolitical challenge.<sup>29</sup>

So far, however, China has shown limited intentions of becoming, and has built few capabilities to become, a global power. Absent this element of intent, its capabilities alone cannot be interpreted as a threat. One should note from the onset that many of the observations about the rise of China refer to the size of its economy—which measures potential but not actual power<sup>30</sup>—and this growth is often overestimated. China’s per capita income is roughly only one-tenth that of the United States; in fact, China’s per capita income in 2010 was \$4,260 compared to the United States’ \$47,140, placing China roughly on par with countries such as Ecuador and Algeria.<sup>31</sup> This gap is expected to persist for decades, with U.S. per capita gross domestic product (GDP) remaining nearly three times that of China through 2050.<sup>32</sup> It is this figure, rather than the total size of the Chinese economy, that is more relevant, because it limits the resources that China can commit to an expansionist foreign policy. China’s government is tasked with providing for four times as many people as the United States and combating the poverty found in a very large number of rural households.<sup>33</sup> Widespread corruption, as well as glaring inequality between affluent city dwellers and the rural poor, fosters political instability. Unless the Chinese government is willing to risk being overthrown, it cannot shift large amounts of resources to a military buildup, to say nothing of extensive overseas geopolitical designs. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that its economy can keep growing at the rapid pace it did in earlier stages of development.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, China’s military power is mainly concentrated in its own region and will be for the foreseeable future.<sup>35</sup> According to Kenneth Lieberthal, “there is no serious military man in China or in the United States who thinks that China has any prayer of dominating the [United States] militarily in the coming three or four decades,” an assessment shared even by more hawkish China experts.<sup>36</sup> China’s navy has rarely been deployed outside its regional waters, and, when it has, the deployments have been for humanitarian and anti-piracy purposes.<sup>37</sup> While the United States has deployed hundreds of thousands of troops in roughly 150 countries around the world,<sup>38</sup> including countries near China such as Japan, South Korea, and more recently Australia and Singapore, China has no overseas bases. Furthermore, while the United States has eleven aircraft carriers that serve to project its power worldwide, China has one.

Likewise, China’s weapons are largely designed to ensure regional, not

global, dominance. China's "regionally-focused" military thus tends to base its most advanced systems opposite Taiwan, and it has focused its efforts on projects such as improving its anti-access and area denial (A2AD) capabilities—designed to “deter or counter adversary forces from deploying to, or operating within, a defined space.”<sup>39</sup> China's BeiDou satellite navigation system, which facilitates accurate targeting of missiles and bombs, is reported to currently provide China with regional and not global navigation capability.<sup>40</sup> Robert Ross finds that “the transformation of the PLA [People's Liberation Army] into a region-wide strategic power will require many decades. The transformation of China's national military, the PLA, into a global strategic power is an even more distant prospect.”<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, China's role at the UN reflects its reluctance to flex its power on a global level. While in the 1990s China “expressed considerable concern over the West's ‘new interventionism’ in Kosovo and Iraq, China's actual position [was] far more nuanced and pragmatic.”<sup>42</sup> China contributed police to peacekeeping efforts in Kosovo despite its initial opposition to intervention there. Despite its opposition to the first Gulf War, China also refrained from vetoing Resolution 678, which authorized the use of all necessary means to restore peace and security after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Crucially, China has also often voted “absent” when the UN Security Council acted in ways that differed from China's views rather than exercising its veto. As of December 2008, China had exercised its veto power only six times, while the United States had done so over eighty times.<sup>43</sup>

China sees its key geopolitical issues as regional, mainly concerning Tibet, Taiwan, and notably the standing of the South China Sea.<sup>44</sup> China claims large parts of the South China Sea as part of its Exclusive Economic Zone—a claim that has generated considerable opposition from other nations in the area including Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Critics of China's foreign policy worry that it will use its military to enforce this claim, pointing out that China has used force in a number of its past border disputes. However, most of these incidents took place almost a generation ago. China's expressed foreign policy doctrine is that of a “peaceful rise;” yet more recently, the policy has been called “peaceful development,” as China has “semantically tempered” the term to reassure countries such as the United States that its ascent will not be a zero-sum game.<sup>45</sup> In accordance with this policy, in recent decades China has often reached compromises in conflicts with its neighbors, settling them via negotiations or other peaceful mechanisms.<sup>46</sup> Between 1949 and 2005, China settled seventeen of its twenty-three territorial disputes with other



governments, offering “substantial compromises in most of these settlements, usually receiving less than 50 percent of the contested land.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, even at a regional level, China has displayed little tendency to flex its power in recent decades. As Christopher Pehrson of the Strategic Studies Institute has observed:

China is aware of the possibility that its growing stature could be construed as a threat to other countries in Asia, so a generally benign approach to gain influence is pursued through the use of investments, development packages, and diplomatic gestures... Even with respect to Taiwan, Chinese policy attempts to balance the “stick” of diplomatic and military pressure with the “carrot” of mutually beneficial cross-strait economic ties.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, far from helping China become the regional hegemon, Beijing’s territorial claims have moved its neighbors to court the West and seek stronger alliances with the United States in order to “balance” China. This pattern is not only seen in Japan, Malaysia, and the Philippines, but

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also in a former close ally of China—Vietnam. Even Burma has sought to put some distance between itself and China; for example, in October 2011, Burma suspended construction on a \$3.6 billion Chinese-backed dam project.<sup>49</sup> The decision is widely seen as a demonstration of the Burma government’s eagerness to signal that it is not a client of China.<sup>50</sup>

It remains to be seen if China will stick to its doctrine of peaceful development or if this is merely a diversion until it is ready to become a global power. Beyond certain instances of cooperation and rhetorical assurances, a sustained pattern of accommodation has yet to be firmly established to allow a better prediction of the more distant future.<sup>51</sup>

Turning from military and economic matters to those of ideation, while some consider China’s state capitalism to be a model that ideologically competes with the democratic capitalism favored by the United States, China has shown little interest in promoting it as global model. The current trend in Chinese leadership does not show an expansionist ideology, nor does it have a design for a new world order. In 2004, Premier Wen Jiabao promised that China’s ascendancy “will not stand in the way of any other



country, nor pose a threat to any other country, nor come at the cost of any other country.”<sup>52</sup> And Professor Yan Xuetong assured those in the West unsettled by China’s growing economic and military strength that “China’s current goal . . . is to struggle for equal status in the international community, it is not to be a global hegemon.”<sup>53</sup>

Some critics do not trust these declarations and view them as being designed to downplay China’s rise to power until it is ready to unveil its newly acquired might. They point to some statements made by Chinese strategists to this effect.<sup>54</sup> However, few contest that, based on an examination of its actions and independent of its declared intentions, China is so far primarily building up its regional power.

China has two major domestic strategic interests with global implications: its economy and its political stability. Both of these require a secure flow of raw materials and energy. It therefore is seeking to develop its land-based pathways and ports. Recently, it completed the Chongqing-Xinjiang-Europe railway to serve as a link between Europe and the manufacturing hubs and industrial belt in the south and southwestern parts of the country.<sup>55</sup> In addition, it has established pipelines to acquire oil from Russia and Turkmenistan, and is building oil and gas pipelines to Burma.

Some have suggested that China is establishing a series of ports (a “string of pearls”) that will eventually serve to establish naval dominance from the South China Sea through the Strait of Malacca to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. However, the Indian government noted that the claims that China was converting Burma’s Coco Islands into a naval base were incorrect,<sup>56</sup> and both the Sri Lankan president and Bangladesh’s foreign minister have publicly assured their citizens that the Chinese port investments in their countries are strictly commercial.<sup>57</sup> China’s interest in foreign ports seems to stem from a desire to avoid dependence on the “chokepoint” of the heavy-traffic Strait of Malacca, which serves as a haven for pirates.<sup>58</sup> As Christopher Pehrson has noted, “China’s development of [its] strategic geopolitical ‘pearls’ has been non-confrontational, with no evidence of imperial or neocolonial ambition.”<sup>59</sup>

All of this is not to suggest that China has no global profile. It has become a member of the World Trade Organization, increased its contributions to the International Monetary Fund, and supported Westphalian norms of sovereignty.<sup>60</sup> It has also become the largest provider of peacekeepers among the permanent five members of the UN Security Council.<sup>61</sup> However, acting on one or more of these limited matters on a global scale does not make a global power. None of these entail application of power as the term is commonly defined—in other words, the capacity of A to make B

follow a course preferred by A. While this does not prove that China could not one day become a global power that will contest the United States, so far there are few signs to this effect. Devolution here takes the form of China assuming some of the United States' regional responsibilities while also striking its own course. Whether the United States will accommodate these aspirations or will seek to actively resist them is still far from clear.

If one assumes that China's rising power—thus far and in the near future—is largely regional, the question of whether this growth will be mainly adversarial or compatible with the prevailing international order depends in part on the United States.<sup>62</sup> If the United States ceases to sell arms to Taiwan, stops urging India to build up its military in order to contain China, welcomes China's quest to secure pathways for its vital needs of raw materials and energy, limits rather than increases U.S. military forces in the region, and commits itself not to move its army to Chinese borders from the demilitarized zone should the North Korean regime collapse, it will accommodate China's regional rise. However, if the United States takes the opposite course in these matters and instead seeks to ring the country with military bases and form military alliances in the area to "contain" China, a confrontation is more likely.<sup>63</sup>

## THE EUROPEAN UNION

Much has been made in previous decades of the rise of the European Union (EU) as a global power, one that would challenge or even replace the United States. In 2002, Charles Kupchan predicted that the EU would supplant the United States as the world's next great power. He wrote, "not only is American primacy far less durable than it appears, but it is already beginning to diminish. And the rising challenger is not China or the Islamic world but the European Union."<sup>64</sup> John McCormick called the EU a "superpower," pointing to the EU's rising influence in the international community and European countries' efforts to counter U.S. foreign policy in Iraq.<sup>65</sup>

Some academics also observed a tendency on the part of the EU to partner with countries such as China and/or Russia to counter the United States. The first years of the new millennium saw a "remarkable blossoming of Sino-European ties."<sup>66</sup> The EU surpassed the United States as China's largest trading partner in 2004.<sup>67</sup> As Roberto Foa has noted, the foremost factor that brought Brussels and Beijing closer together was "the unilateralism of the Bush administration, which led both Chinese and Europeans to see in each other the means toward a balanced international

order.”<sup>68</sup> During the rapid growth in bilateral political cooperation in the early 2000s, the EU developed a “strategic partnership” with China that stressed the EU and China’s “shared responsibilities in promoting *global* governance [emphasis added].”<sup>69</sup> The United States responded by seeking to weaken the EU. In particular, the United States’ support for Turkey’s bid for membership in the EU was interpreted by many as “an attempt to weaken Europe by placing a Turkish economic, demographic, and cultural millstone around its neck.”<sup>70</sup>

In actuality, the EU turned out to be a predominantly regional power, a fairly weak and largely cooperative power onto which the United States has unloaded some of its responsibilities. The EU did succeed in forming a regional community that seems to have eliminated war among nations that fought each other for centuries (and that in the past required U.S. military help to end their wars). However, the EU remains reliant on the U.S. nuclear umbrella to protect it from regional attacks and, for the same reason, supports the continued presence of U.S. troops in the region. Thus, it continues to rely on the United States as a global power and often takes direction from the United States on strategic matters, although less so than during the Cold War years.

On the global level, the EU as a community and its core members on their own (including the UK, France, and Germany), are able to project power on a more limited basis. And when such power has been applied—with rare exceptions such as the Suez War in 1956—it has been in support of U.S.-guided missions with the European nations acting as junior partners in alliance with the United States. These include Iraq both in 1991 and 2003-11, Afghanistan beginning in 2001, and often within the UN Security Council.

One may argue that the EU (or at least some of its major members) is playing a global diplomatic role, one that mitigates and moderates American foreign policy, while basically supporting it—in other words, acting like a global, albeit junior, partner. For instance, it is important to

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consider the active role Germany, France, and Britain have had in negotiating with Iran and in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. However, in all of these instances, comparatively little has been achieved. True, European forces helped legitimize American missions in Afghanistan and sent combat troops. However, these amounted to a small fraction of the total forces and their rules of engagement limited their contributions.

Both the EU's limited power and its role as a junior partner for the United States were highlighted during the 2011 Libyan campaign. True, NATO's European members initiated the intervention. However, they soon discovered that they were highly dependent on American military help during the campaign. The United States provided about three-quarters of the aerial tankers, without which the NATO strike fighters could not have reached their targets and returned to base. When the European stock of precision-guided weapons ran low after only a couple of months, the United States had to provide supplies. In addition, few attack missions were flown without American electronic warfare aircraft operating above as "guardian angels."<sup>71</sup>

Thus, despite expectations that the EU would become a new global power challenging the United States, it has so far turned out to be mainly a regional power, predominantly acting in tandem with the United States. In this case, a stable accommodation has been reached between the superpower and the rising regional power.

## INDIA

Like China, India is often described as an emerging global power. George Yeo Yong-Boon, Singapore's Minister of Foreign Affairs, observed in 2008 that there has been "an enormous shift of power and influence in the world. It is mainly a story of the rise of China and India."<sup>72</sup> American officials have acknowledged India's ascendancy and called upon its leaders to responsibly manage its new position in the world order.<sup>73</sup>

Many refer to the rapidly growing Indian economy as indicative of India's growing strength. Its economy is currently the ninth largest in the world by nominal GDP<sup>74</sup> and the fourth largest by purchasing power parity.<sup>75</sup> However, the size of India's economy points to potential but not actual power. Like China—or even more so, given India is a democratic regime—India may well have to commit the majority of its resources to providing for the economic well-being of its population rather than projecting power onto other nations, especially outside of its region. India's low income per capita (a mere \$1,340, placing it roughly on par with

Papua New Guinea)<sup>76</sup> is a much more telling figure than the size of its GDP. It still has widespread poverty, with approximately forty percent of the population below the international poverty line of \$1.25 per day.<sup>77</sup> Its infant mortality rate is over twenty times that of Japan, or roughly equal to that of Namibia.<sup>78</sup>

During the Cold War, India was either allied with the USSR or was non-aligned, while Pakistan allied itself with the United States. Since 1990, and especially during the George W. Bush administration that initiated an agreement for the United States to help India's nuclear program, the United States has sought to court India as a regional partner in order to balance China.<sup>79</sup> However, as a regional power, India has often sought to follow its own course rather than serve as a regional junior partner for the United States. So far, it has resisted U.S. pressures to settle its differences with Pakistan. It has increased its arsenal of nuclear arms and is one of the four nations outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which includes 190 nations and is strongly favored by the United States and its allies. India also did not support the United States in global negotiations concerning climate change, instead siding with China on this matter. It supported some sanctions against Iran but not others, and opposed sanctions against the repressive military regime in Burma. It also expressed opposition to military intervention in Libya. Moreover, India has been said to provide funding and training to terrorists groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army in Pakistan's tribal areas with the goal of destabilizing the country, an aim clearly at odds with American efforts to cultivate Pakistan as a partner in the War on Terror.<sup>80</sup>

In other instances, India has cooperated with the United States on vital issues such as countering terrorism within its borders, as well as maritime defense and intelligence, as indicated by their joint response to the Mumbai terrorist attacks. The United States and India also hold joint military exercises and work together to combat transnational crime including piracy, smuggling, and trafficking.

Yet, despite this relationship, it is difficult to predict what trajectory India's foreign policy will take in the future, given that it lacks an "overall template."<sup>81</sup> As Evan Feigenbaum notes, while India "has moved beyond nonalignment," it is still unclear if its foreign policy vision entails a deeper partnership with the United States.<sup>82</sup> Pratap Bhanu Mehta has observed that "it is . . . too premature to conclude that the logic of regional balancing will drive India into an alliance-like relationship with the [United States.]"<sup>83</sup>

As a regional power, India has not been a leader as much as it has clashed with its neighbors. It has frequently clashed with Pakistan, backed

the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka, interfered in the internal affairs of Nepal and Bangladesh, and supported opposition to the government of Afghanistan—gaining the animosity of the governments of all these nations. It has also clashed with China over border issues.

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twenty-seventh in soft power, which places it behind Portugal.<sup>84</sup> Its contributions to foreign aid and investment overseas, especially in Africa, are minor compared to those of China, Japan, and Russia. It "remains more a beneficiary of public goods than a producer of them, especially when it comes to security."<sup>85</sup> Although it maintains a large military in terms of troop size, its military equipment remains outdated despite recent modernization efforts.<sup>86</sup> The lack of success in gaining a permanent seat at

the UN Security Council is symptomatic of its weakness as a global power.

In short, India may have the potential to become a global power given its large and growing economy and hence could one day be considered part of the global multipolar array. So far, however, there are few indications that it is moving to play such a role. Indeed, India is not even a major regional power. As far as India's relationship with the United States as a global superpower is concerned, it is conflicted; sometimes it cooperates with U.S. interests and sometimes it resists or follows its own course. In short, it is at best an unreliable junior partner.

## RUSSIA

Russia is the only nation that currently truly poses not just a regional but global challenge to the United States, albeit a minor one. Russian nuclear forces are able to strike the U.S. mainland and cause considerable harm. Russia has also shown a willingness to actively oppose U.S. policies as part of maintaining its global profile. It is much more likely to cast a veto in the UN Security Council than is China—in fact Russia has cast roughly twenty times as many vetoes as China—and China usually does not make use of its veto unless Russia already has.



Russia continues to seek to play a role in all regions of the world, despite its relative weakness as a power. It strongly supports the Assad regime in Syria, actively participated in the six-party talks with North Korea, sought to improve its relations with China, cooperates with Japan in the area of energy, and has increased its sphere of influence in Africa. In fact, Russia recently established a joint project with Nigeria to develop oil fields there and construct a pipeline to Europe.<sup>87</sup> In addition, it maintains a close relationship with Cuba and Venezuela; in 2011, Russia was Venezuela's main source of arms for ground forces.<sup>88</sup> Russia also recently used its supply of energy to Europe, via a pipeline, to exert pressure on Europe's policies and successfully blocked European and American plans to continue to expand NATO eastward to include more former Soviet Republics. Further, it has laid claims to a large segment of the North Pole and sent military units to enforce these claims. All this shows that, unlike other powers who tend to limit their influence to their own region, Russia has extended its reach to almost every corner of the globe.

In some matters, Russia has indeed cooperated with the United States. It helped supply troops in Afghanistan.<sup>89</sup> It agreed with the United States to reduce the level of nuclear strategic armaments under New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), and it participated for decades in the Global Threat Reduction Initiative and in the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, albeit as a secondary—i.e. junior—partner in programs initiated and largely paid for by the United States.

Yet, while Russia prefers to see itself as a global power, its global leverage is typically limited by its innate economic weakness. Its economy is much smaller than that of China or India<sup>90</sup> and is crippled by endemic corruption, dependence on energy exports, and state-supported monopolies that crowd out entrepreneurs and foreign investors.<sup>91</sup> Often, it acts more

to hobble the United States rather than set a course in line with its own preference. For example, in Syria it blocked moves by the United States and its allies, but did not put forward a viable way to end the conflict. It slowed down Western sanctions against Iran, but found no way to prevent it from advancing its nuclear program. Thus, while acting on a global scale

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 .....



and possessing the ability to impede other states from implementing their goals, Russia lacks the capacity to act as a major international power and has given up on a distinct global design since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

However, Russia remains a powerful regional actor that is often antagonistic to the United States. The United States could not stop Russia when it invaded Georgia and “annexed” South Ossetia and Abkhazia, or when it devastated Chechnya in violation of basic human rights—a much more violent repression than the one that led to the 2011 intervention in Libya. Russia stopped NATO’s eastward expansion and rebuilt its relationship with several former Soviet Republics. Moreover, it succeeded in causing the United States to reposition and scale back its missile defense system.

By playing a global role and by projecting power in all regions of the world, contemporary Russia comes much closer than any other nation to illustrating what multipolarity would look like, distinct from regional pluralism. However, given the fragility of its economic and political systems, its power projections are no match for those of the United States, even given the relative decline of U.S. power.

## CONCLUSION

Much of the discussion about the changing distribution of power in the world focuses on whether the power of the United States is declining, whether new global powers are rising to displace it, and how these changes may affect the international order. This article argues that, for the foreseeable future, the rising challengers will remain largely regional powers. On the whole, the changing global order involves increased regional pluralism, or devolution, rather than a rise of multipolarity or a displacement of the United States as the predominant hegemonic power.

Given that the rising powers seek mostly regional influence, they can be more easily accommodated by the United States than if they sought to challenge the United States as a global power. These accommodations are less likely to be conflict-prone if they are correctly understood to involve regional-to-global power shifts rather than global-to-global ones. ■

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