

## Issues, Trends and Challenges in an Emerging Global Power Structure

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### Abstract

The reality of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is that the world is in the grip of the transformation of the power structure. China has risen into global reckoning; Russia began to rise from its inertia; North Korea has evolved to a global threat. All have begun to lay claims to a greater role in the international political system. The unipolarism of the post-Soviet era seems to be dissolving before our eyes. These emerging trends raise questions as to; what sort of multipolarism are we talking about? How will the coming multipolar order operate? Will great power be able to work together to uphold order? Will they descend into self centred and destabilizing military and economic competitions? Can the world support multiple world orders, co-existent yet separate? There are no iron-clad answers to these questions. However, current geopolitics does, perhaps, allow for a glimpse into the future.

This article aims to contribute to that discourse by making three claims. First, there is a dramatic increase in the number of global actors. Second, the diversity among actors has created opportunities for the emergence of new systems and new partnerships and for old ones to be strengthened and transformed. Lastly, the future multi-polar world will be potentially more unstable than all the other multi-polar periods history has experienced: for the first time in history, the world could become both multi-polar and nuclear.

**Key words:** Polarity; Multipolarity; Power-shifts

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### INTRODUCTION

Two phenomenal events, more than any other, shaped our world in the last century. The first is the denotation of the first two weapons of mass destruction on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, both in Japan in 1945. The second was the pulling down of the Berlin wall in 1989.

The use of the atomic bomb in the theatre of war, after several years of secret research and development, announced the arrival of the United States of America as the most powerful nation in the world. Before then, the United States was just one of the major powers, although one whose entry and contributions to the second world war, helped to save the world from Hitler's philosophy of superiority of the Aryan Race and his dream of imposing a 1000-year Reich on the world, as well as from Japan's aggressive imperial adventure in South-East Asia.

The atomic bomb also ensured that the Soviet Union did not convert its massive military advantage characterized by a huge military manpower and the largest assembly of tanks in any post war era. The Soviet Union had Western Europe by the jugular and was within its operational capability to occupy the rest of Europe but the reality of atomic bombs in the arsenal of the United S was always a sobering strategic reality. The communist romance of turning the world into one giant proletariat universe was moderated by the harsh prospects of nuclear annihilation.

For the first four years of the post second world war era, the world was in turmoil arising from the tensions over the management of the spoil of the war-Germany. Several times during that period, the prospects of war between the erstwhile allies against Germany loomed large, the most obvious being the Berlin blockade of 1949 which was broken by heroic air drops of foods and drugs by the Wester powers. Fortunately, there was no war, instead, the Soviet Union developed its own atomic bomb in 1949 and by so doing, ended the monopoly which the United States had enjoyed for four years.

The Soviet atomic bomb ushered in the era of the Cold War, characterized by a vicious nuclear arms race, fierce ideological confrontation, proxy wars and sponsorship of instability and regime change around the world. The Cold War lasted till the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a momentous event which saw the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the restructuring of the world from bipolarism to unipolarism. Francis Fukuyama optimistically described it as the “End of History”, that is the end of the war inducing dialectics of power. What we are witnessing he wrote at the time,

is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. (Fukuyama, 1989, p.2)

The Cold War came to an end in 1991 and the United States emerged as the only super power while western liberal democracy was on the march. That had however begun to change. China rose like a phoenix into global reckoning; Russia began to rise from its slumber; North Korea has evolved to a global threat. All have begun to lay claims to a greater role in the international political system. The unipolarism of the post-Soviet era seems to be dissolving before our eyes.

The reality in this early 21<sup>st</sup> century is that the world once again is in the grip of the transformation of the power structure. But this does not tell the full story. What sort of multipolarism are we talking about? How will the coming multipolar order operate? Will great powers be able to work together to uphold order? Will they descend into self centred and destabilizing military and economic competitions? Can the world support multiple world orders, co-existent yet separate? There are no iron-clad answers to these questions. However, current geopolitics does, perhaps, allow for a glimpse into the future.

This article aims to contribute to that discourse by making three claims. First, there is a dramatic increase in the number of global actors. Second, the diversity among actors has created opportunities for the emergence of new systems and new partnerships and for old ones to be strengthened and transformed. Lastly, the future multipolar world will be potentially more unstable than all the other multi-polar periods history has experienced: for the first time in history, the world could become both multipolar and nuclear.

The article will be presented in four sections. In the first, we establish an understanding of multipolarism within the larger conceptualization of polarity and polarization. The second section will provide a historical overview of multipolarity. The third will focus on today’s world, arguing that a decline of United State’s unipolarity and the rise of other powers are creating the conditions for a multi-polar world. The final section argues that an emerging multi-polar world will be completely different from the multi-polar periods witnessed in history so far.

The presence and availability of nuclear weapons will indeed allow even middle and small powers and non-state actors to seriously threaten and undermine global security and peace.

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## 1. UNDERSTANDING POLARITY

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In international relations, polarity is important in the understanding of global governance and in dealing with global issues in the current globalised world. Polarity describes the degree to which the global system revolves around one or more powerful states or “poles”—the distribution of power in the global system- the number of independent power centers, or poles, in the world (Kaarbo & James, 2011; Hughes, 2000). Polarity first distinguishes between great powers and lesser powers. Great powers have system wide interests and sufficient powers to pursue them (Craig & George, 1983). Second, polarity identifies the number and relative size of great powers. Historically, great powers have constituted a limited subset of total states, seldom more than five or six (Sytoll, 1989). Third, polarity sometimes specifies relationships between great and lesser powers. Polarity defines the character of the international system at a particular period of time. The distribution of power capabilities in the international system determines the number of the great powers and, consequently, the polarity of the international system. If the great powers are more than two, the system will be multi-polar; if they are two, it will be bipolar, while systems with only one great power are considered unipolar, or hegemonic (Mearsheimer, 2001). Basically, polarities offer a powerful way of grasping the structure of power in historic and contemporary systems.

**Unipolarity:** When a single entity dominates the system, it is unipolar. The unipolar system contains a single great power, meaning that only one state has most of the economic, military and cultural influence. Jervis (2009) argues that there are three main features of unipolar system: unipolarity being an interstate system rather than an empire. “Unipolarity implies the existence of many juridically equal non-states, something that an empire denies. In empires, inter-societal divide-and-rule practices replace interstate balance-of-power dynamic” (Jervis, 2009, p.190); unipolarity is anarchical. Waltz (1964) argues that “a great power cannot exert a positive control everywhere in the world” (Waltz, 1964, p.887). This kind of system has been characterized by the lack of competition among great powers and thus absence of war. According to Samuel Huntington, a unipolar system would have one superpower, no significant major powers, and many minor powers (Huntington, 1999). An example of a unipolar system according to Monteiro (2011), is the post-Cold War international system when the defence budget for the United States was “close to half of global military expenditures; a ...Navy superior to all others combined; a chance at a splendid nuclear first strike...;

a defense research and development budget that is 80% of the total defense expenditures of its most obvious future competitor, China; and unmatched global power-projection capabilities” (Monteiro, 2011, p.190).

**Bipolarity:** As the name suggests, the bipolar system consists of two great powers. This means that there are only two spheres of influence. It is the distribution of power in which only two players have most of the military, economic and cultural influence regionally, or globally. Over and over again, spheres of influence develop. For instance, during the Cold War, most of the western democracies would fall under the influence of the United States. On the other hand, the communists nations would be under the influence of the Soviet Union. Following this, the great powers would often be scramble for the support of those remaining areas that are unclaimed (Toma & Gorman, 1991). The bipolar system is considered to be more stable compared to the other two types of system. This is due to the fact that it is less vulnerable to systemic change and great power war. In such a system, there is only the possibility of internal balancing because of the lack of other powers with which to create alliances (Lane & Maeland, 2008). In the bipolar system of the Cold War, each of the blocs the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), linking the United States to the defence of Western Europe and the Warsaw Pact, “military capabilities became concentrated in the hands of two competitive “superpowers” whose capacities to massively destroy anyone made comparisons with the other great powers meaningless” (Kegley, 2005). Alliances tend to be long term, based on relatively permanent, not shifting, interests. In a tight bipolar system, international organizations either do not develop or are ineffective. In a looser system, international organizations may develop primarily to mediate between the two blocs.

**Multipolarity:** Multipolarity refers to an international system in which there are three or more power centres. However, this may encompass arrangements ranging from tripolar systems (the USA, Japan and the EU in the latter decades of the twentieth century) to effectively nonpolar systems (Haass, 2008), in which power is so diffuse that no actor can any longer be portrayed as a “pole”. If there are a number of influential actors in the international system, a balance-of-power or multipolar system is formed. In a balance-of-power system, the essential norms of the system are clear to each of the state actors. In classical balance of power, the actors are exclusively states and there should be at least five of them. If an actor does not follow these norms, the balance-of-power system may become unstable. When alliances are formed, they are formed for a specific purpose, have a short duration, and shift according to advantage rather than ideology (Christensen & Snyder, 1990). The multipolar system refers to a system with more than two great powers; a system of distribution of power in which the great powers have almost equal

levels of cultural, military and economic influence (Kupchan, 1998).

There are different opinions as far as the stability of this kind of system is concerned. For example, Classical realists like Morgenthau (1967) and Carr (1964), suggest that compared to bipolar system, this system is more stable. This is because in unipolar systems, great powers can have more influence through coming together in alliances but this is not possible with the other kinds of systems. On the other hand, the issues of security of states emerge as a limitation of the unipolar system. In the anarchic system, the states seek survival and self-interest through balancing of power. This is the result of the need to survive. Looking from the perspective that the international systems are anarchic and are founded on self-help, the strongest units create the scene for the others and also for themselves. These are the major powers in the system (Waltz, 2000). Nevertheless, because of the intricacy of mutually guaranteed destruction situations, with weapons of mass destruction, multipolar systems may tend to be more stable compared to the other systems even in the analysis of neorealists. Neorealists argue that multipolarity creates a bias in favour of fluidity and uncertainty, which can lead only to instability and an increased likelihood of war (“anarchical” multipolarity). Liberals nevertheless argue that multipolar systems are characterized by a tendency towards multilateralism, as a more even division of global power promotes peace, cooperation and integration (“interdependent” multipolarity) (Heywood, 2011).

Although the United States seems to dominate the international system, the world today is a multipolar system as there are many great powers. In this kind of system, there are regular shifts of alliances. Various alliances have been formed in various situations such as during the United States war on terrorism where other western democracies joined in the cause. The alliance keep on changing until one of these two things occur. Either there is striking of a balance of power or there is no side that is willing to attack the other, or there is an attack by one side on the other due either to fear of possibility of a new alliance, or there is a possibility that it can overcome the other side. In this kind of system also, the global decisions are normally made for strategic purposes to uphold a balance of power instead of historical or ideological purposes.

A system of multipolarity increases rivalry in world politics, the reason being that many states of similar strength compete for power and influence. These states are often uncertain of other states’ intentions, which increase the probability of military action. Also, the power balance in this type of system is constantly changing, as a result of changing alliances. The classical understanding of multipolarity is inseparably linked with the idea of the need for a balance of power (Kaarbo & James, 2011). The revival of this concept in the mid-1990s was the

reaction of the rest of the world, especially major powers, to Washington's attempts to consolidate American hegemony. Today, this understanding is changing as the international environment itself has changed. The balance of power is a very complex phenomenon, since the definition of power has become less fixed. Power may be hard, soft, or economic, and states have it in different proportions. While lacking in one form of power, a state may possess other types of power. As a result, the balance of power becomes complex and nonlinear—if it is achievable at all. In addition, the globalizing economy dictates the ever-increasing interdependence of countries, which further distort the principles of a possible balance of power.

Multipolarity denotes the fundamental power structure in an international system dominated by several large powers, and is characterized by antagonism between these. Multipolarity may now be understood as a way of structuring the global international system where the basic constituent parts are no longer individual states but instead conglomerations of economic interests, united around the most powerful centers of attraction and economic growth.

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## 2. POLARITY IN HISTORY

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As William Shakespeare wrote: "All the world's a stage." And the world stage has many players upon it engaged in the great game of international politics. One of the oldest and universally acknowledged actors on the modern world stage is the state. While states are still the dominant actors on the world stage, they are by no means the only ones. Other groups of important players are the Inter Governmental Organizations, or IGOs, Nongovernmental organizations, also called NGOs and other transnational actors. States and other non state actors engage with one another in the international system. All states are considered to be sovereign, and some states are more powerful than others.

International relations has existed as long as states themselves. But the modern international system under which we live today is only a few centuries old. In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia established the modern international system (Schroeder, 1994; Hughes, 2000). At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the multi-polar European order was swept away by the Thirty Years War, a conflict that lasted from 1618 to 1648 and was triggered by religious, territorial and dynastic disputes over internal politics and balance of power. The Peace of Westphalia, which introduced the concept of state sovereignty and gave rise to the modern international system of states. Subsequently, "at least until World War II, the European state system politically and militarily remained a generally multipolar one" (Hughes, 2000, p.66).

For any understanding of the developments of world history in the past century, one needs to know about the

First World War, because it engendered a system shift from a Euro-centric World, Empires, Kings and Emperors and was the one event which shaped virtually everything that came after it. The political disruption surrounding World War I contributed to the fall of four venerable imperial dynasties—Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Turkey. The failure of balancing mechanisms to prevent World War I gave rise to "a surge of globalist idealism and search for international cooperation in the period following it" (Hughes, 2000, p.66). The first global political institution, the League of Nations was established. The main purpose of the League of Nations was to assist in the management of a multipolar balance of power. The League of Nations existed between 1920 and 1946 to promote world peace ultimately was unable to avert conflicts which would ultimately change human history and prevent the even deadlier World War II (Fisher, 1938).

The state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers (mainly United States, British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, and other Allied Powers) ended with the Treaty of Versailles (one of the peace treaties at the end of World War I) of 28 June 1919. The Treaty of Versailles however, did not bring peace to Europe but helped the rise of Adolf Hitler to power in Germany (Hitler, 2009), and many historians believe that it was one of the crucial causes of World War II (Breuer, 1999).

World War II served as a watershed between the multipolar world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the bipolar world of the Cold War. It ended the military dominance of European powers, but also ushered in an era in which Europe, heavily aided in its recovery by the United States so as to avoid another European war, became a major economic power. The war transformed the United States from an isolationist giant, with little interest in affairs outside the Western Hemisphere, to a modern superpower (White, 1999). World War II was the catalyst of fundamental changes in the structure of the international political system. Following the surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945 near the close of World War II, the uneasy wartime alliance between the United States and Great Britain on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other began to unravel. The victorious allies (joined by China) moved cooperatively to set up a multipolar base for the post-war international order. The United Nations was established. Each of them would sit in the Security Council and had veto power. Despite the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union, and the creation of the United Nations to settle international differences peacefully, the ensuing Cold War was a conceivable result of the war, which left two superpowers in its wake. The Soviet and American armies occupied Europe. The collapse of the European imperial system, the emergence of new states and a struggle between the Soviets and Americans for domination and influence defined the post-World War II confrontation. There were other features and phases of the

confrontation, but in the end, the Cold War was a struggle built on Europe's decline (Friedman, 2013).

By the end of World War II, the multi-polar international system characterized by the pursuit of the balance of power among great powers, in a way that none of them was strong enough to predominate over others, transformed in bipolarity. The bipolar world was dominated by two opposite great powers with strong economic, military, and cultural influence on their allies. This nearly equal amount of distribution of power between the United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) created an international system with no peripheries and with two different spheres of influence which resulted in stability for more than 40 years and assured peace between the two great powers and limited wars in the rest of the world. The world was divided between the United States and its allies which would include its two wartime enemies, West Germany and Japan and the Soviet Union and its affiliates which include East Germany and Eastern Europe; Communist China from 1949 to the Sino-Soviet rift of the late 1950s; and a number of states in the gradually emerging developing world of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

By 1948 the Soviets had installed left-wing governments in the countries of Eastern Europe that had been liberated by the Red Army. The Americans and the British feared the permanent Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and the threat of Soviet-influenced communist parties coming to power in the democracies of Western Europe. The Cold War had solidified by 1947-48, when U.S. aid provided under the Marshall Plan to Western Europe brought those countries under American influence and the Soviets had installed openly communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

At first, the United States was the only superpower but that exclusive position did not last beyond 1949 when the Soviet Union tested its own atomic bomb thus unleashing a nuclear arms race and forcing the world into a bipolar power structure for the next forty years (1949-89). By 1953, both sides had developed hydrogen bombs, which are much more destructive than atomic bombs. Both sides engaged in a race to match each other's new weapons. Nuclear capability of the two superpowers assured their superior positions. The result was a "balance of terror." Mutually Assured Destruction in which each side knew that the other side would itself be destroyed if it launched its weapons discouraged nuclear war. Still, the world's people lived in constant fear of nuclear cataclysm.

The world was locked in a dangerous cold war between the communist East and the capitalist West, which, occasionally, threatened the existence of the World, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), a confrontation that brought the two superpowers to the brink of war before an agreement was reached to withdraw the missiles. The two superpowers signed the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty of 1963, which banned aboveground nuclear weapons testing. But

the crisis also hardened the Soviets' determination to be attained military inferiority, and they began a build up of both conventional and strategic forces that the United States was forced to match.

In the course of the 1960s and '70s, the bipolar struggle between the Soviet and American blocs gave way to a more-complicated pattern of international relationships in which the world was no longer split into two clearly opposed blocs. A major split had occurred between the Soviet Union and China in 1960 and widened over the years, shattering the unity of the communist bloc. In the meantime, Western Europe and Japan achieved dynamic economic growth in the 1950s and '60s, reducing their relative inferiority to the United States. Less-powerful countries had more room to assert their independence and often showed themselves resistant to superpower intimidation or persuasion. The 1970s saw an easing of Cold War tensions as evinced in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) that led to the SALT I and II agreements of 1972 and 1979, respectively, in which the two superpowers set limits on their antiballistic missiles and on their strategic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons (Heywood, 2011). That was followed by a period of renewed Cold War tensions in the early 1980s as the two superpowers continued their massive arms build up and competed for influence in the Third World.

The Cold War began to break down in the late 1980s during the administration of Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev. President Gorbachev tried introducing Perestroika (Restructuring) and Glasnost (Freedom) to promote democracy and personal dignity. However, the Soviets were not prepared for this massive change and by early 1990s, the Union split into twelve Commonwealth of Independent States. The Russian economy, the major country that inherited the legacy, collapsed and lost international strategic power and standing. When communist regimes in the Soviet-bloc countries of Eastern Europe collapsed in 1989-90, Gorbachev acquiesced in their fall. The rise to power of democratic governments in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia was quickly followed by the unification of West and East Germany under NATO auspices. Political reforms in the Soviet Union led to the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the reunification of Germany. The end of Cold War rivalry, and the emergence of the USA as the world's sole superpower, created circumstances in which it was much easier to build consensus amongst major powers favouring intervention. In particular, neither Russia, then suffering from the political and economic turmoil of the collapse of the Soviet Union, nor China, in the early phase of its economic emergence, was strongly minded to block or challenge the USA, the major driving force behind most interventions.

An era ended when the Soviet Union collapsed on December 31, 1991. After its implosion, and the collapse of the bipolar order, American domination of the

international system appeared to be complete. Francis Fukuyama predicted it was the end of history, capitalism and liberal institutions had prevailed. A competing ideology no longer hindered a new world order under US dominance. “Democratic regimes flourished, the world economy was booming and most important, the US dominated in all spheres” (Confino, 2017). The US emerged as the only great power of a new unipolar international system (Kapstein, & Mastanduno, 1999). The well-defined hierarchy of power of the unipolar world allowed the US to remain largely unchallenged for many years and resulted in a relatively peaceful and stable world order (Mastanduno, 1997). This current stability, together with the precedent bipolar balance of power assured by the Mutual Assured Destruction, has been described as “the longest period without war among any of the major powers” (Ikenberry, 2002, p.150).

The Soviet Union had broken down, her military was ill-equipped, the economy was in shambles and the political system was just unfolding and unstable. The United States established itself as a super power. America’s economic dynamism enabled it to become pivotal in both regional and world politics (Brzezinski, 1997). The path was forged through continuous application of US’s growing power; hard and soft alike. America shaped its regional milieu to best serve security and material ends. During this period the US flexed its muscles in Europe (The Bosnia/ Serb war) the Middle East, the liberation Kuwait, the invasion of Iraq over Weapons of Mass Destruction and the invasion of Afghanistan after the 9/11 attack on the World Trade centre and the Pentagon. There was hardly a word from any other power.

Whilst many shifts in the international system accompanied the end of the Cold War and defined the post-Cold War world (Checkel, 1997), the post-Cold War world had two phases. The first lasted from December 31, 1991 to September 11, 2001. The second lasted from 9/11 until now. The initial phase of the post-Cold War world was built on the assumption that the United States was the dominant political and military power but that such power was less significant than before. The second phase still revolved around the three Great Powers—the United States, China and Europe—but involved a major shift in the worldview of the United States, which then assumed that pre-eminence included the power to reshape the Islamic world through military action while China and Europe focused on economic matters. (Friedman, 2013). There was the re-emergence of Europe as a massive, integrated economic power. The Maastricht Treaty was formulated, creating the structure of the subsequent European Union. Virtually unnoticed, China emerged from its cocoon, embraced capitalism and began to stretch its economic potentials to the rest of the World—dominating trade even in the developed countries and laying the foundation of an empire in Africa. Arguably,

China became the largest economy in the World with the largest military force. China, among others, began to grow at unprecedented speed until, of course, China became the largest economy in the world (measured by Purchasing Power Parity) and the second largest (in nominal terms) (Held, 2017). Russia, also lifted by oil wealth and a more stable political system, began to reassert itself as a world centre of power. Globally, Russia’s nuclear arsenal matches that of the US and she has increasingly asserted her claim to super power status—first with the seizure of Crimea, and the blatant, intervention in the War in Syria. Indeed, Russia, intervention in Syria (2015) marked the end of two decades of America Global suzerainty.

The world quickly moved from the unipolarity of that period to a new structure in which power is less defined, in consequence of which, the world has become more dangerous. Regional power struggles replaced the old East-West conflict as seen in the Persian Gulf War. This review of the modern state system, emphasizing the evolution of parity, illustrates the utility of describing the world in such terms.

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### 3. EMERGING POWER CENTERS

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World order, in the modern period, is being shaped by a number of multipolar trends. The most significant of these is the rise of emerging power centers. These are the new, or the would-be, great powers of the twenty-first century. Some states already have a significant measure of regional influence—Brazil and, possibly, Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela in Latin America; South Africa and Nigeria in Africa; Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East; and South Korea, Indonesia, Pakistan and Australia in Asia and Oceania. However, a range of other powers have acquired, or are acquiring, wider, and possibly global, significance. These include, most obviously, China, Russia and India, but also Japan and the European Union. “Between them, and together with the USA, these powers account for over half the world’s population, about 75% of global GDP and around 80 per cent of global defense spending” (Heywood, 2011, p.229).

Over the past two decades, the international order has undergone a qualitative change with a new discourse that emphasizes a rapidly changing global environment characterized by an ever-growing confluence of world-scale challenges gaining prominence. The challenges that range from Arab transitions, Asia rebalance, extremist movements, increasing terrorists and insurgents networks, rising political movements, transnational threats, irregular wars, and emerging centers of power are linked in inextricable ways and have far reaching implications on global politics (Beeson & Bisley, 2010). While anticipating the evolution of these challenges—propelled by various political, economic, legal, demographic, environmental, and technological factors—is a complex

task at best, it is clear that their individual and combined impacts are already shaping, and will continue to shape international relations.

### 3.1 Global Power Shift-Russia and China

It has become increasingly obvious that powers such as Russia and China are entering the world stage again. Russia won a war with Georgia in 2008, driving Georgian forces away from the separatist region of South Ossetia. The Kremlin asserted that it was protecting the interests of ethnic Russians in those areas. Since the coming to power of President Putin, the re-emergence of Russia as a global superpower has become a major political task for the Russian leadership (Macfarlane, 2006; Lo, 2015; Kanet, 2007). Russia's re-emergence as a great power has been evident in two major respects. First, since the sharp economic decline witnessed in the 1990s, associated with the "shock therapy" transition to a market economy, a notable revival has taken place. This has largely been driven by the substantial expansion of oil and gas production, itself made possible by the fact that, at 7 million square kilometers, the Russian land mass is significantly greater than any other country and is still largely unexplored, and by steadily rising commodity prices. Although its economy is in need of diversification and remains heavily dependent on world commodity markets, Russia has emerged as an energy superpower. This allows it, for instance, to exert influence over the states of Eastern Europe and beyond by controlling the flow and price of oil and gas resources. Second, fueled by growing economic confidence and strengthened nationalism, Russia has demonstrated a renewed appetite for military assertiveness, especially in relation to the so-called "near abroad". This was particularly demonstrated by the 2008 war with Georgia (Heywood, 2011).

From the Russian point of view, the new international order should be based on multipolarity, not unilateral U.S. domination, and with Russia as a leading center of global international relations (Więclawski, 2008). By his third term starting 2012, Putin began restoring Russia's strategic position. Russia has reinforced its military and asserted itself on the world stage with a forcefulness not seen since the Cold War, heightening tensions with the West (Legvold, 2016). Russia is reinvesting in its bases in the Arctic by building new ones, expanding old ones and deploying personnel to operate them. Russia has repeatedly entered or skirted the airspace of other countries, including the United States (Einhorn, Fairfield, & Wallace, 2015). The Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea had traditionally housed the Russian Black Sea naval fleet. Though part of Ukraine, the understanding was that Russia will have full access to the port of Sevastopol. But since 1994, Ukraine had been partnering with NATO and was inclined towards the European Union. Russia found this strategically untenable. Seeing the West committed heavily in Iraq and Syria, and using the pretext of pro-

Russian agitation in eastern Ukraine in 2014, Putin decided to annex the strategically located Crimea. This was the first major foreign policy success of the now outward-looking Putin. Since it annexed Crimea in March 2014, the incidents have grown in number and seriousness. In several regions, Russia has exerted its military authority and sown instability to preserve its influence.

Russia's role in the Syrian war escalated in September 2015 when it started airstrikes to support the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad (Trenin, 2016). Taking the world by surprise, Putin moved Russian fighters, surveillance aircrafts and helicopters in support of Assad in Syria, to take on Islamic State. Syria and Iraq were traditional friends and recipients of Russian arms. Russia had a diminished role in Middle East since the Soviet collapse. But Putin finally sensed an opportunity in the complex regional dynamics of the war against Islamic State. Most of Russia's airstrikes have been in rebel-held territory, rather than areas controlled by the Islamic State. Amnesty International has accused Russia of using cluster munitions and unguided bombs that it says have killed hundreds of Syrian civilians.

Russia gives preferential terms for natural gas imports to some countries, buying metallurgical facilities in Hungary and Poland, and buying rail terminals in Slovakia. Whereas, Russia has always been economically dysfunctional, she plays a significant role in the economies of former satellite states. The deals they make are not in their economic interests, but they increase Moscow's political influence substantially.

With the focus shifting to the Asia-Pacific region, Russia began warming up to China and relations were sealed through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Russia built a trans-Siberian oil pipeline for markets in China, Japan and Korea. President Putin is also a valued friend of India, and the original architect of the India-Russia strategic partnership. Putin's Russia maintains positive relations with all BRIC countries. Russia successfully hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics and Paralympics and will also host the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and its domination in Syria challenged Pax Americana. Not only did Putin get away with threatening Ukraine, a vital EU partner, he also seized an opportunity to fill the superpower vacuum, which the US left in the Middle East. While Putin's actions in Russia's own neighborhood, his annexing part of Georgia, his seizure of Crimea, his invasion of Ukraine, and his saber-rattling against the Baltics, were alarming, Russia's military success in Syria is staggering: Just a quarter of a century after the Soviet Union was rebuffed from the Middle East, Putin's sphere of influence stretches from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Putin assessed that Obama would not use military power to stop the Russian adventure in Ukraine. Ukraine was simply not threatening US national interests to an extent that

Obama would engage in a deadly war with Russia. At the same time, Putin knew that supporting Assad would mean gaining a vital foothold in the Middle East, and possibly cause a tremendous amount of immigrants flooding into Europe (Confino., 2017). Also, the US eroded its relationship with Egypt and opened the door for Russia to exert more influence there. Not surprising, the Kremlin was quick to jump at the opportunity to strengthen its ties with Egypt.

### 3.2 China

China is undoubtedly significant. Indeed, many predict that the twenty-first century will become the “Chinese century”, just as the twentieth century had supposedly been the “American century”. The basis for China’s great power status is its rapid economic progress since the introduction of market reforms in the mid-1970s under Deng Xiaoping (1904-97), the most dramatic phase of which began only in the 1990s (Hutton, 2007) . Annual growth rates of between 8% and 10% for almost thirty years (about twice the levels achieved by the USA and other western states) have meant that China became the world’s largest exporter in 2009, and in 2010 it overtook Japan to become the world’s second largest economy. By 2010, the Chinese economy was 90 times larger than it had been in 1978. With the world’s largest population (1.3 billion in 2007), China has a seemingly inexhaustible supply of cheap labour, making it, increasingly, the manufacturing heart of the global economy (Halper, 2010). The resilience of the Chinese economic model was further demonstrated by the ease with which it weathered the 2007-09 global financial crises. China also has a growing military capacity, being second only to the USA in terms of arms expenditure. China’s emerging global role is evident in the influence it now exerts within the WTO and G-20 and over issues such as climate change, as well as in its many strengthened resource links with Africa, Australia and parts of the Middle East and Latin America. An often neglected aspect of China’s growing influence is the extraordinary rise of its ‘soft’ power. This reflects both the significance of Confucianism in providing a cultural basis for cooperation in Asia, and the attraction of its anti-imperialist heritage in Africa and across much of the developing South (Heywood, 2011).

China’s policy has been to maximize trade and economic links while adopting a moderate, low-key approach in discussing human rights (Frolic, 1997) China’s economic growth might have normalized in the past few of years, but it is still catching up with the US with an alarming speed (Dellios, 2004-2005; Frolic, 1997) . Technologically, China has also proven to be a formidable adversary to the US. The US has accused China of hacking into US companies, and stealing vital information about technology and military inventions. Lastly, tensions in the South China Sea haven’t been solved (Confino., 2017). Even with the collapse of the

Cold War structure, and the clear military and economic superiority that rests with the remaining superpower, the United States still supports the prevailing state system and is sensitive to balance-of-power as well as concerting behaviour. Thus China may continue to exercise its role of superpower critic as the need arises. China is not alone in its balancing efforts, as the failure of the US to gain UN support for its war on Iraq in 2003 demonstrated. In this sense, the European Union (EU) and its member states, Russia and others act as both a concerting and balancing force. China, too, acted in concert with the US in its campaign against state-defying terrorism (Dellios, 2004-2005).

China provides an alternative to the US modernization model based on liberal democracy by having incorporated capitalism into a socialist polity. It has still to present an acceptable human rights face to the world (Ibid.). Currently, because of its sheer size and the dispatch with which it has moved from the Third World Economy to industrial powerhouse, China’s arrival as a power is considered inevitable (Jacques, 2012).

Clearly, China’s economic and military transformation challenges the balance of power that has existed in the region since World War II. China has demonstrated hegemonic intentions and that it has the clout to press its prerogatives in more local disputes with its Asian neighbours through its territorial claims in the South China Sea and in its actions against Taiwan. China is forging commercial relationships with African and Middle Eastern countries that can provide it natural resources. A more aggressive and expansionist policy may occur as China faces more pressure to provide food and resources for one quarter of the world’s population (Friedberg, 2011). If the current transformation continues, China will have, in the future, the economic and military might to threaten both the countries in the region and the West. The closer ties with Russia have already resulted in a strategic relationship that is designed to counter the influence of the US. How long this relationship will be is unknown. With its ongoing effort to develop a high technology economic system, China has set the foundation that will likely ensure that it is much stronger than the former Soviet Union and perhaps even more powerful than the United State.

### 3.3 North Korea

The international community is accustomed to eruptions of hostility from North Korea, but in recent times, the crisis has reached a level rarely seen since the end of the Korean War, in 1953. The crisis has been hastened by fundamental changes in the leadership on both sides. In the six years since Kim Jong-un assumed power, at the age of twenty-seven, he has tested eighty-four missiles—more than doubles the number that his father and grandfather tested. Just before Donald Trump took office, in January, 2017, he expressed a willingness to wage a “preventive”



war in North Korea, a prospect that previous Presidents dismissed because it would risk an enormous loss of life (*The New Yorker*, 2017). Trump is the fourth U.S. President to vow to put an end to North Korea's nuclear program. Bill Clinton signed a deal in which North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear development in exchange for oil and a civilian reactor, but neither side fulfilled its commitments. George W. Bush refused bilateral negotiations, then switched tactics and convened what are known as the Six-Party Talks. Obama first offered inducements, and later adopted a stonewalling policy called "strategic patience" (Ibid.).

On July 4, 2017, North Korea passed a major threshold when it launched its first intercontinental ballistic missile powerful enough to reach the mainland United States. In response, on July 21<sup>st</sup>, authorities in Hawaii announced that they would revive a network of Cold War-era sirens, to alert the public in the event of a nuclear strike. Trump expressed hope to boost spending on missile defense by "many billions of dollars." On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, after North Korea tested a nuclear weapon far larger than any it had revealed before (seven times the size of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki), the U.S. Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, warned that a threat to America or its allies would trigger a "massive military response." (Ibid.)

On August 5<sup>th</sup>, as punishment for the missile test, the U.N. Security Council adopted some of the strongest sanctions against any country in decades, blocking the sale of coal, iron, and other commodities, which represent a third of North Korea's exports. Despite the U.N. Security Council's passage of the eighth round of sanctions against North Korea in eleven years, the North Korean nuclear program still went on. President Trump condemned North Korea's claimed nuclear test in a series of tweets, calling Pyongyang's words and actions "hostile and dangerous" and saying "talk of appeasement will not work." Trump declared that "any more threats to the United States" will be met "with fire and fury like the world has never seen" whilst North Korea threatened to fire four missiles into the Pacific Ocean near the American territory of Guam, from which warplanes depart for flights over the Korean Peninsula. Trump in turn replied, in a tweet, that "military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely." (Ibid.)

"North Korea has conducted a major Nuclear Test. Their words and actions continue to be very hostile and dangerous to the United States," Trump tweeted, adding that Pyongyang "has become a great threat and embarrassment to China, which is trying to help but with little success." President Trump further tweeted, "South Korea is finding, as I have told them, that their talk of appeasement with North Korea will not work, they only understand one thing!" Summarily, the prospect of a nuclear confrontation between the United States and the most hermetic power on the globe had entered a realm of psychological calculation reminiscent of the Cold War era.

North Korea has evolved from being a regional menace to a global threat. North Korea's claim that it had tested a hydrogen bomb represented a new dimension of threat. Tensions have risen on the Korean Peninsula after the test. Seoul launched a series of live drills in response and boosted the deployment of a controversial US-made missile defense system, THAAD. The North Korean threat is a global one now and it combines nuclear weapons and missiles. In the past people believed it was a regional one, which is no longer the case. North Korea is not at the nuclear weapon stage, but it has some nuclear weapons, nuclear explosive devices and missiles.

Though Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program has captured more international attention, North Korea has also amassed a huge amount of artillery—some estimate as many as 8,000 artillery pieces—along the DMZ (Connelly, 2017). By 2020, experts believe that North Korea will have stockpiled enough nuclear material to build roughly 100 bombs. By 2020, these experts also believe that North Korea may have the capability to build and launch a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile that could reach the U.S. mainland (Broad, 2016; Reif, 2017).

President Trump's re-designation of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism along with Iran, Sudan and Syria may have dashed cautious hope in the region that talks and diplomacy would replace escalating tensions and bellicose threats. The move is to be followed by the highest level of sanctions. New sanctions are not likely to make any real difference on the already heavily penalized country. More likely, the designation will make diplomacy more difficult without increasing Washington's leverage with North Korea probably taking the discrediting as another reason to stick to its hard-line policy of developing and testing nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Managing a nuclear North Korea will require stronger missile defenses in South Korea, Japan, Alaska, and Hawaii, and more investment in intelligence to track the locations of North Korea's weapons, to insure a credible threat of destroying them. A nuclear-capable North Korea is a situation that is extremely dangerous. Because, at that point, any unexplained move that looks like it could involve preparations for a nuclear strike could precipitate an American preemptive response.

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## CONCLUSION: STATE OF THE WORLD

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This article discussed the concept of multipolarity and the implications it has on the international system. It is evident that the global system is changing at a very high rate. More and new great powers are emerging in the global arena and challenging the existing players. The economic power and global wealth are shifting from the west to the east. This is evident when looking at developing nations such as China. This casts the world as a multipolar system where there no single nation that will have all the power

and influence in the global system. The inauguration of President Trump -an egomaniacal America President who thinks that nuclear bombs are weapons of domination of American prowess rather than destruction; a psychopathic “rocket man” in North Korea, who thinks that launching ballistic missiles is like playing video games; leading to greater instability and conflagration, and intractable terrorism constitute the current period (Held, 2017) and undermine the predictability of the bipolar/Cold War era as well as the stability of almost three decades of unipolarism which explains the behavior of the world. We are thus entering a new era. An era tending towards formlessness.

There are several defining characteristics to this era we can identify. First, the United States is no longer the world’s dominant power in all dimensions. Second, Europe is returning to its customary condition of multiple competing nation-states. Third, Russia is re-emerging. As the European Peninsula fragments, Russia will do what she has always done: fish in muddy waters. China is managing its new economic realities. And fifth, a host of new countries and actors are emerging as global contenders (Friedman, 2013). Viewed from a ‘society of states’ perspective, that is, a system intent on preserving itself, contention is matched with concerting behaviour. Great powers, indeed global powers with unprecedented economic and security interdependence—must concert together as much as compete. The world no longer operates, if ever it did, as a zero-sum game. In this sense, China’s rise may be seen as an asset in world terms.

Western dominance has come to a clear halt with the shortcomings and failures of dominant elements of western economic and security policy over the last three decades. The west can no longer rule through power or example alone. The trajectory of change is towards a multipolar world, where the west is no longer predominant (Held, 2017). Both China and Russia individually as well as in cooperation with other powers are beginning to challenge United State’s unilateralism. These are evident signs of the emergence of a multipolar world.

The fact that the 21<sup>st</sup> century ushered in a state of increased interdependence (despite increasing tendency towards cooperation to contain terrorism) did not negate the principle of competition as a key driving force in international affairs. As competition intensifies, the question of how international actors can ensure their own interests and overall stability while experiencing globalization becomes increasingly relevant. To this degree we no longer live in a world composed of clearly specified friends and well-defined enemies, but rather in one where partnership has become a necessity. Second, the current world order is changing once again. We are, in an emerging multipolar era—an era that is likely to be more unstable. Paradoxically, it is likely to be fairer, because the arrogance of one will be contained by the actions of other great powers. This has been demonstrated

by the US becoming a supplicant at the altar of China in order to contain the threat posed by a nuclear-armed North Korea. Fortunately, nuclear conflagrations will remain largely impossible inspite of the bombast of Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, his “rocket man” friend in North Korea. The downside is that there might be an increase in non-nuclear conflicts around the world, anxieties over nuclear proliferation, more frequent tension between the United States and Russia on the one hand, and between the United States and China on the other. What these portend, is that in an emerging multipolar world, contestations among the great powers will be more frequent and the world would be more turbulent, if not more dangerous.

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