

In the Antechamber of a New Global Bipolarity

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Abstract: *This paper investigates the shifts in the international balance of power, that we attribute both to the weakening status of the US globally and to the rise of regional powers. The hypothesis of the study is that the world is currently experiencing a short stage of unimultipolarity, characterised by high instability, which is generated by the rise of new regional hegemonies, the changes at the top of power hierarchies, the diminishing gap between the only superpower of the moment, the US, and the rising powers. We point to the tensions caused by a shift in power and status from the global hegemon to the regional hegemonies, discussing its consequences in terms of: ideological allegiances, institutions and treaties evolution, development models legitimacy. The following decade will probably confirm the tendency for a return to a new type of bipolar order. Our analysis of the current stage of international relations reveals that we are now witnessing a double bipolarity: an American-Chinese economic bipolarity and an American-Russian military bipolarity.*

Keywords: *unipolarity, multipolarity, bipolarity, regional hegemonies, development models*

1. The regional turmoil boils over globally

Some 15-20 years ago, nothing seemed more solid and durable than the international order established at the end of the Cold War. America ruled supreme. If there was discontent, it was uttered under one's breath. Nowadays, challengers fight in the open, in official high fora and international bodies. Sir Robert Cooper, the distinguished British diplomat, says that international order used to be based either on hegemony or on balance². Empires were

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² Sir Robert Cooper, *The New Liberal Imperialism*, *The Guardian*, April 7, 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/07/1>.

hegemonic, and while they promoted order, they did not promote change, which finally led to their fall. Later, international order was based on balance, the co-existence of significant centres of power. Military confrontation was the solution when the balance of power was lessened. During the Cold War, the bipolar order was an expression of the confrontation between the two non-European superpowers. As early as 1964, Kenneth Waltz welcomed the bipolar world system as the most stable one; because states were more secure, ideology had great impact. Named by John Lewis Gaddis “the long peace”, the period after WWII was characterized by stability in Great Power alliance configurations: “with only two world powers there are no peripheries”³. In bipolarity, these predictable alliances alongside shared strategic interests and stratified hierarchy translate into diminished status ambiguity⁴ and increased legitimacy, which makes it unlikely for violence to occur. In this sense, bipolarity is easier to maintain than multipolarity.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, for the first time in modern history, one single state held most of the global cultural, economic and military power. The predictions of a multipolar world, with centres of power in Japan, Germany (and Europe at large), China and a weakened Russia turned out to be inaccurate. The key question in the debates about the “unipolar order” or “unipolar moment” related to the sustainability and closeness this order could bring.

One of the first authors to speak about the unipolar moment, Charles Krauthammer, also hailed the upcoming multipolarity. “The most striking feature of the post-Cold War world is its unipolarity. No doubt, multipolarity will come in time. In perhaps another generation or so there will be great powers coequal with the United States, and the world will, in structure, resemble the pre-World War I era. But we are not there yet, nor will we be for decades. Now is the unipolar moment”⁵.

Debates continued up to the end of that decade, when Samuel Huntington already spoke about uni-multipolarity. It was a sign that unipolarity had reached its limits. “Global politics has thus moved from the bipolar system of the Cold War through a unipolar moment – highlighted by the Gulf War – and is now passing through one or two uni-multipolar decades before it enters a truly multipolar 21st century”⁶. Later studies investigated whether American unipolarity would be consistent with a multilateral, rule-based order. John Ikenberry named the political order produced by the US a liberal hegemony, dominated by both liberal and imperial logics, just as Great Britain in the 19th century. But unlike the empire, governing the imperial order as an outsider, the hegemon operates within the system it has created, with the help of rules and institutions. The analysts were well aware of the dangers that unipolarity raised, among which the problem of governance: “without bipolar or multipolar competition it is not clear what disciplines or renders predictable US power”⁷. The growing

³ Kenneth Waltz, *The stability of a bipolar world*, Daedalus, 1964, p. 882.

⁴ William Wohlforth, *Unipolarity, status competition, and great power war*. *World politics*, 61(01), 2009.

⁵ Charles Krauthammer, *The Unipolar moment*, *Foreign Affairs*, November 1990, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/art>.

⁶ Samuel Huntington, *The lonely Superpower*, *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 1999, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1999-03-01/lonely-superpower>.

⁷ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberalism and empire: logics of order in the American unipolar age*, *Review of International Studies*, 30(04), 2004, p. 623.

global economic interdependence already announced the need for coordinated economic policies. Only several years later, Ikenberry raised the question of governance once more, this time with reference to the whole world: "How the liberal order is to be governed – that is, the location of rules and authority – is the great unresolved, contested, and evolving issue of liberal internationalism"⁸.

Almost two decades have passed since the dawn of the 21st century, a time marked by important events. First was the decade which preceded the crisis, with emerging states developing at remarkable rates, several times higher than those of the developed countries. This not only decreased the gap between the two groups, but occasioned a transfer of power from the developed to the emerging world. The global order started making way for regional orders. The emerging states became increasingly important in the world economy. In the early days of this century, the BRIC share in global GDP (based on PPP) was 38%; by the end of the century's first decade, it had increased to 50%⁹. The crisis advanced these prefiguring tendencies, especially because it attacked primarily the developed world. Not only did the developed world experience the strongest recession, but the comeback was much slower than initially estimated. For instance, the EU has not yet reached the pre-crisis GDP levels. These past years, says Martin Wolf, have clarified the various stages of developed world recovery after the Great Recession of 2008-2009. "The US is years ahead of the Eurozone in its recovery and is, in consequence, at a different stage of the monetary policy cycle"¹⁰.

Our hypothesis is that the current stage of uni-multipolarity is a short one, characterised by instability, a lot of convulsions and low-intensity earthquakes, which encourage the feeling that the world is characterised by geopolitical indiscipline. The above-mentioned phenomena are generated by the rise of new regional hegemony, the changes at the top of power hierarchies, the diminishing gap between the only superpower of the moment, the US, and the rising powers. A closer look at the processes of hierarchy clarification taking place in the following decade reveals that there is a tendency for a comeback to a *new type of bipolar order*. The pervasive perception announced by both Krauthammer and Huntington, that we are heading towards full multipolarity, with centres of power quite similar in scope and influence, is far from being confirmed. Multipolarity has hardly come into being; against this background arises a new bipolarity. In the second part of the following decade, two important powers will prevail: the US, the leader of the developed world and Western hemisphere, and China, the leader of the emerging world and the Eastern hemisphere. We are now in the antechamber of a new bipolarity. We would even go as far as to say that we are now witnessing a double bipolarity: an American-Chinese economic bipolarity and an American-Russian military bipolarity.

This bipolarity is supported by economic developments which are either verifiable or forecasted by specialized fora on a 20-year period. This comes to confirm the idea that

⁸ G. John Ikenberry, Liberal internationalism 3.0: America and the dilemmas of liberal world order. *Perspectives on Politics*, 7(01), 2009, p. 72.

⁹ More data on this topic can be found in Paul Dobrescu, *A century-long decade. The century of the emerging world*, Comunicare.ro Publishing house, 2013.

¹⁰ Martin Wolf, The challenges of central bank divergence, *Financial Times*, December 9, 2015.

international trade thrives in bipolar, rather than multipolar systems¹¹, as political alliances evolve into economic cooperation.

A less talked-about component, although important for supporting evolution towards bipolarity, is dissatisfaction, even discontent, of people around the world with frequent international conflicts and their subsequent instability, which are associated with the present stage of uni-multipolarity. A bird's eye view of the world would show the regional turmoil. The global has decreased in importance. One of the reasons is that globalization may have been launched by developed countries, the US especially, but the real beneficiaries were the emerging countries. Turmoil is now regional. The clash between spheres of influence and global order is reproduced everywhere. What is new is that *regional turmoil boils over globally*. We have to go to the root of this situation, that generates uncertainty and distrust in citizens.

In what follows we will discuss the causes of the dramatic changes in international order, which we attribute both to the weakening status of the US globally and to the rise of regional powers. We conduct an in-depth analysis of the evolution and global implications of American exceptionalism after the Cold War. We will also point to the tensions caused by a shift in power and status from the global hegemon to the regional hegemons, discussing its consequences in terms of: ideological allegiances, evolution of institutions and treaties, and development models legitimacy.

2. “Monroe doctrine” vs. “Sinatra doctrine”

The current international order was projected at the end of the Cold War, when US dominance was unchallenged in the economic, military, cultural power spheres. In projecting a new type of international order, the US relied both on its own power and on the demands of the rising process of globalization. In the new context, international order served as a cloak wrapping the whole world. Its pillars were not states or regions, but rather *institutions and rules*. After the 2008-2009 crisis, this cloak symbolising international order started wearing thin and tearing apart in a series of important points: Eastern Europe (the Ukrainian space), the South China Sea and, finally, the violent outbursts in the Middle East, a meeting point of “the worlds of today”, with their accompanying interests and values, all overlapping with a tight knot of ethnic, religious and territorial complications. The order still preserves its image of a protective cloak over the world, but its warp is less resistant and, in some places, threadbare, about to burst under the pressure of rising regional powers.

This weakening of international order must be related not as much to the weakening of the global hegemon, but to the decrease in the gap between the current single superpower and its main competitors. In this context, it is legitimate to ask whether the US, the country having 5% of world population and 22% of world GDP, will be able to project its vision at any moment and in any place in the world. This is one track of analysis. Another important change needs to be taken into account, which has been little acknowledged and seldom

¹¹ See Joanne Gowa, Edward Mansfield, Power politics and international trade. *American Political Science Review*, 87(02), 1993; Joanne Gowa, Bipolarity, Multipolarity, and Free Trade. *American Political Science Review*, 83(04), 1989.

debated. The international order instituted after 1990 was projected as a global order, with few local pillars. The new order claimed to express not the interests of a state or of regions, but of the world in its entirety, although this was a “borderless world”. Its networks undoubtedly carried interests (mainly the interests of the global hegemon), but they were well hidden by that global reach claimed by the respective international order. This is the main contentious subject between the current order and the order of the rising powers: international order is territory-bound.

The current order, say the rising powers, is not really a global order: it is the order dictated by American interests, wrapped in global rhetoric. And because the US no longer has the same power and prestige, it appeals to what is called “regime change”, in order to globalize its own values and options; it is the concrete way in which globalization is used in order to spread a sort of “political Americanisation” around the world, restricting diversity. Let us imagine that this is a dispute over cultural values, for instance, or better still, over political values, more exactly models of political organisation chosen by various states. Regional hegemony foresees that this move could be aimed at them in the long run. In the words of Gideon Rachman, “Beijing and Moscow seem to genuinely fear they could fall prey to US-backed regime change”¹². Because the image of international order after the end of Cold War is that of global order, which does not serve a power’s particular interests and is in everybody’s service, the underground confrontation is fierce: which of the competitors can label the other as a “revisionist” of current order. The US believes that Russia’s and China’s territorial claims are revisionist attempts aimed at global international order, while the two countries accuse the US of undermining international order, sponsoring “regime change” in various regions of the world.

When we talk about the international order, *the confrontation between various readings* seems stronger and more intense than the economic or military competition, although the sound of weapons is increasingly audible. The fragmentation of approaches is most visible in the Middle East. After the tragic events in Paris we expected these divergent approaches to come together under one single approach that would trigger a prompt joint response to ISIS danger. According to *The Economist*, during President François Hollande’s visit to Washington, who was seeking to discuss the conditions of an alliance, or at least of rapid, significant response, the American president declared: “We have the right strategy and we’re going to see it through”¹³. In other words, the wished-for alliance took the form of intensified cooperation; whether it is also increasingly efficient we do not know. In this way, it is confirmed that ISIS ascent is based on the lack of correlated response from the current powers, and the weaknesses of multipolarity in its present form.

We can legitimately ask whether the accusations and fears of potential regional hegemony have any real support. We cannot answer without referring to two focal processes: the uniqueness of the period following the Cold War (“the unipolar moment” we talked about) and the influence of this moment over American exceptionalism.

In the 90s, something happened that many hoped would not happen; as any superpower at its highest, America was all too tempted to “institutionalize its success”, which diminished

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ In Russia’s defeat he trusts, *The Economist*, November 28, 2015.

its capacity to adapt to a diverse world, where joint options coexisted with different values, most of which could be tracked down to the development stages of those particular regions and zones, to the cultural contexts in which they had evolved for years and, sometimes, for centuries; at that moment, America became a sort of “imperial republic”, ready to forget or fail to remember much of Claude Levi Strauss’ historical verdict: “We can see the diversity of human cultures behind us, around us, and before us”¹⁴.

This is how a paradox was born: the world came to the meeting with the US carrying its worries, fears, particularities, and the US, instead of trying to give the right answers, as it had after WWI and II, looked at this diversity through the lenses of the model followed by the American nation; moreover, it started judging and evaluating this diversity by contrasting it with the American model and its overt or implicit values and options. When these concerns and troubles became part of the equation configuring Washington’s strategic objectives, they were examined and solved according to the American model. American exceptionalism – characterised by the universal relevance of American ideals and the duty to promote them (“the missionary zeal”, in Kissinger’s words) became prominent again at the beginning of this century. The latest of American victories over the Cold War occasioned not only over evaluation and overconfidence, but a type of absolutism, which is generally hard to acknowledge in politics: *America’s own way became the only way*. This led to rigidity in both US discourse and international behaviour. This is how we can explain President Bill Clinton’s position in a meeting with the Chinese president. According to John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, the American president told Jiang Zemin directly that he was “on the wrong side of history”¹⁵. We wonder what this encounter would look like nowadays. History is at times cynical, at times cruel, at times both.

The perspective given by the emerging powers represents a real gain: there cannot be an international order without taking into consideration territorial units (regions), their interests, their balance and dynamics. The real “building blocks” of international order are represented by regions, their integration and stability. There cannot be a stable international order if regions are marred by conflicts. In their attempt to forward regions as the pillars of international order, the emerging countries scale down international order to a process of *cohabitation of spheres of influence*. While one of the most important pillars of international order is gained, another one, confirmed by the order instituted after the Cold War, is lost. The idea of sphere of influence involves the idea of regional hegemon and pre-eminence of its rights in the regions. In the long run, what regional hegemons hold against the global hegemon could well be used by states in the region against the dominant regional power. More precisely, what China held against the US about its dominant presence in the Pacific could be used by Vietnam against China. Whether we like it or not, the right of a national state to decide on its own future is trespassed.

That is the reason why the US opposes the comeback of the vision shifting the weight of the international political order to a regional level. The main objection is related to the limitation that “spheres of influence” impose on the right of any country to decide depending on its political and security interests and options. Tony Blinken, former Deputy National

¹⁴ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Race and History*, UNESCO Paris, 1952, p. 49.

¹⁵ John Micklethwait, Adrian Wooldridge, *The Fourth Revolution. The Global Race to Reinvent the State*, Allen Lane, 2014, p.142.

Security Advisor of the US and current Deputy Secretary of State, made this point clear as early as 2009: “We will continue to reject the notion of spheres of influence, and we will continue to stand by the principle that sovereign democracies have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own partnerships and alliances”¹⁶. This assertion was afterwards quoted in various contexts, especially after the evolutions in Ukraine over the last two years. It is clear that the acknowledgement of spheres of influence would not have presented Ukraine with the possibility to make its own decisions; neither could Vietnam or the Philippines, if we have in view the situation in the South China Sea, claimed insistently by Beijing. The appearance of these new tensions between the global hegemon and the regional hegemons and the similarity of the situations have hastened the debate on international order. In fact, the American dignitary compares “what China is doing with those islands to what Russia did with Crimea”¹⁷.

In these increasingly heated debates on international order, we can decipher two distinct levels. One is historical. The US feels it has a historical vulnerability, because some time ago it launched “the Monroe doctrine”, which postulated the idea that the Americas represented the US’ natural sphere of influence. That is the reason why John Kerry recently declared in a speech at the Organization of American states: “The era of the Monroe doctrine is over” and even spoke about “a major paradigm shift: the overcoming of the paternalism involved in the Monroe doctrine and its canonical statement “America for the Americans”¹⁸. In other terms, the US will support each people’s right to decide on its own future. Which, said Gideon Rachman¹⁹, is nothing but what a former Soviet diplomat called the “Sinatra doctrine”²⁰. The “Sinatra doctrine” was the new Soviet foreign policy doctrine during Mikhail Gorbachev, named after the famous Sinatra song, *My Way*. It was thus suggested that any country could choose its own path.

From a historical perspective, we can notice striking similarities. We can find the same confrontation in economics, between liberalism and mercantilism. The rising powers embraced, without exception, mercantilism as an economic doctrine; they protected their own market to facilitate growth. This is what Great Britain did when it fought against the Low Countries, and then later the US and Germany. Once they reached “the top”, they pushed away the “mercantilist” ladder which had helped them reach the rooftop, so that other competitors would not be able to reach them. And, all of a sudden, they became liberal and anti-mercantilist. This conflict is now similarly reproduced. When the US was rising, it embraced “the Monroe doctrine”. Now, when the US is on the rooftop, the doctrine is obviously not good. These two approaches do not necessarily express attachments to principles, but two distinct classes of interest. It is not the principle which prevails, but

¹⁶ Merle David Kellerhals Jr., Biden Visits Ukraine, Georgia for talks, *IIP Digital*, July 20, 2009.

¹⁷ Mark J. Valencia, The issue of US ‘neutrality’ in South China Sea disputes, *The Straits Times*, August 11, 2015.

¹⁸ Federico Finchelstein, Pablo Piccato, Latin America sees straight through John Kerry’s Monroe speech, *The Guardian*, November 21, 2013.

¹⁹ Gideon Rachman, China, Russia and the “Sinatra doctrine”, *Financial Times*, November 25, 2014.

²⁰ The term as such was used for the first time by the spokesman of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of the Soviet Union, Ghennadi Gherasimov, in October 1989. Afterwards, in an interview, he said: “We now have the Frank Sinatra doctrine. He had a song, I Did It My Way. So each country decides on its own road to take”. Asked what would be Moscow’s position if a socialist country would opt out of communism, he answered: “political structures must be decided by people who live there”.

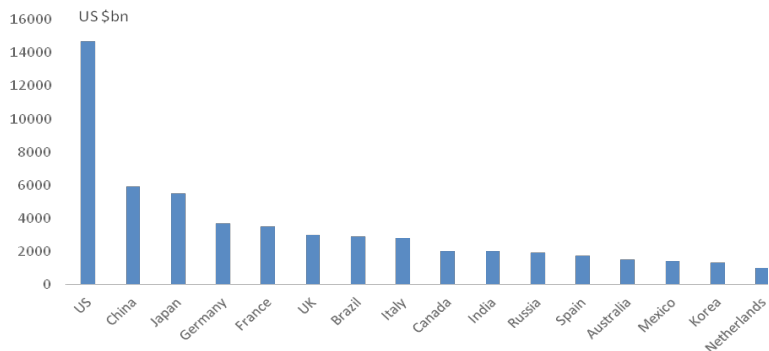
interests. There are two distinct approaches fed by distinct interests. And *the clash of interests contains enormous risk potential*. Moreover, the emerging powers can invoke the historical trail of “the global hegemon”: what we do is what you did. This can only feed conflict and increase confusion globally.

3. This is not the age of the rising power, but the age of the rising world – the emerging world!

How could we represent more intuitively the current state of international order? It very much resembles those small earthquakes preceding or following a major earthquake, which occurs once in a while. Taken separately, they do not raise issues, because generally they do not endanger the communities’ lives. Yet, because they take place repeatedly, they lead to unbearable insecurity. Psychologically, they are extremely nerve-racking, because they feed the sensibility created by the major earthquake, or by conflicts, strains, and threats. Faced with this disorder, people are tempted to regret the orderly bipolar world.

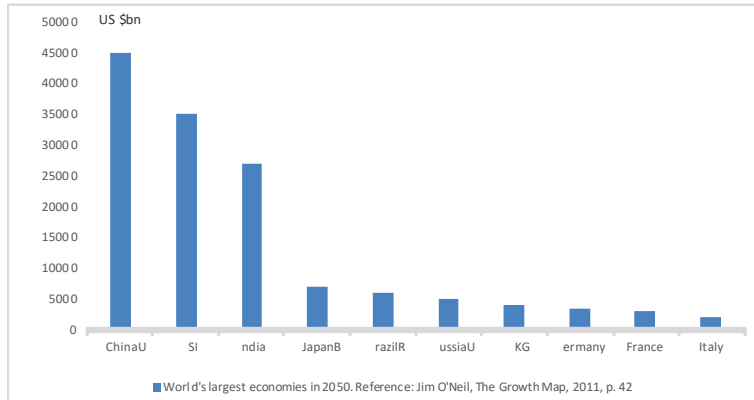
We can anticipate the reader’s question: which is “the major earthquake”? It is this spectacular change in the hierarchy “at the top” of our world. A possible objection is that these changes are still a decade or more away; the international order we are talking about is the one we are now living. We cannot evaluate today’s evolutions by tomorrow’s standards. Changes in economic hierarchy are ongoing. It is not necessary for this evolution to come to an end for “small earthquakes” to take place. The rising powers have started to assert their interests, sometimes discontentedly. This is where small earthquakes take place. The rising powers have started to object the fact that the institutions of the current international order do not acknowledge their new status. They feel entitled to have a decisive word to say in their region. These are the *new hegemon*s, claiming their rights. This is what feeds the increasingly visible tension between the global power and the regional powers, the global hegemon and the regional hegemon

Generally, things are read through the equation between the current superpower, America, and the rising superpower, China. Although real, it poorly represents the magnitude of the transformation. Let us take a close look at the world’s economic hierarchy as it looked in 2010 and will look in 2050.



■ World's largest economies in 2010. Reference: Jim O'Neil, *The Growth Map*, 2011, p41

This is not the age of the rising power, but the age of the rising world – the emerging world.



The graph above reflects a type of evaluation of the 2050 evolutions. According to *The Economist*, in 2050, no G7 country except the US will qualify for the first 7 positions, which will be filled by India, Brazil, Russia, Indonesia and Mexico²¹. This evaluation must be taken prudently; in fact, prudence is what should characterise any analysis of the world in 2050 or in five years' time. Yet we cannot question the broad tendencies. Undoubtedly, in the following two or three decades, two powers will dominate the world economically: the US and China. Starting with the middle of the next decade, China will take the leading position, by GDP power. In the words of Joseph S. Nye Jr., when we refer to this world's superpowers, we need to take into consideration other elements of power, such as military and cultural (soft) power²². But our aim here is not to evaluate these two powers' strengths and weaknesses, but to show that these powers' competition for domination risks leading to conflicts which must not be under evaluated.

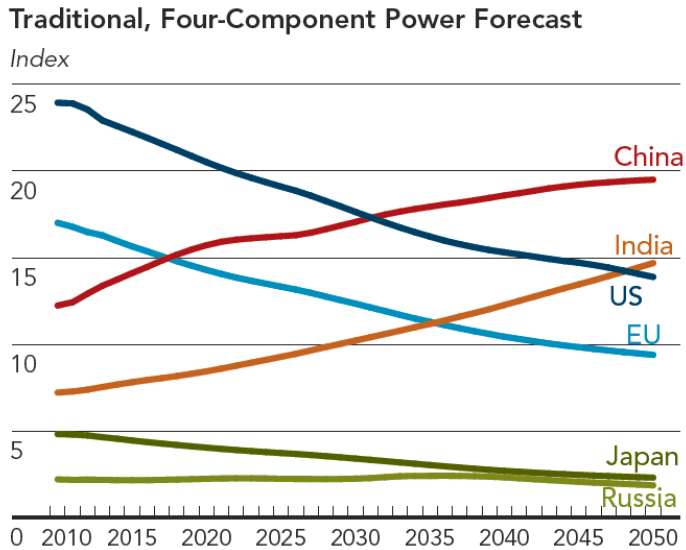
Obviously, China is the rising power. Its traits are increasingly those of a regional hegemon and it fights to get the rights going with this position. What we call the South China Sea conflict is an instance of the broader conflict between global order and regional order, the interests of the global hegemon and the interests of the regional hegemon. Things are not vastly different in the Ukrainian conflict, which is the expression of the encounter between the EU's Eastern Partnership and the tendency of "the Eurasian Union" to establish an area of Russian influence among most of the former Soviet Union. Eventually, the Ukrainian conflict involves Russia and the US.

We are speaking about the rise of East Asia or the rise of the emerging world. Behind the two processes is China, a beacon, a rising power having about 50% of the emerging world's GDP and approximately the same percentage of East Asia GDP. For us, it is important to underline that in the world economic hierarchy two powers stand out. China has overtaken

²¹ Simon Cox, *The age of emerging markets*, in Daniel Franklin, John Andrews (eds.), *The Economist: Megachange. The world in 2050*, 2012, p. 157.

²² Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Is the American Century over?*, Polity, 2015.

the American PPP and in the first part of the next decade it will have the higher nominal GDP. The following graph is based on four indicators, a complex calculation made by specialists at CIA's National Intelligence Council. China's economy will increase, while the US's will decrease. Yet, between now and 2040 the two powers will dominate categorically. No competitor will get close until 2040, when India will aim at a top position in the world economic hierarchy.



Source: *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, a publication of the National Intelligence Council, <https://globaltrends2030.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/global-trends-2030-november2012>

The events on the international stage show us that the two superpowers are getting ready for the role they are about to play. For China, the real priority is “Asia first”. China aims at making Asia grow. A very important argument is that China’s huge internal market is opened primarily for countries in Asia, in this order: Japan, South Korea, South-East Asia and only then, Germany. In its turn, the US promoted two initiatives aimed at gathering the developed world’s energy around Washington: the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the former already reached, the latter still under negotiation. Yet the Trans-Pacific does not comprise China, a fact which opened the American initiative to criticism. The second agreement seems to exclude China and Russia from various types of cooperation and exchange, which made Hans-Werner Sinn label the agreement as an “economic NATO”²³.

More significant is the interpretation of the situation in Ukraine by George Friedman. We have got used to reading what is happening in Ukraine through the lens of the right to self-determination, which is absolutely valid. Yet the American analyst integrates the situation in Ukraine into a broader, global, geopolitical approach. In his vision, this is the strategic priority of American foreign policy: after WWI and II and the Cold War, the US foreign

²³ Hans-Werner Sinn, Free-Trade Pitfalls, www.project-syndicate.org, June 24, 2014.

interests focused on the relationship between Germany and Russia. United, they represent the only force that can endanger the US; America's main purpose is to make sure this would never happen²⁴.



The buffer zone (*Intermario*), presented by George Friedman

In this context, the American specialist reassesses the idea of the former Polish Prime-Minister, Józef Klemens Piłsudski, to create a buffer zone represented by the territory among the seas (*intermario*), between the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea. This is the solution preferred by the US, in its attempt to hinder the union of German capital and technology with Russian resources and capacities. "Whoever can tell me what Germans are going to do is going to tell me about the next 20 years of history"²⁵.

4. The real confrontation is between development models!

Henry Kissinger's remark is quite significant: "Every international order must sooner or later face the impact of two tendencies challenging its cohesion: either a redefinition of legitimacy or a significant shift in the balance of power"²⁶. It is quite clear that the impact on the international order has lately come from the pillar represented by the shift in the balance of power. This shift is mainly embodied by China's ascent. Kissinger differentiates

²⁴ George Friedman, *Speech to The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, October 9, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4-hSBRs4Qw&feature=youtub.be>.

²⁵ *Idem*.

²⁶ Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*, Allen Lane, 2014, p. 365.

between legitimacy and the shift in the balance of power, in order to better highlight them. They are distinct but highly interdependent, at the same time. Economic growth over a long period of time, resulting in a country's rise to world power, must give some legitimacy to that country and its development track. We usually associate legitimacy solely with the existence of democratic procedures for appointing representatives, which criterion holds true. But we have to admit that legitimacy needs to be associated with performance, that economic performance represents an increasingly significant pillar, similar in importance with the respect for democratic procedures and values. An inefficient ruling body elected democratically loses legitimacy. And this is true whether it is openly acknowledged or not, debated or not.

We need to clarify these issues in order to better highlight the complexity of the conflict between the global order and regional order, as well as the nature of the new bipolarity. International order is challenged not just because certain countries have developed more rapidly, unsettling the global balance of power. Among those challenged are values and options associated not as much with respecting democratic values, but with performance and the way *a society's organisation contributes to its development*. In other words, these issues are rather associated to what Kissinger calls legitimacy. Global order was established by the West starting from the premise of the universal character of democratic values and options.

Many Asian countries have assimilated these values *in a new configuration*. They do not deny the importance of democratic life, but the most important value for them is development, which is the lens they employ to read current trends. In this context, they attach a different significance to the state, turning it into the main instrument of development. Most emerging countries, especially Asian ones, believe that *modernization precedes and establishes democratization*. They do not deny the value of democracy, but perceive it as a result. This result needs to be built and well settled in order to last. Both democracy and freedom need certain social, economic and cultural conditions to be able to assert themselves. *The result must be judged together with the process leading to it*. We must admit that here we can identify a strategic option. Which are the options of a country that started the modernization and development process much later? The economic success of the Asian countries is also interpreted as a *validation* of their development model. Consequently, *the conflict between global order and regional order is, implicitly, a conflict between Western and emerging countries development models*.

Most analysts agree that in the last decades there has been a geopolitical shift from the Western coast of Eurasia to the Eastern coast. This is a cyclical movement: after straying for several centuries, power returns to Asia. It is most instructive to ask ourselves what kind of vehicle history selected when it decided to return to Asia. It was the same it employed in Europe, *the development vehicle*, adapted to national circumstances and readapted to regional and global circumstances. The focal point of a supercontinent does not move because of strains and efforts and commitments. Effort and determination must always benefit from support from a *model* which rearranges the elements of development in a matrix which can be better adapted to the demands of a certain stage in historical evolution. Eastern Asian states have postulated development as a fundamental value in a time when the developed

world seemed to abandon or, in any case, lose interest in this main objective. Lately another dimension of this process has become visible.

For instance, John L. Campbell and John A. Hall²⁷ say that many of the positions of developed states on deindustrialization and the overstated importance of trade in economic growth have rather been “export goods”; in reality, neither Great Britain or the US privatized as much as they pretended, while the huge funds dedicated to technological research and innovation were the definite proof of a preoccupation for building the true vectors of development nowadays.

In the same time, the Asian countries invested the state with the responsibility to carry out these strategic options. This is how they created a new binomial state-development for advancing their own evolutions. It is important to underline that without this coordination body, the Asian countries could not have modernised, could not have used the potential represented at a certain time by the cheap labour force, could not have opened so timely and decisively “the lock of the relationship between technology and development”, and could not have promptly achieved their full potential represented by globalization.

When talking about the economic evolution of East Asia and China we need to highlight the correlation between economic growth and demographic growth, which is generally overlooked. In history, no significant economic power could rise without positive demographic evolution. This is the example of France in the time of Louis the XIV (at the time, the country had close to 40% of the population in Europe), this is how Germany and Russia grew in the second part of the 19th century and how the US developed in the first part of the 20th century. Asia has always had significant demographic growth. The population has become a crucial factor in the economic growth nowadays. This time round, the population has benefited from strategic guidance and can turn its assets to good advantage. A cardinal aspect is rarely mentioned: the most important factor impregnating China’s potential is this country’s development strategy. There was a time when cheap labour force represented an element of primitive accumulation of capital (the existence of cheap labour force made production cheap, and, as a result, more competitive). Behind China’s ascent there is a lot of human suffering and sacrifice, but at least they were rendered valuable through the spectacular rise of the country.

Within this strategy, the orientation which characterises above all the rise of East Asia (China, in particular) is the option for industry and manufacturing. When the developed world gave up industry and dethroned manufacturing in favour of delocalization, China betted on its capacity to transform industry and use its modernization force. This is how this country became “the workshop of the world”, after Britain had fulfilled this role in the 19th century, and the US, in the 20th century. We do not wish to dwell on the virtues industrialization has always had, but to underline that the developed world’s underestimation of this field was coupled with the overestimation of the finances’ role (a process known as financialization), with the tendency to speculate, to “make money out of nothing”. That is why the recent crisis met with a robust answer in Asia (and the negative effects were limited), and with a porous economy in the developed world (which made the impact devastating).

²⁷ John L. Campbell, John A. Hall, *The World of States*, Bloomsbury, London, 2015.

Asia did not favour the supranational, but the intensification of the relationship between *sovereign entities*. It created the famous regional production chains, which is another form of integration, as a way to increase efficiency and adapt to the particularities of global production. In fact, if we think about it, the result is, if not the same, strikingly similar to that of the supranational model; the fundamental difference is that the Asian model preserves the actors' identity and maintains strategic decisions at the level of states. In this way, East Asia reconfigured a new development equation and in an impressive effort (impressive because of the energy of the engagement, and the intelligence that guided it) accelerated the translation we talked about: the geopolitical shift from the West to the East. In consequence, East Asia became not only the most dynamic region of Eurasia, but *the very epicentre of global development*.

Two powers take centre stage in international economy: the US and China. Important analysts (Henry Kissinger, John Mearsheimer etc.) find similarities between the rise of Germany in the 19th century, the rise of the US in the 20th century and the rise of China nowadays. "Germany's emergence posed such a challenge to the system in the twentieth century in Europe, triggering two catastrophic wars from which Europe never recovered"²⁸. "China's rise is unlikely to be tranquil", says John Mearsheimer. "It will try to dominate Asia the way the United States dominate the Western Hemisphere"²⁹. In many respects, the analogy is justified. But this time the situation is more complex. The rise of China takes place at the same time with the rise of a whole world. The process of Chinese power development symbolises in a way the processes of East Asia development, if we place the rise of the emerging world geographically and bring out the countries with remarkable economic dynamics. This not only amplifies the magnitude of the accomplishment, but increases its attractiveness as development path.

Consequently, this is not only a competition between two powers, but between two development models, which propose two different evolution tracks for modernizing countries. China speaks openly about itself, but its spectacular rise speaks indirectly for those who would want to benefit from this evolution, even partially. For us to have an image about the extent of this confrontation, it is enough to mention that in 2050 Asia will contribute to approximately 50% of the global GDP. We will be speaking about Asia and the rest of the world. This makes us understand beyond doubt that the main confrontation in the future years will take place in the Pacific. That is the reason why the US claims it is a Pacific power and has shifted the interests of its foreign policy towards this ocean. This is where history is happening nowadays.

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²⁸ Henry Kissinger, *op cit.*, p.367.

²⁹ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2014, p.368.

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