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Emerging World Order After the Russia-Ukraine War

Leading Thinkers Reflect on Post-War Global Power and Authority

Edited by Muqtedar Khan

NEW LINES INSTITUTE
FOR STRATEGY AND POLICY

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Contents

Rescuers search for people trapped under the rubble of a high-rise residential building hit by a Russian missile in Dnipro, Ukraine. Russia launched missile attacks on Ukrainian cities on Jan. 14, 2023. A Russian cruise missile hit the nine-story residential building, destroying a section of it from the top to the bottom floors. (Taras Ibragimov / Suspilne Ukraine / JSC "UA:PBC" / Global Images Ukraine via Getty Images)

Our mission is to provoke principled and transformative leadership based on peace and security, global communities, character, stewardship, and development.

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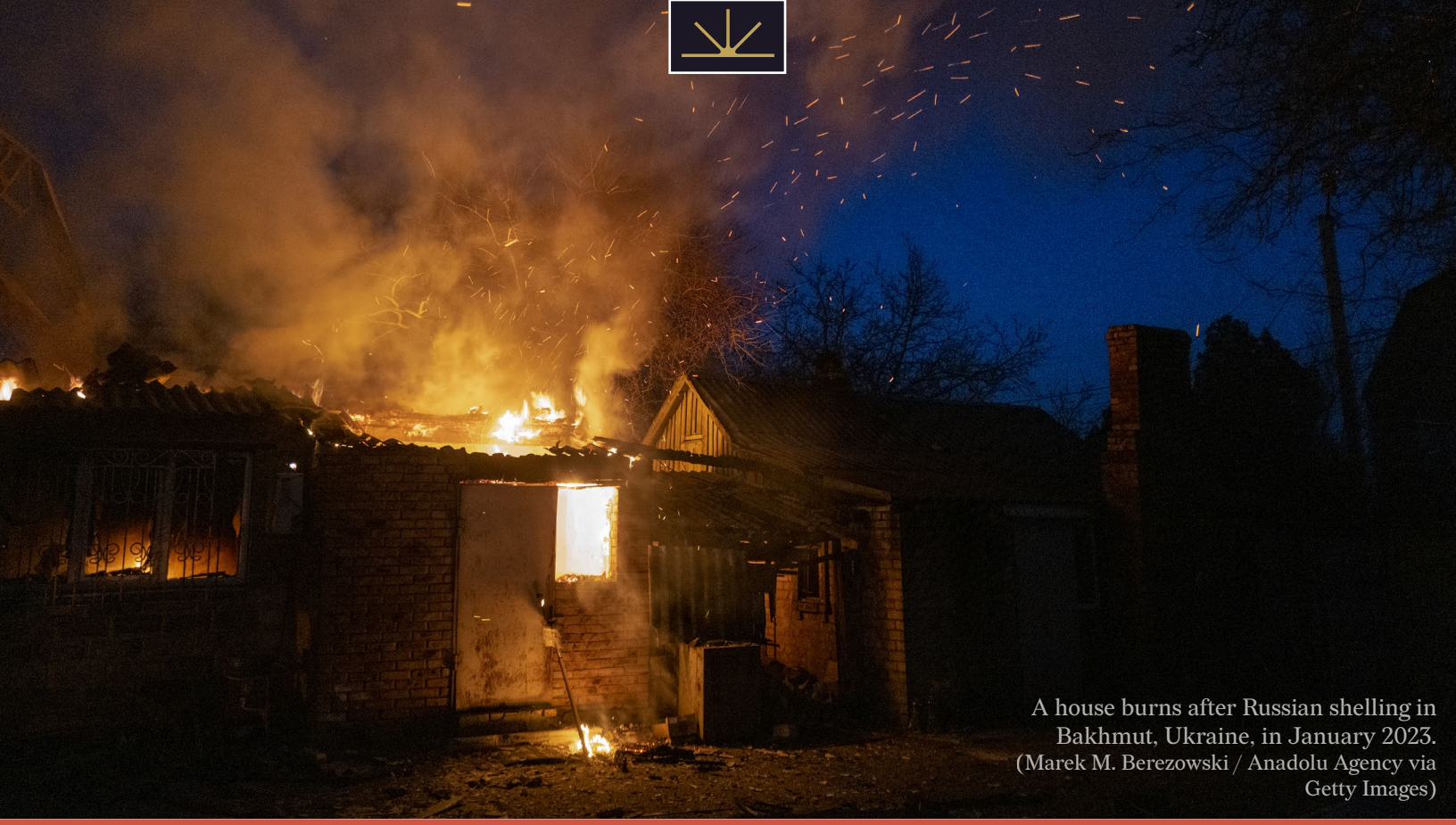


A house burns after Russian shelling in Bakhmut, Ukraine, in January 2023. (Marek M. Berezowski / Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

Introduction: New Values, New Powers, New Trends, and the New World Order

Muqtedar Khan

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has exposed and upended assumptions and the conventional wisdom about the international order and state behavior. In a liberal international order, where the prime motivation for states should be conforming to the dictates of neoliberalism, an imperial war for territorial expansion is unthinkable. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has confirmed the weakening, if not the gradual collapse, of the liberal international order led by the U.S. and its allies. Additionally, the inexorable rise of China and its illiberal ethos has left students of global order in a precarious position: They can see the existing order recede with clarity, but they cannot see with even a modicum of certainty what will replace it in the near- and the long-term future.[1]

For over 30 years, the world has enjoyed a peaceful state that witnessed unprecedented global political integration, economic globalization, and cultural convergence around liberal values. This era began with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of an unprecedented American unipolar moment. Historian of American foreign policy Michael Mandelbaum described this moment in history of unprecedented global domination by a single power as "hyperpower."[2] While some scholars, such as he, see the American moment of unipolarity as lasting until 2015, I feel that it lasted only for 10 years, from 1991 to 2001. The terrible attack on the U.S. of Sept. 11, 2001, albeit by a nonstate actor, ended American hegemony, as the country was driven to try to reassert

its domination by force. Dominant nations need to use force only when their hegemony has collapsed or is severely challenged. The challenge in this case came from the Middle East-South Asia region, and even though the U.S. fought two long wars in that region and reduced the potency of terrorism, neither has the U.S. fully succeeded in restoring its hegemony in the region nor fully eliminated the threat of nonstate actors. The decline of U.S. primacy began with those dastardly attacks on the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001.[3]

Sensing American weaknesses, war fatigue, and the debilitating impact of the economic crisis of 2008 on the U.S., revisionist states such as Iran and Russia have been consistently testing the limits and robustness of the post-Cold War liberal order.[4] Even potential friends such as India and Saudi Arabia have not fully aligned with the U.S. and the West to preserve the liberal order so egregiously challenged by Russia's invasion of and brutal war on Ukraine. Both Russia and India prefer a multipolar order to replace the current order. "Multipolar world" is a code for a world in which the U.S. is less influential. As the economic center and power shifts from the West to Asia and the Global South by 2050, it is forecast that China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Turkey, Brazil, and Mexico will be in the top 10 economies of the world along with the U.S., U.K., and Germany. These emerging powers are looking for a new ordering of the global system that more truly reflects the emerging distribution of power, norms, and wealth.

It is not clear whether the post-international liberal order will be unipolar, with the U.S. retaining its preeminence through the formation of new alliances such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy; bipolar, with China balancing the U.S. and competing with it for geopolitical and geoeconomic dominance; or multipolar, with the U.S., Europe, China, India, Russia, and Japan competing and cooperating to maintain an illiberal order that encourages cooperation in trade and security but eschews interferences in internal matters of weak states by powerful states. It is evident, however, that along with the liberal order the globalized economy too will take a hit, and we may see new processes such as "friendshoring" instead of "offshoring" and "slobalization" instead of globalization become the norm.

In this anthology by the New Lines Institute, we have invited scholars whose voices speak from diverse perspectives to examine and discuss the ongoing transformation in the global order. They advance a fascinating account of what is happening to the existing order and provide glimpses into what may be coming in the future.

A Post-American View of the Coming World Order

Professor Amitav Acharya's assessment of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is deeply informed by the politics and concerns of the Global South. He points out that many scholars and policymakers in the West do not agree with the official Western narrative that the war was not provoked by NATO's expansion. He argues that the war will neither unite nor strengthen the West; on the contrary, it will weaken and perhaps even hasten the demise of Western hegemony. Professor Acharya poses a very interesting question about U.S. and Western capabilities. He asserts that the West easily won the Cold War because they faced only one opponent, the Soviet Union, and asks: Can Washington now save the liberal international order when faced with two determined challengers, Russia in Europe and China in the Indo-Pacific?

After predicting the demise or weakening of the existing order, professor Acharya suggests that the global order that will succeed it will not be one of a China-West bipolarity or even a multipolar order, but rather he foresees a multiplex order. He describes the potential multiplex world as a regionalized order which is pluralist, has both formal organizations and informal partnerships, and will be shaped by civilizational norms coming from the Chinese, Indian, and Islamic heritages in addition to Western liberalism. Acharya offers a vision of the future informed by perspectives from non-Western civilizations and a critical view of the liberal order.

The View From America

Professor Shibley Telhami draws a mixed picture of the post-Cold War order. He sees both the display of American primacy and its support for the rules-based international order, and the weakening and undermining of the same rules-based order by America through its invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its support

A Ukrainian tank fires at Russian positions near Kreminna in the Luhansk region on Jan. 12, 2023.
(Anatolii Stepanov / /AFP via Getty Images)

for the relentless flouting of international norms by Israel. Professor Telhami narrates a fascinating tale of two invasions that bookend the post-Cold War order: the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Even though he does not dwell on the similarities, it is amazing how similar the claims made by both invaders are — that the other country has no right to exist as a separate country; it was always a part of "our" country.

Professor Telhami offers a unique perspective on Russia. He points out how even after defeat and very strenuous sanctions, Saddam Hussein's regime survived in Iraq and he was removed only by a bigger and more expensive war. Professor Telhami similarly anticipates Russia to survive and remain a midrange power with an outsized nuclear arsenal regardless of the outcome of the war with Ukraine. In his discussion of the international system, professor Telhami continues to evaluate domestic trends and attitudes inside the U.S., emphasizing how the convergence among U.S. elites and political parties impacts U.S. support for the international order. He fears that domestic trends in the U.S. as well as the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and possibly again in 2024 show that the U.S. cannot be relied upon to underwrite the rules-based order as vigorously as before.

The View From Europe

Professor Raffaele Marchetti brings a European perspective to this anthology. He makes a persuasive and counterintuitive argument that rather than being an inflection point in contemporary history, the Russia-Ukraine war is actually consistent with the polarizing trend that began long before this war and will only hasten that ongoing polarization. He does not see the war precipitating a major change in the structure of world politics, but rather as a consequence of shifts that began during the period 2001-2008. Professor Marchetti argues that 2008 was the turning point in the international system. He argues that the trends that began in the 1990s that led to global integration experienced turbulence in 2008 with a severe economic recession that undermined the American-European dominated liberal order and initiated gradual polarization and division of the unified global economic system.

Flags of the EU and European countries stand beside the red carpet at the EU Leaders Summit in Brussels in June 2019. (Nicolas Economou / NurPhoto via Getty Images)

Marchetti argues, in keeping with conventional wisdom, that the future of the global order depends on the evolving relationship between the declining hegemon the U.S. and the emerging power China. Marchetti advances three possible scenarios of the emerging global order. He suggests that the world could be divided between the West and the rest, or two other possibilities: one in which China wins by integrating Eurasia (Europe and Russia) into its orbit and the U.S. is isolated, and the other in which the West expands and China is isolated.

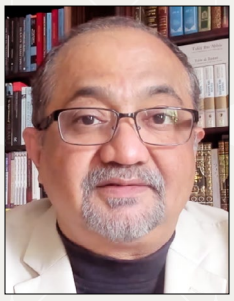
South Asia Hopes for a Multipolar Order

This final essay in the anthology was written by a team of scholars from South Asia: Dr. Marufa Akter from Bangladesh, Dr. Farooque Leghari from Pakistan, and Dr. Shelly Johny from India. They begin their essay by recognizing that change is taking place at three levels: global, regional, and state level. At the global level, there is a fundamental shift in the balance of power with the rise of China, the revisionist aggression of Russia, and the sympathies of illiberal states toward both of them. At the regional level, the region itself is becoming more significant. I agree with their assessment. Even as the significance of the western part of the region — the Afghanistan and Pakistan policy theater — is declining for international security, the significance of the eastern end, with the Rohingya crisis and the prevailing tensions between India and China, is becoming more salient. The economic gains by both democracies, India and Bangladesh, have also increased the profile of the region as both China and the West compete to invest in these countries and seek strategic partnerships with them.

The authors anticipate the emergence of a two-level multipolar global balance of power. At the global level, they see blocs led by the U.S., China, Europe, and India, and at the regional levels by nations such as Brazil, Japan, South Korea, Iran, Israel, South Africa, and Nigeria. It is interesting that they see India and Europe remaining independent of the U.S. bloc. They predict three types of strategic behavior in the

region. First, they anticipate that India will continue with its "multi-alignment approach," which essentially means engaging with all major players. Next, they see Pakistan as migrating from the Western camp to the non-Western camp led by China and Russia. Finally, they expect the rest of the nations, especially those that border China, to seek to find a way to balance their national interests with the pressures and temptations stemming from engagement with China. The South Asian scholars see the need for the U.S. to do more diplomatic work in the region and develop its strategic relationships so that the countries of the region can begin to rely on it as much as East Asian nations like Japan and South Korea do. They advise the U.S. to act with prudence and patience while engaging this rising region.

In these essays, we have tried to provide a broad and diverse perspective on the fundamental shifts taking place in the global order and world politics. Not only is the balance of power changing, but so is the normative basis of the international system. Change is certain, but what is emerging in uncertain. We hope that these essays will provoke thought and also add to the global conversation on the change we are experiencing.



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Endnotes

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Illustration by Getty Images)

A Multiplex World: The Coming World Order[1]

Amitav Acharya

The term "world order" refers to the broad configuration of power, ideas, and institutions that underpin the stability of the largest section of the planet in a given period of history. Since the 19th century, if not earlier, world order has been shaped and dominated first by the European imperial powers, and after World War II, by the United States. The latter is itself an imperial power, inheriting many of Western Europe's cultural and political ideas and institutions (including those about race and geopolitics) while adding a network of multilateral institutions that were nonetheless designed to preserve and legitimize Western hegemony. The longevity of the order known as the Liberal International Order (LIO), or the American World Order, had been challenged for some time as a result of decolonization, the revival of non-Western powers, and the global financial crisis of 2008-2009.

Some developments in the past five years, however, have pushed the LIO closer to the brink of collapse. Three are especially noteworthy: the election of Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the global COVID-19 pandemic since 2019, and the Russia-Ukraine war since February 2022. This essay looks specifically at how the Russia-Ukraine war affects world order. Briefly put, my argument is that far from leading a revival of Western power and prestige, the war has hastened the end of the LIO and accelerated the transition to what I have called "a multiplex world."[2]

An Anticipated Catastrophe

Though NATO apologists vigorously deny such claims, and nothing can justify the full-scale invasion of a sovereign nation with such bloody consequences (with possibly greater military casualties for Russia and far greater civilian casualties for Ukraine), the Russia-Ukraine war was neither unprovoked nor unanticipated.

Writing in the New York Times in 1997, George F. Kennan — the father of the U.S. "containment" strategy against the Soviet Union — warned that "expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era."[3] But he was not alone. A host of other Western policymakers and strategists, including Henry Kissinger, Malcolm Fraser, Edward Luttwak, Sam Nunn, Jack Matlock, Paul Nitze, Owen Harries, William Perry, and William Burns (current CIA director), had either opposed NATO expansion generally or Ukrainian membership of NATO specifically, or warned of its deeply dangerous implications. And in May 2022, Pope Francis caused a stir when he said in a media interview that NATO "barking" at Russia's door might have either "provoked" or "facilitated" Putin's attack on Ukraine.[4]

While there is little question that Putin saw Western liberal values as a threat to his regime security, and that his foreign policy is driven in part by a desire to create a sphere of influence (a much more likely motive than to reassemble the former Soviet Union), it would be simplistic to see these as the main cause for his Ukraine attack. Russia had already conceded NATO expansion considerably closer to its frontiers. Throughout history, alliances like NATO have been known to provoke as much as deter conflict. Recognition of the war-causing effects of Europe's alliances had led President George Washington to pursue a foreign policy "to steer clear of permanent alliances," while the same distrust led Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt to advocate a universal security system.

Whatever its cause, the Russia-Ukraine conflict would have profound consequences for world order. Not only has the war paralyzed the U.N. Security Council and severely limited cooperation among the major powers, occurring in the heart of Europe not long after the centenary of World War I, it has taken Europe "back to the future."

Putin's February 2022 putsch now seems to have been a dangerous miscalculation. It has darkened the future of not only both Ukraine and Russia, but also Europe more generally. Instead of making Europe more secure, NATO expansion has made Europe the "world's most dangerous place."[5] Major war has returned to Europe.

After the end of the Cold War, Europe presented itself as a model of world order-building at large. Not only did Europe itself seem "primed for peace," as MIT's Stephen Van Evera put it in 1991,[6] but European concepts such as "common security," pan-European identity, or "European common home," as articulated by the Palme Commission in 1982 and promoted by the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), drew global attention, even attraction. But these ideals have fallen by the wayside now. As the Economist magazine noted: "As much as the war's reverberations are felt around the world, though, they sound most strongly in Europe. The invasion has upended the idea of a continent 'whole, free and at peace,'[7] slogans which were once enthusiastically embraced not only by European leaders but also by U.S. presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton."[8]

With the Russia-Ukraine war, the EU has had to forgo its fledgling desire for greater strategic autonomy. It has become ever more dependent on the U.S. for energy and arms, as the U.S. profits by becoming not only Europe's but the world's largest LNG supplier. While the EU was once led by its larger founding members such as Germany and France, its security is now being driven by its smaller and ideologically more zealous new members, who are reaping the benefits of NATO's military protection, EU's economic aid, and "European identity." But it remains to be seen how long EU citizens will tolerate the growing economic costs and potential spillover effects of a high-intensity proxy warfare on their doorstep.

The strategic burden of the war also challenges America's LIO rebuilding project. The LIO's triumph in the Cold War was possible because the U.S. needed to focus on only one major challenger at a time; after U.S.-China rapprochement neutralized the Chinese challenge, attention turned to the Soviet Union. The

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III (right) and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (left) speak during two-day defense ministers' meetings at NATO headquarters on Feb. 15, 2023 in Brussels. Defense Ministers of the North Atlantic Council allied countries also met at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. The U.S. also hosted the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.
(Omar Havana / Getty Images)

question now is: Can Washington make the LIO great again against powerful challengers on two major fronts, Europe and the Indo-Pacific?

In this respect, the initial hopes that the sweeping Western sanctions against Russia would rekindle Western unity and U.S. leadership in global affairs might prove too optimistic. Soon after Putin's attack on Ukraine, Stewart Patrick of the Council on Foreign Relations wrote: "In one fateful step, the Russian president has managed to revive Western solidarity, reenergize U.S. global leadership, catalyze European integration, expose Russia's weaknesses, undermine Moscow's alliance with Beijing, and make his authoritarian imitators look foolish."[9] In this view, Putin had given the idea of "the West" a fresh lease on life. As a columnist for Slate magazine put it, "Pro-Ukraine feelings in search of an organizing principle are coalescing around a category of identification that hasn't enjoyed real, popular international relevance in a good long while: 'the West'—a category Vladimir Putin has long railed against, but which Westerners themselves haven't, at least in recent years, claimed with much personal attachment or ideological loyalty."[10]

But Western analysts were not alone in such thinking. From China, Hu Wei, vice chairman of the Public Policy Research Center of the Counselor's Office of the State Council, expects that as a result of the Ukraine crisis, "The power of the West will grow significantly, NATO will continue to expand, and U.S. influence in the non-Western world will increase … no matter how Russia achieves its political transformation, it will greatly weaken the anti-Western forces in the world. … The West will possess more 'hegemony' both in terms of military power and in terms of values and institutions, its hard power and soft power will reach new heights."[11]

Yet insofar as the Global South is concerned, a totally different plausible outcome might be that instead of reviving the West's dominance of world order, it could hasten its demise, or create a more level playing field between the West and the rest.

Commenting on the world order implications of the Russia-Ukraine war, Fareed Zakaria observed, "One of the defining features of the new era is that it is post-American. By that I mean that the Pax Americana of the past three decades is over."[12] Zakaria had first proposed the "post-American world" in 2008. But he was then talking about the relative decline of the U.S. power, rather than the U.S.-built order, resulting from the "rise of the rest." He had until now refused to accept the end of the LIO, long after other analysts had done so.

Although the Global South is not a singular category, most of its nations, including most Asian countries, do not see Russia as a threat and are genuinely not interested in taking sides in an ideological competition and military rivalry between NATO and Russia or between the West on the one hand and Russia and China on the other. They see the Russia-Ukraine war as a European and trans-Atlantic mess-up, yet feel profoundly victimized by it, as they bear a disproportionate share of the cost of higher energy and food prices and disruption of global supply chains. Moreover, while condemning Putin's aggression, the Global South countries are not necessarily supporting the revival of the U.S.-led order (LIO). Aside from the fact that China, India, and South Africa abstained from voting on the March 2, 2022, U.N. General Assembly resolution condemning Russia, 28 African countries

voted in favor and 17 abstained. Brazil and Mexico voted for the resolution, but refused to join Western sanctions on Russia. In other words, as far as the Global South is concerned, condemning the Russian invasion out of principle, not breaking sanctions out of fear (of U.S. retribution), and the dislike of Western "internationalism" and double standards are not mutually exclusive.

This ambivalence is hardly surprising. Western sanctions remind Global South countries of the coercive economic power of the West, which would be used against them if they challenge Western interests and expectations. The pressure being put on them by Western policymakers to choose sides by joining the sanctions against Russia, backed by the threat of secondary sanctions, is reminiscent of the pressure they were under during the Cold War. Moreover, African and Middle Eastern opinion also points to the harsh treatment of refugees from these regions in Eastern Europe, including by Ukraine. Then there is the memory of the West's long history of self-serving military interventions. As Gilles Yabi, the founder of WATHI, a "citizen think tank" in Senegal, notes, "In Africa, we are … stunned by this invasion of Ukraine by Russia. … This is unjustifiable, as were the interventions of the United States and NATO, as in many countries, sometimes under false pretenses and in flagrant violation of international law."[13] This shows that attempts by Western policymakers and analysts to reject any moral equivalence between Russian and U.S./NATO interventions are not entirely convincing in the non-Western world.

With its membership expansion and growing interventions in conflicts inside and outside Europe, NATO is no longer seen in the Global South as a "defensive military alliance," as Western policymakers and media such as the BBC[14] frequently try to project. Rather, NATO looks like the last stand of a fading Western hegemony. The harebrained idea of a global NATO, championed by influential U.S. think tanks and the U.K., would expand the perimeters of world disorder by dragging European nations — which do not see China as an existential threat — increasingly into the U.S.-China competition in Asia, and Asian nations — which do not view Russia as a threat — into the Russia-NATO conflict in Europe. It is useful to keep in mind that many postcolonial nations viewed Western multilateral alliances such as NATO, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) as a "return in a pact form to colonial rule."[15] Such sentiments led India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indonesia's founding president, Sukarno, to denounce SEATO, especially at the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955. Now Global South countries resent Western pressure to join the fight against Russia, as revealed in former Pakistani Premier Imran Khan's "Are we your slaves …?" outburst in March when confronted with a missive from Western ambassadors to condemn Russia.[16]

Kennan's prophecy about NATO expansion being a grave American strategic blunder is yet to finally come true. Much depends on whether the Ukraine conflict ends with the humiliating defeat of Russia or the collapse of European and Western unity. But a war at the heart of Europe that has already cost hugely in human lives and destroyed the future of both Ukraine and Russia is not a glowing advertisement of the world order that the West built. With it, the idea of Europe (and the West) as a model of peace and prosperity for Global South regions such as Southeast Asia, Africa, or Latin America, has suffered a fatal blow.

The Next World Order: Possibilities, Not Predictions

Despite the Biden administration's efforts to rebuild it, the decline of the LIO is accelerating and seems irreversible. But we are not entering a multipolar (as conventionally understood), Sinocentric, or bipolar (U.S.-China) world. The emerging world order is more likely to be post-hegemonic, meaning there would be no globally dominant country or bloc, no globally dominant ideology, and no single cooperative global institution. The future world order will be culturally and politically diverse. It will still be interconnected, but any reglobalization and connectivity is as likely, if not more so, to be led by the East as the West.

It's also likely that a more regionalized world order will emerge. Regional orders would include not just regional organizations such as the EU or ASEAN, but also informal arrangements born out of the interactions among regional powers that constrain, if not eliminate, the influence of extra-regional powers. While some great powers may try to achieve

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo delivers a speech at the EU-ASEAN summit at the European Council headquarters in Brussels on Dec. 14, 2022. EU leaders met with their counterparts from Southeast Asia at the summit to bolster ties in the face of the war in Ukraine and challenges from China. (John Thys / AFP via Getty Images)

this by pursuing exclusionary regional spheres of influence (Russia and China come to mind), others, especially small and medium powers, may pursue accommodationist and communitarian regional orders, such as Indonesia through ASEAN.

Global governance in a multiplex world will continue to pluralize with the emergence of regional and plurilateral institutions and various forms of complex and hybrid arrangements among state and nonstate actors, such as corporations, foundations, and social movements. This trend toward "G-plus" governance will not displace the current state-centric U.N.-led structure, or the Gs, such as G-7 or G-20, but would offer some competition to it.

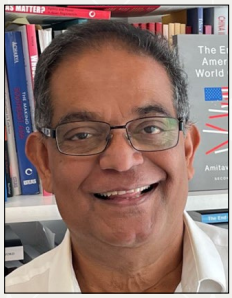
In the multiplex world, there would be no "end of history." World order will be shaped by the competitive and coexisting elements of Chinese communitarianism, Western liberalism, Indian eclecticism, and the worldviews of Islam and other civilizations.

To be sure, such a world order would not be free from conflict; no world order is. But conflict and violence resulting from the demise of the LIO will affect both the West and the rest. Europe might return to its historical place as an epicenter of global disorder, in stark contrast to during the Cold War, when Europe and the West were spared major conflict while the non-Western world bore the brunt of it.

Although older civilizations, such as those of China, India, and Islam, would play a more influential role in shaping world order than has been the case for the past several centuries, there is no reason to believe that the world would experience intensified intercivilizational conflict. Conflict is as likely to occur within civilizations as between them. Coexistence and understanding among civilizations is less rare than is often assumed. Today, we see many examples of cross-civilizational cooperation. For example, Ukraine, an Orthodox civilization, has moved decisively closer to the West, despite Huntington's prior assertion that an Orthodox civilization would never fight with fellow Orthodox Russia (as he put it in his 1996 book, "If civilization is what counts, violence between Ukrainians and Russians is unlikely"). India, itself a multicivilizational state, is pro-Western politically and

technologically, while maintaining closer energy and economic ties with Iran and China, its supposedly civilizational rivals.

World orders, like empires and nations, rise and fall. But the LIO is not going to disappear entirely. It could survive in a truncated or rump state, returning to its initial form as a club of the Western nations, rather than as an inclusive global framework, contrary to what its proponents had hoped for when the Cold War ended. But in the interest of global stability, the West, instead of bemoaning the passing of the world order that it created and nurtured, or pining fruitlessly for its extremely unlikely revival, would be better off seeking accommodation with the emerging powers and the orders built by other nations and regions.



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U.S. fighters fly over oil fires set by Iraqis during the Gulf War in 1991. (History/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

A Ukrainian tank fires at Russian position near Bakhmut in January 2023. (Anatolii Stepanov / AFP via Getty Images)

Bookending the Post-Cold War Era: A Tale of Two Fateful Invasions

Shibley Telhami

Two invasions have bookended the post-Cold War order as we have known it since the Berlin Wall came down in 1989: the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The tale of the two wars, and what happened in between, tells us a lot about the current state of international politics.

Both invasions took the international community by surprise, and both were followed by robust international responses, led by the United States. The decisions to invade seemed improbable by rational analysis and were shocking to many. In the case of the Iraqi invasion, even Baghdad's patrons in Moscow were surprised, having assumed that the concentration of forces on the Kuwaiti border was more of a bargaining tool to extract Kuwaiti concessions on a disputed oil field. As then-U.S. Secretary of State James Baker put it, "The fact that (Soviet) intelligence services had been so wrong about it, the fact that a client state with Soviet military had, in an unprovoked way aggressively moved against a small neighbor like this. They were genuinely embarrassed and I think they felt what we were doing was the right thing to do."[1] The Soviet Union ultimately voted yes on United Nations Security Council Resolution 678[2] authorizing a coalition of over 40 allied nations[3] to "use all necessary means to uphold and implement" the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and "to restore international peace and security in the area."[4] A decade later, after the 9/11 attack on the U.S., Russia also voted yes on U.N. Security Council Resolution 1386 authorizing "the

establishment of an International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan" in 2001.[5]

In the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, even the Ukrainians seemed surprised by the invasion, despite clear and unusual warnings by the United States that the action had become inevitable.[6] The shock was predicated on the assessment that Russia had a lot more to lose than to gain, even if its military campaign had been more successful than it turned out to be.

In the case of Iraq, the invasion of Kuwait came just as the Cold War ended, with its patron, the Soviet Union, on the verge of collapse. And there were clear signs that Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein, understood that this was America's moment: In a speech he had delivered a few months earlier, in February 1990, the Iraqi leader warned that the end of the Cold War was not good for Arabs, and that the U.S. would be even more inclined to take Israel's side and might actually embark on "stupidities"[7] given the absence of Soviet restraint. And counter to the argument that former American Ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie gave Iraq the greenlight to invade, evidence since has discounted that reasoning, as I showed.[8] Looking at records of meetings between Saddam Hussein and his advisers and with foreign leaders, "There is no evidence to support the theory that Saddam thought he received a green or yellow light from the United States, and much evidence that he expected hostile American reactions."[9]

In the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the moment was different. America had weakened, in relative terms, since its pinnacle in the 1990s, and Russia was more assertive and ambitious. Surely America was still strong economically and militarily, but its deep divide at home, including about relations with Russia; the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on democracy; and the black eye that America still carried internationally from its 2003 invasion of Iraq, had suggested to Putin different reactions, including in Europe. As an example, even the threat to democracy that the United States sought to seize on to counter Russia's invasion was seen differently internationally: A 2021 public opinion poll[10] in 55 countries showed that the U.S. was seen as presenting a greater threat to democracy in their own countries than Russia and China (though most ranked economic inequality as the biggest threat).

But the international reaction to both invasions was not what Iraqi and Russian leaders had expected. Gulf Arab rulers may have been unhappy about American policy, but once Iraq invaded Kuwait they felt more threatened by Iraq than by the United States. And those in Europe who had wanted some distancing from the United States and had built economic ties with Russia feared Putin even more once he invaded Ukraine. That fear, combined with aggressive diplomacy by the Biden administration, revived the NATO coalition[11] and propelled states like Finland and Sweden to seek membership.[12] If Russian President Vladimir Putin's fear of NATO expansion was a driver of his invasion, the outcome could not have been worse for him. This in turn made Putin and the Russian elite even more insecure, and more fearful about the prospect of Ukraine itself joining NATO at some point. As former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, now director of the CIA, William Burns put it in his book "The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal," Ukraine is not only Putin's issue, it's a redline for Russian elites: "Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin's sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests."[13]

In generating international coalitions to counter each invasion, the winning message was the same, though it resonated more in 1990 than in 2022: that countering invasions was essential for defending a rules-based international order.

Of course, Russia in 2022 is not Iraq in 1990, but neither is it today a great power. When the Soviet Union collapsed as a superpower, it was in part because its economic capacity didn't match its military ambition. Many decades later, Russia's economy remains modest for superpower ambition, comparable to that of South Korea.[14] Beyond its nuclear arsenal, its military budget is less than one-tenth of that of the United States and one-fourth of that of China.[15] But Putin may have counted on real challenges facing the United States at home and abroad as limiting American reaction, apparently misjudging his ability to exploit them.

But Russia remains an influential power. It may be weakened, but it's hard to know what defeat would mean. Its leaders may not pay the price even as the country suffers; even in the case of Iraq's Saddam Hussein, he survived defeat in 1991 and more than a decade of stringent international sanctions — and was dislodged only by a devastating and costly war a dozen years later. Of course, Putin could fall, but we shouldn't count on it.

Unlike the victors in the Second World War, who joined together to write new rules of international politics and give the loser an opportunity to forge a new path, the United States failed to seize the moment of American primacy in the 1990s to lead the revamping of international institutions, including the United Nations, that no longer reflected the distribution of power that prevailed at their inception, preferring instead to exploit the benefits of American power to focus on the economy at home and utilize this power to advance American trade interests globally, including through missions abroad.[16] As I noted back in 1993, the post-Cold War moment for transformation of international institutions had probably passed by that date already:

"If a fundamental transformation of the United Nations became possible following the collapse of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry (and it is not clear that it ever was possible), the most opportune moment for change—the months immediately following the Persian Gulf War of 1991 … that moment may have passed. As new patterns and new rivalries have emerged in international relations, it has become clear that perceptions of U.S. power far exceeded reality."[17]

The most consequential and ruinous moment of American foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, however, was the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Nothing damaged perceptions of a rules-based international order more than that war. Coupled with the perception that the United States was complicit in the rules-busting decades-old Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, the war made it harder for the U.S. when it acted in the name of protecting such an order.

The Obama presidency helped America recover only mildly, mostly in relief after the Bush presidency and

A machine gunner aboard a U.S. Marine Corps V-22 Osprey scans the terrain as the aircraft flies near a French artillery base near al Qaim in Iraq's western Anbar province, a short distance away from territory held by Islamic State in February 2019. (Daphné Benoit / AFP via Getty Images)

Obama's credible opposition to the Iraq war. But the American president was more focused on doing no harm than on reshaping the international order, with America's weakened hand and events beyond his control, such as the Arab uprisings that spanned most of his years in office, constraining his actions. American-backed NATO actions in Libya in 2011, in the meanwhile, angered Russia further. Russia's abstention from the Security Council vote had allowed the passing of UNSC Resolution 1973, calling for nations to take all necessary actions to protect civilians, including by implementing a no-fly zone in Libya.[18] But as NATO actions escalated, ultimately resulting in the end of the regime of Russia's former client Moammar Gadhafi, Moscow complained that "[t]he U.N. Security Council never aimed to topple the Libyan regime. … All those who are currently using the U.N. resolution for that aim are violating the U.N. mandate."[19]

Donald Trump's presidency was the antithesis of a rules-based order, even as it maintained amicable ties with Moscow.

So even before Russia invaded Ukraine, the order that followed the end of the Cold War, especially in the 1990s, had substantially weakened — and certainly not only due to American behavior. Russia too had surely violated the rules, as in the incursion of Russian forces into Georgia[20] in 2008, and its annexation of Crimea in 2014.[21]

But if the post-Cold War rules-based order meant maintaining a degree of Russian-American cooperation, even in the face of obvious violations by both, the Russia-Ukraine war has, for now, ended that era.

Russia will remain a factor in the global order as a midsize power with a substantial nuclear arsenal. But the new rules of the game will mostly depend on the ways the United States and China conduct their business, and whether they move toward more confrontation or more cooperation. China is a clear winner of the Russian invasion, aided globally by anger with Putin and lingering international discomfort with American policies.

My comparison of the two invasions and their impact on perceptions of the global order has focused principally on the policies and relative influence of the big powers, with an eye to the distribution of military and economic power that remains central in much of world politics. But the degree of the internal strengths and cohesion within the big powers can present greater challenges to them than to other big powers.

The reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union go well beyond the pressure applied by the United States during the Cold War years. In fact, one of Saddam Hussein's miscalculations in 1990 had to do with a stunningly superficial assessment of the internal structural conditions that ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hussein understood that a big part of the Soviet Union's troubles was economic; this weakness not only reduced Soviet military potential but also the role of the generals, who were key interlocuters in the Soviet-Iraqi relationship. But his proposed remedy gave a hint of his lack of understanding of the depth of the USSR's troubles: To help revive the USSR, Hussein proposed that some of the "hundreds of billions invested by the Arabs in the United States and the West … may be diverted to the USSR and East European countries. It may prove even more profitable than investment in the West, which has grown saturated with its national resources. Such a course of action may yield inestimable benefits for the Arabs and their national causes."[22]

As for the United States, there are lessons to be learned even as the Russian invasion of Ukraine has focused attention on potential threats from big powers. The greatest threats America faces today are from within: the deep divisiveness that goes far beyond partisanship, raising the prospect of civil conflict. American democracy, which, despite its flaws, has been an anchor of a successful system that fed American economic and military power, is being severely tested.

This internal aspect of weakness in America's posture has been visible to the rest the world for some time. In fact, as Fiona Hill notes, Putin had come to see "that despite the lofty rhetoric that flowed from Washington about democratic values and liberal norms, beneath the surface, the United States was beginning to resemble his own country … The fire was already burning; all Putin had to do was pour on some gasoline."[23] As it turned out, in fact, despite the deep

American partisan divide, there was robust American public backing for U.S. support for Ukraine,[24] but since then, there has been further evidence of reduced support among Republicans,[25] with many influential Republican voices criticizing the Biden administration posture on Russia and Ukraine. Putin surely miscalculated on many levels, but the verdict is out on how the invasion will ultimately play out in American politics. For now, even this momentous invasion failed to transcend the American divide at home. One can only imagine how things may look in 2024, if Donald Trump, or someone like him, is elected president.

Shibley Telhami, is the Anwar Sadat professor for peace and development at the University of Maryland and a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. His best-selling book, "The Stakes: America and the Middle East," was selected by Foreign Affairs as one of the top five books on the Middle East in 2003. In addition, his most recent book, "The World Through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East," was published in 2013. The Carnegie Corporation of New York along with the New York Times selected Telhami as one of the "great immigrants" for 2013. Telhami is a recipient of the Excellence in Public Service Award, awarded by the University System of Maryland Board of Regents in 2006, and the University of Maryland's Honors College 2014 Outstanding Faculty Award.

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Smoke rises over Kyiv after a Russian missiles strike in April 2022. The strike hit a residential building. (John Moore/Getty Images)

World Order Scenarios Post Russia-Ukraine War

Raffaele Marchetti

The war in Ukraine is further advancing a polarizing trend that has been emerging in international affairs for at least the past 15 years. Horrible as any war is, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not going to change structurally the world in which we have been living the past few decades; the change is quantitative, not qualitative. In fact, the Russian actions, rather than revising, are indeed accelerating a pattern of polarization and compartmentalization that has been growing in the political, economic, military, and cultural realms of global affairs.

From 1989 to 2008 (and 2022): The End of the Global Village

With the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the world entered a period of unmatched unipolarity that lasted for almost two decades and was marked by growing global integration. The 1990s began with the first Gulf War and were later shaped incisively by Bill Clinton's two presidential terms in the United States. Several significant events occurred during this decade, including the war in Yugoslavia (1991-95) on the security front; the creation of the WTO in 1995, with Chinese membership in 2001, on the economic front; and Russian membership in the Council of Europe in 1996 on the political front. All in all, the world moved clearly toward global integration under uncontested American leadership.

From 2001 on, however, the path of global integration came into question. Most acutely, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 posed a challenge to unrivaled American leadership. In a very different form, but equally challenging, was the creation of the World Social

Forum in Brazil as a place of radical contestation from below. Under U.S. President George W. Bush, the U.S. entered two conflicts, in Afghanistan (in 2001) and Iraq (in 2003), both of which have generated numerous controversies. On a more institutional note, the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2001 marked the first major institutional divergence from the universal multilateralism led by the West that dominated the 1990s.

Arguably, 2008 can be considered a turning point for the international system. A systematic change seems to have begun that year that is slowly pushing the world order toward a more multipolar or multicentric model. The American economic crisis, which began in 2007 but erupted in 2008 with the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, weakened U.S. status at the international level. The EU followed a similar pattern a few years later. Precisely as the West was experiencing these moments of weakness, a number of other major powers began to be more assertive and confrontational toward the Western international system that had dominated the scene since 1989. As a consequence of the crisis, in 2008, the first G-20 heads of state summit was organized in Washington with the intention of tackling the economic crisis by bringing in the emerging economies. The G-8 was no longer seen as an adequate means of properly addressing this major instability. In the same year as this institutional revolution, the (re)emerging powers asserted their role in world politics in other ways too. Russia intervened militarily in Georgia to reassert its influence in its immediate region. China hosted the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing to assert its return to the world stage.

The world after 2008 looks like a world in which the project for single global integration in political, economic, and security terms is ever further away, and instead, regional fragmentation and West versus BRIC tension has been accentuated. Regional blocs increasingly seem to be in competition: The Eurasian Customs Union was created in 2010 as a barrier to the European Union's power of attraction and a further response to the flashpoints in Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia. Interregional trade agreements were signed (TTP, 2015) and are being negotiated (TTIP) as a substitute for the multilateral WTO rounds and as a way of reestablishing Western leadership by systematically excluding the BRICs from the negotiating table. New financial institutions were created — the New Development Bank (formerly, the BRICS Development Bank) in 2014, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015 — that altered the U.S.-centrism of the world economy. Finally, huge infrastructure projects such as the Chinese Belt and Road initiative aimed to connect the entire Eurasian region within a single platform while excluding the U.S.

The most recent events in Syria, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine on the Russian front, and in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, the South China Sea, and Taiwan on the Chinese front are just proxy episodes of a larger global confrontation between the American-European bloc and the Sino-Russian bloc. We need to look at the China-U.S. tension, which is the pivot of global affairs, to understand better such episodes.

The PRC-USA Tension

The international system will most likely pivot on the interaction between the declining hegemon the U.S. and the emerging power China. It is with reference to such interaction that we need to envisage possible future world orders. It is clear that the other remaining powers, not to mention other countries, will have to strategically adapt to the behavior of these two superpowers.

Trends for U.S. power are controversial. A number of authors argue that the decline is significant and clear (Layne, 2012). Other analysts argue instead that the U.S. is bound to remain the leader of the international system for decades to come (Nye, 2010). The economic weight of the American economy as a proportion of global GPD is not expected to change significantly. Similarly, U.S. political and military power will remain very significant. What is changing is the diminishing edge the U.S. has enjoyed vis-à-vis other powers. While the American economy will constitute slightly more than 20% of the global economy, other economies will expand and actually outgrow their U.S. counterpart.

China's growth is undeniable. Economically, China will become the largest economy in the world in the next few years. It already has the largest banking asset, the largest import-export gains, and is a leader in R&D. Militarily, Chinese growth is significantly reducing the

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen (3rd from right) and Chinese Vice Premier Liu He (3rd from left) and their respective delegations wait ahead of their meeting in Zurich on Jan. 18, 2023. (Sebastien Bozon / AFP via Getty Images)

gap between it and its American counterpart year by year. Socially and politically, China is becoming a magnet of attraction for an increasing number of countries and individuals around the world.

Many see the relative decline of the U.S. and the growth of China as setting the two countries on a collision course (Allison, 2017). It is difficult to predict whether a real armed conflict will occur between the two superpowers. There are significant balancing dynamics between the two countries, first and foremost their economic interdependence: The U.S. needs China to buy its treasury bonds, and China needs the U.S. to buy its products. This remains true despite the recent attempt at delinking the two economies, especially for security concerns in the tech dimension. What is more certain is that there will be a continuing, if not growing, tension between the two, and the other two remaining players, the EU and Russia, will have to align with one or the other. As an outcome of this tension, one of three main scenarios of world order is likely to occur.

Three Scenarios

My take is that the potential scenarios after the Russia-Ukraine war may take one of three shapes. The first seems the most obvious in the short term; it is, in fact, already materializing. And yet we cannot totally exclude the other two, even if only as residual, long-term scenarios, or we would run the risk of having limited foresight analysis. Key in these three scenarios is the tension between the USA and the PRC. At the same time, secondary powers the EU and Russia will carry significant weight depending on with which global power they choose to ally.

World Order 1: The West Versus the Rest

In this scenario, tension remains a central feature that polarizes the world in a new bipolar system. The EU is

pulled toward and even more greatly integrated into the transatlantic community, while Russia follows a similar trajectory within the Sinocentric Asian community. Tensions increase between the U.S. and China, but do not reach the point of an armed conflict. China is not ready yet for a military confrontation. The U.S. could be tempted to crush the would-be challenger before it is no longer possible; however, a number of parameters suggest that any unilateral American military containment may be too late. Economic relationships, political groupings, and military alliances all tend to be polarized. As a consequence, the two junior partners, the EU and Russia, are bound to align themselves with one of the two great powers. Economic pressure is developed through a revival of intraregional blocs, protectionism, economic geopolitics, economic cyber warfare, and technological competition. Political pressure is exerted indirectly on minor allies and directly through attempts to discredit rivals within their local constituencies. Military escalation is visible in an arms race, a corresponding increase in the military budgets of the two countries and their allies, and the repetition of minor skirmishes in East Asia, especially in the area of the South China Sea. More proxy wars like the one in Ukraine should be expected.

World Order 2: Eurasian Integration and U.S. Solitude

In this scenario, a process of interregional integration is promoted by China and accepted by both Russia and the EU. The Eurasian mass is progressively integrated into the largest economic area in the world. All other regional aggregations suffer a strong pull effect. The U.S. and the American continent at large goes adrift in geopolitical solitude, generating inward-looking isolationist stances. The U.S. economy enters a stark decline, the country loses political leadership, and the military apparatus gets silenced. Domestic politics become fragmented, ethnic issues become dominant, and the territorial integrity of the federation is challenged, with states such as California and Florida demanding independence. The tight grip of American global alliances weakens, and one after the other, former allies open up channels of communication and cooperation with the emerging hegemon. China's power continues to expand, and its attractiveness continues to grow. The global narrative changes and becomes Sinocentric. A new Pax Sinica, with Chinese political and economic principles, is established. Eurasian integration develops significantly due to promotion from Beijing. First ASEAN and African countries, then countries in Central Asia, then South Korea, Russia, and Iran all move toward deeper integration with China. Finally, the European Union, India, Japan, and the Gulf countries all enter the Chinese orbit. The U.S. is isolated and barely manages to maintain its few "light" anti-China alliances with individual countries in Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

World Order 3: Enlarged West Versus China

In this scenario, the West remains predominant, China is more and more isolated, and Russia is pulled back, after a regime change, toward Europe and the larger transatlantic community. The enlarged West, now strengthened by the addition of a traditional rival, reestablishes its global leadership. China is relegated to the role of a regional power with no global ambition. The U.S. is able to exert considerable pressure on China such that China actually gives up its international ambitions. Economic constraints, political pressure, and a number of minor military confrontations suffice to deter China from further developing its global ambitions. China is internally destabilized by domestic revolts that weaken its leadership and challenge its territorial integrity, especially in Tibet and Xinjiang. China is thus inhibited and only manages to preserve its autonomy on a regional basis within East Asia. Under these tense circumstances, Russia is persuaded to give up its strategic alliance with China and to return to Europe and the broader Western world with the status of a junior partner.

Conclusions

The world is entering a phase of significant geopolitical shifts. With the end of the Western world order that has dominated the last three decades, the international scene is becoming more pluralist and complex. Traditional American leadership is being challenged by a number of increasingly powerful competitors that have growing international ambitions. I argue that in coming years, four main actors will play the game of global politics: China, the European

Union, Russia, and the U.S. The era of globalization understood as a system of all-inclusive political and economic cooperation is over. Compartmentalization and competition will become the core values for the future world order. The key question for the future of humanity is whether the two blocs (however drawn, as in scenario 1, 2, or 3) will be able to coexist in a more or less peaceful accommodation, or whether the logic of aggressive expansionism will lead to an escalation that may endanger the whole of mankind.

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China's Vice Premier Han Zheng speaks at the Hong Kong Belt and Road Summit on Aug. 31, 2022. (Vernon Yuen / NurPhoto via Getty Images)

U.S. Grand Strategy in South Asia in a Changing Global Order

Marufa Akter, Farooque Leghari, and Shelly Johny

One of the challenges that historians face in the midst of global change is to encapsulate the exact moment when a new global order has replaced an old one. They often point to a period of change or crisis as the moment when an old order ended, but in those moments a new one has not yet replaced it. The world was already rattled by challenges such as climate change, financial crises, a pandemic, and rising inflation when Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, triggered the transition away from the unipolar global order. The multilateral institutions charged with protecting and promoting the values of the liberal world order and ensuring respect for international borders have seemed to fail at responding to the complex challenges in recent years. The division between liberal democracies led by the United States and illiberal powers led by Russia and China in the wake of the Ukraine conflict is a sign of a newly emerging great power competition. One of the regions of the world that is increasingly becoming important in international politics is South Asia. The nations of this region are recalibrating their foreign policies in the face of this new global rivalry.

Nevertheless, they have already shown signs that they can and are willing to balance relations with global powers that have turned rivals, which is a necessity considering the diverse needs of the countries in this region. South Asia, especially India, is vital to the United States in checking Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region. This is because South Asia shares borders with China, and India is one of the rising powers that has the capability to resist China's drive for influence in the region. What grand strategy the U.S. should adopt toward South Asia as a region is an issue that is worth exploring given the investments the U.S. is making

in developing the Indo-Pacific region. Can it afford to limit development to the Quad and exclude other nations in South Asia?

Countries around the world have felt the economic costs of the Russia-Ukraine war because of the nature of the exports of both Ukraine and Russia. They together export nearly one-third of wheat and 70% of sunflower oil on the global market. Russian fertilizer is crucial for global food production. The trade embargo on Russian products disrupts the global energy and food supply chains, contributing to rising inflation in many countries worldwide. Europe is very much affected by the war because of its dependency on the Russian energy industry. It will be interesting to see whether European countries will be willing to continue the sanctions against Russia in 2023 too. The war and sanctions have seriously impacted South Asia. This is mainly because South Asia heavily relies on fossil fuels for energy generation, and also food supplies and fertilizers from both Russia and Ukraine.[1]

The Middle East was probably one of the regions where America's allies first realized that they could no longer depend on the U.S. to defend them from threats and instability. Arab Gulf nations such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar intervened in conflicts in countries such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen in the context of the "Arab Spring" protests and ensuing civil wars. They did this to protect their interests, deter the increasing influence of Iran, and prevent Islamist parties from coming to power when they felt that the U.S. would no longer assume the full responsibility of containing Iran. U.S. allies in other parts of the world have also been revisiting their national security and economic strategy. Japan and South Korea are taking proactive steps to strengthen their self-defense capabilities without waiting for American security guarantees in the face of China's belligerence and North Korea's nuclear program. In Europe, Germany is moving ahead to increase its defense budget after resisting American demands to do the same for many decades.

All of these developments have led to opinions that the globalization project is under severe stress and that trust in the U.S.' ability to manage it is diminishing, and suggest a change in the existing world order. But the question is: What is likely to be the nature of the new world order that will replace the old one? The possible multipolar system would encompass the entire globe, unlike the last multipolar global order of the 19th century, when European colonial powers were the major powers, having colonized almost the whole world. As Marc Saxer has pointed out, in the multipolar order nations would limit cooperation on issues such as human rights and promotion of democracy compared to the earlier liberal order, as they would not consider these issues vital to their national interests. At the same time, cooperation on an issue such as climate change is more possible in a limited multilateral framework, as most countries of the world have suffered its devastating consequences.[2] Unlike the Cold War, nations would also align with each other to oppose an adversary not on the basis of ideological affinity, but because they would see the adversary's actions as a threat to their national interests.

The new multipolar global order would also be more complex in terms of the number of powers that would constitute the major players, as besides the major nations and blocs such as the U.S., China, India, and the EU at the global level, there would also be major players at the regional level such as Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, Iran, Israel, Japan, and South Korea, making the balance of power a more complex system. But it would be very difficult to predict whether such a system would be more stable than the liberal world order, as the international system has become unpredictable due to the rise of a significant number of nonstate actors in the context of globalization. Besides, China is trying to promote an illiberal multilateral system led by it by pushing its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as an alternative to the Western-led financial organizations like the World Bank and IMF.[3] It is too early to say whether China's attempts will turn out to be successful, as there are myriad factors that both positively and negatively impact the ultimate results. A factor that favors the Chinese model is its attractiveness to governments of nations in the Global South, as the model includes no demands for democratization or protection of human rights. On the other hand, there are increasing concerns, such as whether participation in the BRI results in a debt trap and economic crisis for nations. There are other concerns as well, such as the Chinese government's crackdown on Chinese tech companies and the lack of open and critical debate on China in the Confucius

Russian-made Indian Air Force Mi 17 helicopters perform during the inauguration of the Aero India 2023 at the Yelahanka Air Force Station on Feb. 13, 2023, in Bengaluru, India. The five-day event is held to showcase India's aerospace and defense capabilities. (Abhishek Chinnappa / Getty Images)

Institutes established by China in various countries. This raises the question of whether a nation's domestic policy comes under greater international critical scrutiny when it tries to promote its soft power and national image. Whether nations of the Global South will prefer joining a Chinese-led multilateral initiative over accepting Western assistance will depend on how well China manages its image and retains its credibility in the international community.

What strategies would South Asian countries adopt to survive in this period of global change? The countries in South Asia are economically dependent on the major powers of the globe, and are not exclusively linked to any one particular global power or economic bloc. India depends on Russia for armaments and spare parts for its military hardware. Most of its fighter aircrafts are also Russian. India has also received strong support from the former Soviet Union in times of crisis. In 1971, India aided the Mukti Bahini, who were fighting the Pakistan Army in what was then East Pakistan for the creation of Bangladesh. When the U.S. sent the 7th Fleet to the Bay of Bengal in support of Pakistan, the Soviets sent a naval task force, leading to the withdrawal of the Americans. Bangladesh itself has technological partnerships with Russia, including for the building of a nuclear-powered electricity generating plant. Bangladesh is also attracting investment from various countries, including Japan and China. With regard to Sri Lanka, the U.S. and EU are the biggest markets for Sri Lanka's exports. Russia has continued to support Sri Lanka at international fora with regard to Sri Lanka's track record on human rights, especially in its war against the LTTE. Sri Lanka became closer to

China in the 10 years after the war ended in 2009, as it completed many new post-war infrastructure projects with Chinese loans.[4] But in the face of the economic crisis and political upheaval in Sri Lanka, the new government is showing signs that it intends to move away from close economic ties with China.

The Chinese see India as collaborating with the West to check their influence in South Asia. When it comes to smaller South Asian countries, it is a matter of balancing India and China. The situation in the Maldives is quite complex, as there are political factions in their domestic politics that alternately support India and China. Therefore, Maldivian domestic politics will decide its foreign policy. Shared borders means that China has considerable influence in Nepali domestic politics. Likewise, China has leverage over Bhutan to solve the two countries' boundary problems in a manner favorable to China. While national interests would determine whether South Asian countries would be close to China, such countries that share borders with China would find it difficult to completely avoid its influence. Strategic mistakes on the part of India, which is sometimes seen as a "big brother" by smaller South Asian countries, could drive these countries toward China.

Pakistan's situation is in a way different from the other South Asian countries, as it was clearly in the Western camp during the Cold War. It later allied with China when it realized that the latter could effectively counter India in South Asia. Pakistan managed to have strategic relations with both its patrons, the U.S. and China. But in any relation between patrons and clients, changes in the strategic requirements and goals of the patron can drastically alter its relations with its clients. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan also brought about deteriorating ties with Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan grew closer to Russia due to Russia's deepening relations with China, as well as taking advantage of lost momentum in India-Russia relations.[5] There was a political strand in Pakistan led by former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan that increasingly wanted to maintain neutrality between the West on the one side and Russia and China on the other. But with his ouster due to the opposition of the Pakistan Army, which still favors the old alliance with the U.S., this thinking has lost its traction. It is doubtful that this change can lead to a warming of relations between the U.S. and Pakistan.

The South Asian countries have tried to balance relations with major powers by considering the varied economic and political relations that they have with these countries. This was the case even when India was getting very close to the U.S. in recent years. Even when India participated in the Quad, which is often described as an attempt to counter Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region, along with the U.S., Japan, and Australia, it refused to take part in the naval patrols of the Quad.[6] India was always reluctant to depict the Quad as an anti-China alliance. This was one of the reasons the U.S. formed the AUKUS, a trilateral security alliance between the U.S., the United Kingdom, and Australia, with a clearer mandate to counter China in the region. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine was an occasion when South Asian countries clearly were reluctant to join the West in openly taking a stand against Russia's invasion. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka abstained from the U.N. resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. India is clearly moving away from its policy of aligning itself closely with the U.S., which is the policy it followed in recent years in a situation where doing so could clearly harm its relations with Russia. But is India's decision to balance relations with both the U.S. and Russia a return to the nonalignment of the Cold War years?

The present National Democratic Alliance coalition led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that is in power in India is ideologically opposed to the nonalignment policy of the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was also the leader of the Indian National Congress. Since coming to power in 2014, the current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently skipped the Non-Aligned Movement summit meetings. Therefore, the current external affairs minister of India, S. Jaishankar, has termed India's policy of maintaining relations with all the major powers in the world as "multi-alignment."[7] India's participation in both the Russia- and China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Quad, which includes the U.S., provides an illustration of how this multialignment works. India's participation in the SCO despite the presence of China, with which it has a border conflict, confirms the idea of "no limits in cooperation." India's

A photo from the Iranian Army's official website shows Iranian, Russian, and Chinese warships in a joint military drill on the Indian Ocean on Jan, 21, 2022. Iran, Russia, and China did the joint naval drills for three days to reinforce "common security," according to an Iranian naval official. (Iranian Army office / AFP via Getty Images)

profile is set to further increase as it is set to assume the presidency of the G-20 and the chair of the SCO.

The prioritization of certain parts of the world that are seen as more vital to the U.S.' national interests complicate the country's strategy toward South Asia. Michael O'Hanlon quotes George Kennan to list the regions that he considered important for American security, including Western Europe, Russia, and Japan. South Asia does not figure in this list. O'Hanlon suggests that the U.S. should follow a strategy of absolute restraint, where if China tries to grab territory, including in the South China Sea or Taiwan, the U.S. should not intervene directly. Instead, it should use indirect methods such as economic warfare and attacks on China-bound shipping in the Indian Ocean.[8] But such a method would be more effective if the U.S. had the military and diplomatic support of South Asian countries such as India. It is not just because India is useful as a bulwark against China that South Asia is important as a region. India is also one of the fastest growing economies in the world, which would not have been clearly envisaged during the time of George Kennan. South Asian countries will not respond positively to the U.S. strategy of putting pressure on them to join its political and economic efforts to isolate nations that challenge the liberal order, especially in the form of sanctions. This is because of the diverse political and economic relations that South Asian countries have developed to ensure their national interests, as mentioned earlier. The South Asian countries also do not have military relationships with the U.S., in which the latter's troops would provide protection to them as they do in Europe or East Asia. Therefore, expecting these countries to adhere to America's policies in the same way as members of NATO or Japan is unrealistic.

In a scenario in which the unipolar global order is on the verge of decline, it would be worthwhile for the U.S. not to expect South Asian countries to align with it on the basis of ideological affinity, but rather because it suits their respective national interests. Preventing the spread of Chinese influence in the region would

be in the mutual interests of the U.S. and South Asian countries. But countries within the region also remain aware that China is a neighbor, and they would prefer using diplomacy to diffuse a crisis rather than use armed force. This is actually in line with the strategy of absolute restraint that O'Hanlon advocates. South Asian countries realize that the U.S.' adversaries and rivals, such as Iran and China, are countries with which they will have to engage precisely because these two countries are important neighbors to the region. This will have to be strongly taken into consideration by the U.S. While it can be easily understood by the U.S. government, which engages in diplomacy with South Asian nations regularly, a more informed debate in political circles in the U.S. about what goes into the making of foreign policies in South Asia could result in more understanding from the U.S. Congress.

All of the countries in South Asia, especially Bangladesh, are drastically affected by climate change. This is another area in which the U.S. and South Asian countries can cooperate. The Biden administration's steps to reverse the decisions of the Trump presidency to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, to continue to push for further reduction in carbon emissions, and to continue to fund climate adaptation programs in countries like Bangladesh can help the U.S. gain soft power in South Asia. The U.S. would also have to look for long-term changes in South Asia's political and strategic scenario to build stronger relations with countries in the region. If Russia becomes more dependent on China, that could affect ties between Russia and India, leading to more robust relations between the U.S. and India. By exercising prudence and patience, the U.S. can ensure that there will be fruitful collaborations with countries in South Asia to face common challenges in a fast-changing global scenario relative to previous decades.

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