

STRATEGIKA

ISSUE 55

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

NOVEMBER 2018



THE STRUCTURE OF WORLD POWER

IN THIS ISSUE

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CONTENTS

NOVEMBER 2018 • ISSUE 55

BACKGROUND ESSAY

The Structure of the Contemporary International System
by Josef Joffe

FEATURED COMMENTARY

Seeking Stability in the Structure of Power by Seth Cropsey
The Vagaries of World Power by Nadia Schadlow

RELATED COMMENTARY

There is Only One Superpower by Gordon G. Chang
A Wobbling Goliath by Giselle Donnelly
A Different Path to Global Stability by Chris Gibson
Regional Bipolarity, The New Global Model by Ralph Peters
America on Top by Miles Maochun Yu

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Discussion Questions
Suggestions for Further Reading



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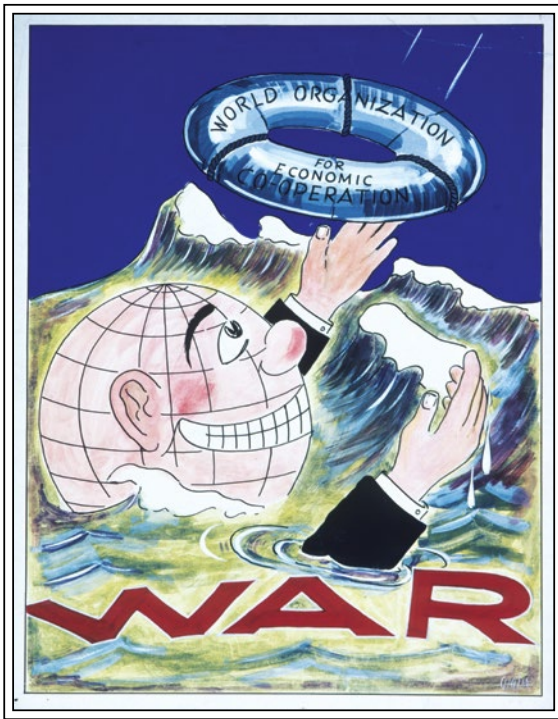


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The Structure of the Contemporary International System

By Josef Joffe

A monopoly obtains when one firm is free to set prices and output while keeping ambitious newcomers out of the market. The best example is Standard Oil in the late 19th century. Ruthlessly undercutting competitors, the company ended up controlling 90 percent of refined oil flows in the United States. The United States never had that kind of overweening power in the international “market.” It may have come close to unipolarity in the 1990s when its mortal rival, the Soviet Union, had committed suicide. Yet the contemporary world is no longer unipolar.

Neither is it bi- or multipolar.

What, then, is the nature of the international system, as defined by the distribution of power? That depends on how the various sources of power measure up: economic, military, diplomatic, cultural.

A World of Two Triangles

Applying GDP as a gauge of economic might, the world looks tripolar. The three heavyweights are the United States with a 20-trillion-dollar economy, followed by the EU with 18 and China with 12. The next contender, Japan, is way down, weighing in at 5 trillion.

A critical measure is military power. The EU is rich, but not a strategic player because its 27 nations do not an e pluribus unum make. Nor is the EU equipped or willing to project force globally (unless in tandem with the United States). Like Japan’s, Europe’s safety is ultimately guaranteed by the United States. So it plays in a different league from China and Russia.

In the case of Russia, the relationship between economic and strategic weight is reversed when comparing Putinland with the EU. Militarily, it is a worthy rival of the United States, yet economically, it is a dwarf, given that the US economy is thirteen times larger while the EU outstrips Russia by a factor of eleven.

In the strategic realm, where nuclear China is steadily modernizing its conventional forces, the world may be tripolar, as well. Yet the three poles—America, Russia, and China—are not equivalent. Unlike the United States, Putin’s Russia cannot intervene anywhere in the world. The same holds true for China, though it is building a blue-water fleet to dominate at least the Western Pacific. Yet neither Russia nor China sits atop a globe-spanning system of alliances, as does the United States. In fact, these two do not have any allies, let alone a planetary network of bases.

True, China’s land forces are almost twice the size of America’s. Yet the bulk of these are for internal and border security, whereas the United States does not have to worry about Mexico and Canada, nor about a

restive population with a historic record of revolt and civil war. When it comes to forces beyond borders, the United States is far ahead on aircraft carriers and advanced large surface combatants. In the air, the United States fields three times as many military aircraft. Fifth-generation combat planes are steadily replacing the older craft. In terms of useable power, the United States is far ahead.

Economically, China also lags behind. Though an economic giant, the world's No. 2, the Middle Kingdom does not have what matters more than mere GDP: America's ability to dominate the channels of global trade and especially finance. It gives the United States a leg up on economic warfare, be it by way of sanctions or punitive tariffs.

What about China's fabulous growth? The latest figure (2018) is 6.6 percent, a far cry from the double-digit rates in the past that spawned all these wide-eyed predictions of China as the new No. 1. Set aside the debate on the veracity of such national statistics. Consider instead China's growth model launched under Deng Xiaoping: overinvestment, under-consumption, undervalued currency, and "exports first." This model catapulted Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea into double-digit growth in the sixties and seventies. They are now down to low single digits for reasons inherent in the model (add postwar West Germany to the roster). Add also that China is a disaster waiting to happen. Its national debt is estimated at three times GDP. Its banking system is drowning in nonperforming loans. Empty new cities are testimony to overinvestment in fixed assets. The working-age population began to shrink around 2015.

So the giant stands on wobbly legs. The more general point is this: The United States can play at any table in the global casino and then with the largest pile of chips of all of them. China and Russia cannot. They are strong enough to flex their muscles regionally, as in Syria, but not equipped to play a global game. All told, the contemporary system is not unipolar, but neither is it truly tripolar. China and Russia form the base of the strategic triangle while the EU and China do so in the economic one. Yet the United States represents the apex of both. So much for the snapshot.

If we look ahead, the picture turns blurry, and the question becomes: Can the United States maintain its exalted position? Donald Trump's answer is a jubilant or growling "yes."

With its surfeit of useable power, Trump's America is trying to change the political and economic terms of trade in its favor—"pony up or else. . . ." Donald Trump is taking the axe to the Liberal International Order (LIO) America built and guarded not only for itself but also for others, which endowed it with a third source of unique power beyond its economic and military assets. To wit: alliances for mutual security, trade within rules-bound institutions, open economies, and multilateral conflict resolution. These institutions did limit United States autonomy, but they also granted Washington a hefty measure of authority grounded in consent and legitimacy.

Add to this unmatched cultural clout. The world speaks English with an American accent and absorbs American law in the new realms of commerce such as intellectual property. It gobbles up American gadgets like iPhones, communicates via United States social media, watches entertainment made in Hollywood, and aspires to send its young to Caltech and Stanford. Russia's cultural power is nil, and China's is still miniscule.

Good Boys Go to Heaven, Bad Boys Have More Fun

Vast power has its own temptations. The election of Donald Trump in 2016 spells a caesura in America's grand strategy whose depth and longevity is still hard to gauge. To put it in the harshest of terms, Trumpian policy is pursuing short-term gains at the risk of losing long-term leadership. The game is "I win when you lose." Hence the trade battles with China and Europe, the pressure on allies to up defense spending, the reconstruction of NAFTA in favor of the United States, the assault on the JCPOA, the nuclear deal with Iran, the fitful attempts at a "reset" with old enemies like Russia and North Korea that agitate and alienate old

friends. At the end of this road, the LIO, the framework of United States influence and of its agenda-setting ability and convening power may well be history.

But not quite yet. It is a testimony to America's vast strategic, economic, and financial clout that this approach to friends and foes is working. With his trade wars, Trump has gotten the attention of the EU, China, Canada, and Mexico. Though its economy is almost as large as the American one, the EU is treading very softly on retaliation. The Europeans are beefing up defense outlays and readiness. In the fall of 2018, NATO launched its largest war game since the end of the Cold War. In Norway, 50,000 troops, 250 aircraft, and 10,000 vehicles from 31 countries demonstrated their ability to fight off a "fictitious aggressor," aka Russia. Germany, the main target of Trump's ire, fielded the largest contingent. Chalk one up for The Donald.

Trump may yet soften up North Korea and Iran, which is buckling under sanctions. The Palestinians, who have gotten an almost free ride for decades, are being confronted by Trumpian reality, what with the closing of their "embassy" in Washington. Add the defunding of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), the UN agency established to sustain Palestinians in camps on Israel's periphery where they hold on to their revisionist dreams. More significant is the strategic realignment in the Middle East that defies 70 years of deadly Arab-Israeli enmity. It unites Israel, Saudi Arabia, the "Gulfies," and Egypt in a common front against an expanding Iran that clings to its nuclear option.

It is a further testimony to American power that the rest of the world is not (yet) ganging up on No. 1, as happened regularly in centuries past. In the end, superior coalitions brought down Europe's would-be hegemon: Habsburg Spain, the France of Louis XIV and Napoleon, the Germany of Wilhelm II and Adolf Hitler. The Atlantic coalition prevailed peacefully against the Soviet Union. Great power begets greater counterpower, says international history. For the time being, the United States seems immune to this law as it throws its weight around in the age of Trump. The rest of the world is not about to go after Mr. Big. Not yet.

So in the shorter run, Trump has been scoring, keeping rivals off balance, and getting his way in a game Thomas Schelling has laid out as Rationality of Irrationality in his Arms and Influence. Pretend to be unbalanced, and you will intimidate your opponents. What about the long run? The LIO and America's global engagement are too costly according to Trump, allowing others to "free-ride." Actually, this American "empire" comes quite cheap. The price tag is 4 percent of GDP for defense. It was ten times higher in World War II. The trade deficit runs to 2.9 percent, the current account gap to 2.5 percent of GDP.

The upside of such "dues," as economists would remind us, is that external deficits (when a country consumes more than it produces) paradoxically spell not weakness, but strength. Essentially, the United States is a kind of central bank to the world, having fed streams of liquidity into the system since World War II. In turn, such a service makes the dollar a global reserve and transaction currency, without which Trump's financial sanctions would lose their teeth. Conversely, surplus areas like Euroland or China cannot field a universal currency because they suck in more than they provide to the world. To boot, no nation has capital markets as deep and wide as the United States. Together with an open financial system these spell power. The golden rule here is this: He who has the gold, makes the rules.

Maybe, Trump will be history by 2020. Maybe, America will resume its role as benign hegemon by once more upholding the LIO—doing well for itself by doing good for others. But if Trumpism—might makes right—is the future, the United States will lose out in this quasi-tripolar system as it keeps dismantling the US-sponsored high-rise where it occupies the penthouse. Its commercial rivals may finally come together to unseat the almighty dollar. They might raise trade barriers against the United States while shutting it out of regional free-trade zones. They will form ad hoc coalitions to isolate the United States in the diplomatic arena.

In fact, an alliance of sorts has been emerging on Iran where the Europeans and the Russians are trying softly-softly to undercut US financial sanctions designed to force Tehran to renegotiate the JCPOA. It defies the diplomatic imagination to believe that the United States can have it both ways. On the one hand, Washington inflicts punitive tariffs on the EU and China while rearming against Beijing and Moscow. On the other hand, the United States needs all of them to build an impenetrable sanctions wall around Iran. Even the mightiest nation on earth cannot pull off this trick. It cannot harness those it harms.

So short-term success comes with a long-term warning. Donald Trump is deconstructing the very order that has granted America a lifetime of primacy at acceptable costs. Bullies don't have friends; their companions are fear and defiance. Those who keep breaking the rules they themselves have invented might end up in a world where their authority trickles away and others impose their own rules. Despotism regimes like Russia and China will not rebuild the international order Trump seems intent on dismantling in the name of "America first."

It takes liberal states to craft and safeguard a liberal international order—Britain, then the United States. Conversely, the hegemonists of yesteryear went for conquest and top-down empire—Spain in the 16th century, France in the 17th, and again in the 19th under Napoleon, Germany's under Wilhelm and Adolf in the 20th and Stalinist Russia after World War II. If the United States stops safeguarding the liberal order, illiberal regimes will step in, damaging US long-term interests. Housekeepers do a lot better than housebreakers



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Seeking Stability in the Structure of Power

By Seth Cropsey

The global strategic landscape is moving away from the primacy that America achieved over the last century. New terrain includes the possibility of great power competition, a return to the bipolarity that policy makers in the immediate post-Cold War said must never happen again. Current sentiment in the United States illustrates that there are worse possibilities than bipolarity.

The social science bent in the humanities enabled polarity's drift into the study of international relations. It is used to describe a specific phenomenon—the distribution of power between political units in an international system. Polarity's antecedent is the "balance of power," a central concept in Western international relations theory that, as David Hume noted, has appeared from Thucydides onwards. Nor is the balance of power restricted to the Western tradition. The great Chinese literary work, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, recounts the struggle for power during and after the Han dynasty's collapse.

The balance of power concept holds that a rising political actor's neighbors will naturally view it as a threat. Careful diplomacy and structural impediments, including political ineptitude, ideology, and enduring enmity between potential allies can mitigate the balance of power's effects, while outright military superiority can eliminate the balance altogether and replace it with hegemony. But absent global governance or universal empire, the logic of the balance of power will continue to govern the international system.

Polarity theory, however, transcends the abstract notions of the balance of power. It identifies the number of actors in an international system as the most important variable in determining its character and stability. Multipolar systems involve several relatively equal great powers, which form alliances to further their own ambitions, and check those of their rivals. Bipolar systems are characterized by two dominant "superpowers," whose strength forces all other actors to choose between each titan. Unipolar systems, the rarest historically, are defined by a single superpower, with nearly matchless military superiority.

The line between these polar systems, particularly bipolar and multipolar ones, is fuzzy. For example, while Athens and Sparta dominated 5th century BC Greek politics, both had to respect the concerns of lesser powers. Sparta's domestic structure compelled attention to allied concerns, particularly those of Corinth, for fear of defection or the creation of a third contestant.

The Cold War's conclusion initiated an unprecedented period of unipolar power. Balancing typically followed such watershed moments in international politics, either immediate, as occurred between 1945 and 1952, or delayed by unjustifiable hope, as with the interwar period. In the sole alternative case—Napoleon's defeat in 1815 and the subsequent Concert system—creative diplomacy and broad homogeneity in relative power still relied upon the balance of power's logic.



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Initially, however, predictions of resistance to the United States' dominant international position did not materialize. Similarities between the Anglosphere and European continent diminished suspicion, while a politically tumultuous Russia and economically driven China lacked the power to contest American actions regardless of objections. Additionally, America's unique character suited its unipolar role. Americans have eschewed imperial expansion and territorial conquest. While smaller states had to band together against the hegemon, or risk destruction, they would instead be able to cooperate with the hegemon and with each other, secure in the United States' benign intentions.

Just as the balance of power defines international political life, deception permeates all forms of politics. Particularly for actors with aggressive strategic goals, obfuscating capabilities and intentions is a critical political instrument. But as economic, and by extension military, power have dispersed, strategic obfuscation has become more difficult. The current international system exhibits multipolar and bipolar characteristics.

Two major actors, the United States and China, are the most consequential. The United States' global power projection capabilities and high-tech economy are unmatched, except, potentially, by China's regional denial networks and economic productivity. Nevertheless, secondary powers remain relevant.

Iran's irregular forces have carved out an expanding Near Eastern empire from the Levant's bloody cities and deserts. If it fulfills its nuclear ambitions, Iran's influence can only be expected to grow.

Russia's economy remains weak, but it possesses a robust security establishment that has outmaneuvered more powerful Western opponents in multiple confrontations. India, despite its internal divisions, retains the potential to assert itself internationally, as does Europe, if united under a working political framework. And the threats that loomed so large in the aftermath of September 11th, rogue regimes and terrorist networks, remain.

Whether today's world is bipolar, multipolar, or otherwise, the balance of power has reasserted itself. In past decades, one would expect this balance to crystallize. America would either compete with its challengers and force all but one of them out of the running or engage in a diplomatic balancing act between relevant actors, searching for an equilibrium (with some combination of the two measures the most likely response).

These are not ordinary circumstances. Rather than actively competing with its rivals, the United States and the West are increasingly reluctant to pay the price of power. China eyes Taiwan, but America remains largely silent. A resurgent Russia and increasing potential for terrorism threaten European security, but Europe fragments rather than uniting, and dallies with xenophobic political movements. Britain flirts with economic risk as a palliative to ineffectual political leadership. Both major American political parties remain embroiled in a politicized investigation that avoids central issues the country faces. The West leans toward a deepening unwillingness to fight for either interests or values.



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The Vagaries of World Power

By Nadia Schadlow

By traditional measures—military strength, economic wealth, population size—the United States remains the world’s preeminent superpower. Its economy continues to expand; it deploys the largest military in the world; it is home to a growing population; and American laws and capital flows encourage a vibrant ecosystem for innovation.

But in a world of determined competitors, asymmetric threats, and networked technology, those traditional measures of power are no longer sufficient to ensure the ability of the United States to preserve peace and promote prosperity at home or abroad. The prevailing assumption in the post-Cold War period was that America’s superpower status was the principal determinant of world order. Today, that assumption is no longer valid. We are facing, as Henry Kissinger observed, “a period in which forces beyond the restraint of any order determine the future.”¹ The postwar world order built and defended by the United States and its allies is crumbling. World order no longer conforms to traditional sources or uses of American power.

Except for the existential threats posed by nuclear weapons, “world power” does not exist in a meaningful sense. Today, the phrase has limited utility. There are three reasons for this. First, states and other actors project power from within geographic regions, not throughout the entire world. Thus, the balance of economic, political, and military instruments and influence within those regions is a crucial measure of power. Second, the nature of power today is diffuse. Compared to fifty years ago, many more actors can and do participate in shaping political, economic, and military trends. The playing field is also filled with state and non-state actors using technology and asymmetric tactics to secure their advantage. Third, power goes to those who can adapt quickly and actually get things done. It accrues to those actors who can use their political, economic, and military instruments fluidly and responsively. The United States has many of the building blocks necessary to deter and shape, but the architecture in which these tools reside is outdated and broken, thereby making us less capable of using our advantages to achieve our desired outcomes.

Power from Regions

State actors such as China, Russia, Iran, as well as non-state groups such as jihadist terrorists pose significant challenges to the United States. Each of these challenges is a competition with its own character and dynamic. What these actors have in common is an increasing ability to operate freely in key regions

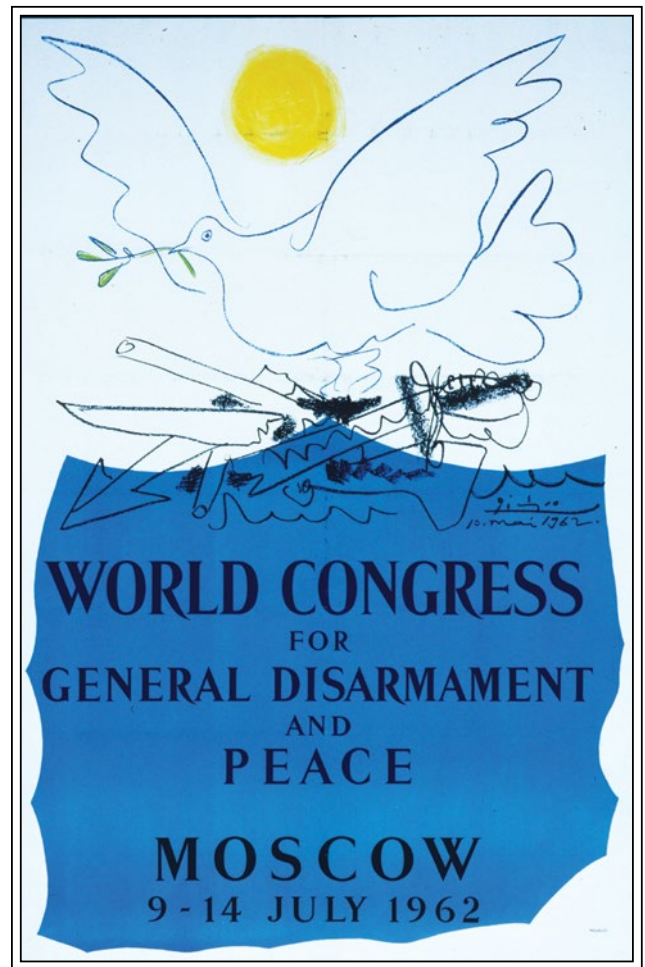


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of the world, undermining the rules of the post-World War II international order, and threatening the sovereignty of states in those regions. Russia's invasion of Ukraine shifted the balance of power in Europe and established a new status quo from which Russia can and does project power. Its air defenses extend over all of the Baltic states, most of Poland, and over most of Ukraine. Moscow's rearming in and around Kaliningrad provide Russia with serious sea denial capabilities, allowing it to potentially shut down access to the Baltic Sea. China continues to militarize man-made islands in the South China Sea, having fundamentally turned that region into a giant Chinese military base. President Xi's speech at the 19th Party Congress in 2017 cited its island-building effort as an example of "China moving closer to center stage." Similarly, US Admiral Philip Davidson, commander of the Indo-Pacific Command, observed that China was now in a position to "extend its influence thousands of miles to the south and project power deep into Oceania," and was now "capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States."²

Iran continues to shape the power dynamics of the Middle East. Its successful use of proxies such as Hezbollah and the orchestration of smart-missile attacks on Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and Israel, keep the region and Iran's rivals there off balance. The struggle for stability in the Middle East depends upon finding effective counters to the Hezbollah model. Even after the decline of the Islamic State, jihadist groups continue to operate from the region, posing a threat to US allies and partners.

The ability of these competitors and adversaries to flout the rules that bind democratic states together is a form of asymmetric advantage that reduces America's power and reach, despite its superpower status. Moreover, our competitors have the benefit of being able to focus on the region most important to them, while the United States remains stretched across all three.

Diffusion of Power

The United States is vulnerable to asymmetric threats precisely because of the strengths of our open economy and society, as well as our highly networked military forces. One needs only to glance at a week's worth of headlines to reveal how, with the proliferation of technology, state and non-state actors can do significant harm using cyber, informational, biological, and other tools. Individual actors have cost American companies and individuals billions of dollars using relatively simple cyber tools. State actors such as China have not only stolen troves of information, but their use of cyber exploits have called into question the reliability of key American weapons systems—with the Department of Defense only now "beginning to grapple with the scale of [our] vulnerabilities."³

The number of instruments available to individuals and small groups, and the effectiveness of those instruments, have increased dramatically over the past decade. As Jakub Grygiel has written, the proliferation of lethality has empowered groups that no longer need the vast apparatus of a state to be lethal and, therefore, strategic actors.⁴ Traditional tools of statecraft such as deterrence and diplomacy are difficult to apply to these actors. It is hard to deter those who are small and mobile and do not present clear targets. And it is difficult to negotiate with a group that is often not hierarchical and for whom violence is a source of cohesion.

The past couple of centuries were characterized by periods of stability interspersed by massive eruptions of industrialized warfare that altered maps and power balances. Today's trends may result in a different world—one where constant violence—perhaps low-level and diffuse, but disproportionately disruptive—is interspersed by undecisive wars which nonetheless upset distributions and balances of power.

In addition to this democratization of violence, an increasing array of actors are developing and deploying disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence. Rapidly advancing technology is an active force in

the world. It is altering individual lives, as well as geopolitical relationships, and it is affecting the character of conflict and the nature of statecraft. Many countries, from China and Russia among major powers to economic micropowers such as Israel and Singapore, are investing heavily in AI (artificial intelligence). Autocracies can use it to alter undesirable behaviors, enhance monitoring, and target repression on segments of their populations. AI and other technologies, whether embedded as parts of existing platforms or as enablers of new concepts for military power such as swarms,⁵ have the power to supplant traditional modes of conflict and disruption and to expand the competitive space. Non-state actors could have the ability to access simpler algorithms and capabilities to enhance their destructive power. AI and other emerging technologies such as robotics, gene editing, and additive manufacturing, could reshape the nature of politics and political systems, and allow states to expand the competitive space. As Michael C. Horowitz argues, the risk for the United States is if, despite being a technology innovator, it takes its economic and military leadership for granted and fails to be agile and nimble in leveraging these technologies in the national security sector and beyond to sustain America's edge.⁶

The Exertion of Power

The ability to act—to respond to threats and to seize opportunities as they arise—is a critical but undervalued component of power. Despite its superpower status, the United States has not adapted quickly or effectively to the threats posed by competitors—whether state or non-state actors.

While many of our competitors are agile, the United States is ponderous. It took the United States a full year to respond to China's deliberate hack of OPM's extremely sensitive security clearance information on over 20 million Americans. It is well known that the pace of the Defense Department's acquisition processes takes so long that by the time our "advanced" military systems are fielded, they are nearly obsolete. Legislation to improve cooperation between the public and private sectors on key areas of technology remains mired in partisan infighting in Congress. Moreover, for over two decades, descriptions of America's vulnerabilities across its critical infrastructures have become only more dire, while solutions remain fleeting.

In the current geostrategic landscape, with its continuous tension between disruption and construction, institutional rigidity is a serious strategic liability. As the Trump administration's National Security Strategy observed, "repressive, closed states and organizations, although brittle in many ways, are often more agile and faster at integrating economic, military, and especially informational means" to achieve their goals. As a result, with these incremental successes our adversaries and competitors "accrue strategic gains over time"⁷ and a new status quo emerges. And the United States is then, automatically on the defensive: responsive rather than proactive.

The ability to act with timeliness and dexterity must become a front and center national security priority. Advantages accrue to those actors who can use all of their instruments of power with agility and speed, and often, simultaneously. In the past, the United States could outbuild and outspend its enemies to compensate for slow decision-making processes. Not so today.

The organizational, legal, and bureaucratic models that emerged in the post-World War II period today perpetuate stove-piped thinking and actions, making it extremely difficult to respond to current threats or equally important, to take advantage of opportunities. For the most part, responsive US action is limited to those situations in which one organization controls the capabilities, budgets, and has the right authorities. Thus, our combatant commands such as US Central Command or the US Special Operations Command, tend to be able to respond quickly to events on the ground. The US Treasury Department controls virtually all the tools and authorities to act to impose sanctions. Unfortunately, such parallels

do not exist when dealing with problem sets that require different parts of the government to respond simultaneously.

Precisely because we live in an arena of continuous political, military, and economic interactions—accelerated by technology—power will shift to those actors, state and non-state, that can develop and deploy the operational models necessary to shape outcomes. There is nothing static about “superpower advantage.”

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- 1 Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (Penguin, 2014), p. 2.
 - 2 Advance Policy Questions for Admiral Philip Davidson, USN Expected Nominee for Commander, US Pacific Command. [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_APQs_04-17-18.pdf]
 - 3 GAO Report.
 - 4 Jakub J. Grygiel, *Return of the Barbarians: Confronting Non-State Actors from Ancient Rome to the Present* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 12–47.
 - 5 Swarming is a “deliberately structured, coordinated, strategic way to strike from all directions.” It often involves the “deployment of myriad, small, dispersed, networked maneuver units.” See John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Swarming and the Future of Conflict* (RAND, 2000), p. vii. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/documented_briefings/DB311.html]
 - 6 Michael C. Horowitz, “Artificial Intelligence, International Competition, and the Balance of Power” *Texas National Security Review* 3:1 (May 2018). [<https://tnsr.org/2018/05/artificial-intelligence-international-competition-and-the-balance-of-power>]



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There Is Only One Superpower

By Gordon G. Chang

“China has overtaken the U.S. in all respects,” said Tsinghua University professor Hu Angang last year.

The high-profile Hu is only one of many Chinese proponents of the notion that this era belongs to their nation. The United States, they maintain, is a spent force.

Therefore, we should not be surprised that they believe the international system either is now or will soon become China-centric. In any event, the prevailing narrative in China and elsewhere is that the world has passed its “unipolar moment”—the years immediately following the Cold War when Washington was dominant—and is “bipolar” or “multipolar.”

Arrogant Beijing leaders may not agree, but the United States will continue to dominate this era. However bright the Chinese sun shone in recent years, the People’s Republic is at this time stumbling. Decades on the rise, China looks like it has started a long period of decline.

We start with the conventional wisdom. “No one denies that in the long term, things look good for the People’s Republic,” writes Kerry Brown, a professor at King’s College in a recent opinion piece.

Actually, the situation is not good. The economy, the engine of China’s extraordinary four-decade advance, is clearly exhausted.

Juiced by debt—especially since the end of 2008—the country now cannot grow without gobs of it. When the so-called “hidden debt” is taken into account, the economy is incurring one-and-a-half times as much indebtedness as it is producing nominal gross domestic product if official GDP figures are accurate.

They’re not. China is not growing at the 6.7 percent pace claimed for the first three quarters of this year. In reality, it’s less than half that. The combination of slow growth and unprecedented accumulation of debt suggests the country is heading to a systemic crisis.

While China moves toward its debt crisis, Xi Jinping, its ruler, is reversing the “reform and opening up” policies that fueled China’s rise. It is ironic that as the country approaches the 40th anniversary of the start of its era of economic liberalization, Xi is reembracing not only state-dominated economics but also totalitarian-style politics.

The embrace of Maoism leaves China ill-prepared to meet the critical challenges of the eroding environment, crumbling demographics, and emerging societal modernity. Xi can coerce but not persuade. His ideological campaigns are leaving the Chinese people, for the most part, cold.

Externally, Xi is showing a face of China that most abhor. Beijing is grabbing territory from neighbors, closing off the global commons, and proliferating nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. It makes common cause with a host of bad actors, such as genocide-committing generals in Burma and misery-creating autocrats in Latin America. Even Beijing’s friends recognize it has chosen the wrong path. For instance, Brown, the King’s College professor, is the author of “How China Is Losing the World.”

China has already lost the United States. The Chinese progressed in recent decades in large part because the United States and others paved their entry into global commerce and international diplomatic councils. A succession of presidents, from Nixon onward, made success of the Communist Party a goal of American foreign policy.

Now, that's no longer the case. Americans have run out of patience or optimism, but in any event President Trump is pursuing policies either undermining Beijing or ignoring its interests. Moreover, President No. 45, unlike at least two of his last three predecessors, is not trying to manage American decline. He is all about asserting American power and is, to modify his signature line, "Making America Great Again."

Whether or not one thinks America has always been great, the new line of thinking is trouble for Chinese communists. Many of them know Beijing cannot win a long-term struggle with America. Unfortunately, their leader is not acknowledging that reality, which means he could take China down with him.

The world is still unipolar. There is only one superpower. It is not China.



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A Wobbling Goliath

By Giselle Donnelly

Describing the balance of power by way of “poles,” the analytical framework so favored in recent decades by professional political scientists, is no longer that useful. The polar concept earned undue acclaim through the writings of the late Charles Krauthammer, whose 1990 *Foreign Affairs* article, “The Unipolar Moment,” [<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1991-02-01/unipolar-moment>] was a succinct way to capture the extent of American geopolitical influence at the end of the Cold War, but is an inadequate yardstick for understanding the present moment or the future of—wait for it—“the American-led liberal international order.”

To be sure, these organizing principles of global life have their discontents. But no one has done better than Walter Russell Mead in describing Iran, Russia, and China as an “Axis of Weevils,” capable only of undermining the world the United States has made, not bringing forth a new one. To begin with, the Weevils lack the same ex nihilo opportunity that presented itself to America in the wake of World War II (and, in fact, World War I before it); absent a similar catastrophe that so inflates and deflates the relative power of nations, constructing a new—even regional—“pole” of power will be the work of decades, if not centuries. Before any fall would come much more decline.

In imagining the fate of the Pax Americana, Rome might well provide a better model than the European empires of the modern age. Like Rome, the United States is a pervasive linguistic, cultural, and economic as well as military influence, and America’s “provinces” enjoy a good deal of autonomy. The number and power of “contented” allies far outstrips the extent of adversarial discontents. Moreover, the Weevils have little to offer by way of ideological attraction. At their cores, China and Russia are animated by a blood-and-soil kind of nationalism, while Iran pairs that with Shi’a sectarianism. There’s not much there if you remain among the “nonaligned” or considering your own long-term interests.

But if the barbarians outside the gates pose a manageable challenge, those within are of greater concern. While much ink and many electrons are spent bewailing the divisions and partisanship of our current politics, it is the increasing agreement over the role of America in the world that is more worrisome. From the Rand Paul Right to the Kamala Harris Left, there is a rising consensus that American power is both waning and illegitimate. President Trump’s “American First” rhetoric is a manifestation of this impulse—though his policies, which have included maintaining the American position in Afghanistan and, reportedly, in Syria as well, do not. Both parties have developed deep phobias about the use of military power, but when a

POLL: What is the current chief threat to US security?

- Vladimir Putin’s regional bullying and his arsenal of 6,500 nuclear missiles.
- The ascendance of China and its increasing regional aggression and global economic reach.
- Rogue states like North Korea and Iran.
- Radical Islamic terrorism and the offshoots of ISIS and al-Qaeda.
- America’s massive debt, internal discord, and dysfunctional politics.

Democrat next occupies the White House, there is likely to be a yearning for the “internationalism” of the Trump years.

Rome survived multiple sackings but not its internal divisions—the one pole became two and then the many squabbling polities of the last millennium. The long decline came before the fall, but the subsequent age was indeed a dark one. The result has been large concentrations of immigrants segregated in neighborhoods like the banlieues of Paris or the satellite “dish-cities” of Amsterdam. Shut out from labor markets, plied with generous social welfare payments, and allowed to cultivate beliefs and cultural practices inimical to liberal democracy, many of these immigrants despise their new homes and find the religious commitment and certainty of radical Islam an attractive alternative. And like the two French-Algerian brothers who attacked the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, some turn to terrorism.



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Polarity, and the balance of power logic that underpins it, is only relevant when all actors in the system participate. Absent easy room for expansion, states must resort to subtle maneuvering or violence to achieve their objectives. A vacuum, created when one actor refuses to engage, abrogates this logic. Balancing is illogical when predators see weak and weary prey. Rather than fighting over scraps, they can gorge themselves upon fresh meat. Only when the target chooses to resist its enemies, or is devoured by them, will the balance, and polarity, return.

A Different Path to Global Stability

By Chris Gibson

The global strategic landscape is clearly evolving beyond US hegemony, presenting both challenges and opportunities for our national leaders.

With growing economies and/or formidable military might and a desire to play on the world stage, China, India, and Russia are on the rise and they offer the other nearly 200 nations around the world alternatives as they seek trading partners, economic aid, and security arrangements. For over the past 25 years, the United States has enjoyed a near monopolistic position in these areas, but increasingly these emerging global powers are contesting us in that space. Consequently, preserving our desired relationships will be more difficult.

Yet with these challenges, there is enormous opportunity. Indeed, even though America has benefited greatly from the global security arrangements we put in place after World War II, benefits that only increased after the fall of the Soviet Union, *the costs associated with hegemony have weighed heavily on the American people* and contributed significantly to the current populist political environment demanding our leaders now put “America First.” The emerging multipolarity offers opportunity to cross-level some of the burdens of maintaining global stability onto the other emerging powers and to address some of the adverse economic impacts of globalization on American companies and workers.

If the United States does not want to be the world’s policemen, and I for one agree with that position, then other emerging global powers will need to step up to do their part to help preserve stability. The transformation of the global security environment will not happen, however, without American leadership.

To lead the world towards a more stable and sustainable future, we must first take some steps to put our own house in order. We need to strengthen deterrence by bolstering our military capabilities (restoring full spectrum joint force readiness, modernizing the nuclear arsenal, and enhancing national missile and cyber defenses), improving our economy (adopting policies that promote GDP growth of 3+%), and by getting back to a balanced budget. By taking these steps, we will be in a stronger position to help influence the emerging global powers to work towards our mutual interests.



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Regional Bipolarity, The New Global Model

By Ralph Peters

The United States' superpower monopoly endures, but only in the western hemisphere. There is no regional military or economic competitor, and ideological challengers have failed or remain strategically marginal. Elsewhere, the emerging model is regional bipolarity coincident with global economic tri-polarity (United States, China, European Union).

In East Asia, the obvious regional bipolarity pits a strategic insurgent, China, against a status-quo (not "declining") power, the United States. Every other state in the region either has chosen to align itself with one of the dominant powers or makes an uneasy pretense of neutrality. For years, the majority of regional states rallied—formally or informally—around the United States as a comfortably distant security guarantor against an alarmingly near and newly aggressive China (indeed, China's epoch-making turn from strategic introspection to global aspirations may, in the long term, prove the defining strategic development of this century). Today, the situation has lost a troubling measure of stability, given the current US administration's questioning of the value of alliances: Pacific-rim states are no longer certain they can trust us, but they do not trust China, either.

In Africa, an emerging theater of competition, the regional bipolarity is between China, which pursues a "debtors' prison" model of diplomacy (lending sums to local governing elites that cannot be repaid), while the West (the USA and Europe as one entity) struggles to apply rule-of-law aid which does not enrich local "big men" as seductively, along with military support and training directed against Islamist terrorists and domestic insurgencies.

Regional bipolarity is also manifest at the regional power level, for example, between India and Pakistan, or between the majority of Arab states (plus Israel) and Iran overlaid with a neo-traditional "great game" rivalry between Russia and the United States. But those are enduring confrontations, while the shift to regional bipolarity from global superpower dominance is new and disorienting.

Despite the US dollar's continued reign as the global currency, the global economic environment is tri-polar (with the Middle East oil states in disarray and much-reduced in influence, a discordant quartet became a trio). If the great observer and philosopher of warfare, Carl von Clausewitz, had a blind spot, it was his inability to foresee economic competition as a form of warfare—a dimension in which China has led all others in recent decades.

Returning to the realm of force, the immediately alarming regional bipolar confrontation is between the Putin regime in Russia, and the United States (despite the current US president's peculiar indulgence of Putin), watched by Washington's nervous allies. Despite the gush of concern among security professionals and pundits, the danger to the international order that has prevented major conflict in Europe for seven decades (the longest period of peace in the recorded history of the continent) is even graver than generally realized.

One historical precedent illustrates the potential for catastrophic disruption: In 1494, Charles VIII of France invaded Italy, inaugurating a multifaceted revolution in military affairs and shattering the equilibrium that had evolved between the Italian states to restrict warfare to a rules-based system and make it less destructive. Charles brought with him mobile heavy artillery (revolutionary technology) that could shatter any defensive wall on the peninsula; Swiss mercenaries who had developed a new form of infantry warfare (revolutionary tactics); and a ruthlessness (the "*furia francese*") that left the mannered *condottieri*

of the old school aghast as the French massacred garrisons and civilian populations wherever they met resistance (revolutionary behavior).

While the United States has concentrated on developing battlefield technologies and has become obsessed with limiting casualties, Russia leapfrogged past our hardware, the dimensions of the jump obscured by the crudeness of the actor.

Putin's new "artillery" is the internet, where Russian-created alternative "realities" and hacking have allowed the regime to invade and degrade other countries without firing a shot: His cyber military doesn't need to shatter walls, just penetrate firewalls. The new Russian techniques of infiltration (the "little green men") and subversion-by-subsidy of political parties are revolutionary tactics. Not least, the Russian regime's willingness to murder opponents and massacre civilians (as in the Russian bombing campaign in Syria), displays strength of will utterly lacking in the West: We worry about breaking windows while Putin gleefully shatters the Euro-American order.

Putin has a coherent strategic vision, while the West is self-accusatory and self-destructive, with traditional US allies in Europe belittled and dismissed by a US administration that suggests it might not honor its most-important treaty commitments. Meanwhile, Western legislators refuse to tackle the challenge of deciding what constitutes an act of war in the digital age.

Charles VIII's move into Italy led to more than six decades of savage warfare. We shall see what becomes of Putin's parallel behavior.

A last regional bipolarity, superficially dormant for now, is the rivalry between Russia and China for control over enormous stretches of the north-Asian land mass. This is where the rising-versus-declining-power paradigm applies.

Charles VIII ultimately failed in his designs, but not before he unleashed the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse on Italy and, ultimately, on Europe. Putin has the French king's strategic DNA.



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America on Top

By Miles Maochun Yu

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been the lone superpower that, if it's so willing, can exert preponderant influence over the global, geostrategic, and geopolitical order. In a true sense, a bipolar or multipolar world order whereby the United States is of equal status and influence with another "pole" or "poles" does not really exist.

America's economy is the world's largest, nearly two times larger than China's, and is rapidly approaching close to 4 percent growth, accounting for roughly a quarter of the global economy. But the size of the economy is not the only thing that matters. Its quality remains unrivaled, too, with both a normal GDP per capita, and median household income nearly 10 times that of China's. The US dollar is the default currency in more than 80 percent of global financial transactions, without any real possibility of being replaced in that role in the foreseeable future. It's a structurally diverse, predominantly private, entrepreneurially driven, and market-oriented economy that earns the world's unswerving faith and confidence, which in turn draws the largest foreign capital inflow. In other words, the United States is the world's lone economic superpower.

The United States also has the world's strongest and most lethal military force, with a defense budget greater than the next ten largest defense spenders combined. The United States retains dominance on land, at sea, in air, and space, and possesses a nuclear arsenal that can strike and destroy targets anywhere in the world. The US Navy alone has more aircraft carriers than the rest of the world combined, with a nuclear-powered supercarrier class without any meaningful rival on the horizon. On top of its unmatched military hardware, the United States also has a global military alliance system to rely upon when international, multilateral, or proxy actions are called for. No other nation in the world can enjoy the command and alliance authority of the US military.

This American unipolar dominance also manifests itself in America's leadership in innovation, science, technology, research and development, and education. Nine out of the top ten largest tech and information companies in the world belong to the United States which also dominates in the number of Nobel laureates and top research universities, making the country the ultimate incubator of the world's most accomplished scientists and innovators.

The unipolarity enjoyed by the United States is also reflected in America's unparalleled soft power. Its founding principles of liberty, equality, human rights, and the rule of law has made the nation the ultimate destination for more immigrants than any other country. It's the world's oldest, most trusted, and most stable democracy. It sets the standards for global information exchange, social media interaction, and e-commerce through giant companies such as Facebook, Wikipedia, Amazon, YouTube, Google, and Twitter. The United States leads globally in virtually all major cultural strands, including cinema, music, sports, mass media, and television.

However, if a superpower refuses to recognize or take pride in its own greatness, it runs the risk of developing a chronic strategic hesitation to use its superpower strength to benefit its national interest. In a world vandalized by multiculturalism, whereby all nations and cultures are soothingly regarded as of equal value, talking about an unrealistic and nonexistent bipolar or multipolar world order will only help nullify America's unique position to make the world safe for democracy and untenable for tyranny

and dictatorship. However, if a superpower refuses to recognize or take pride in its own greatness, it runs the risk of developing a chronic strategic hesitation to use its superpower strength to benefit its national interest.



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Discussion Questions

1. Is the world now strategically bipolar, multipolar, or still characterized by an American superpower monopoly?
2. Does China's agenda resemble Japan's Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere of the 1930s?
3. Does the growing strategic partnership of Russia and China resemble something like the dangers of the arrangement between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union in 1939?
4. Could either North Korea or Iran soon face something similar to the abrupt but unexpected meltdown of communism in eastern Europe in 1989?
5. Is the United Nations following the trajectory of the League of Nations into irrelevance and eventual oblivion?

Suggestions for Further Reading

Recent works on Europe:

- Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower* (Cornell University Press, 2018), http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140107107650&fa=author&person_id=5910
- Richard N. Haass, *The Age of Nonpolarity: What Will Follow U.S. Dominance*, *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2008). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2008-05-03/age-nonpolarity>
- Josef Joffe, *The Myth of America's Decline: Politics, Economics, and a Half Century of False Prophecies* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2013). <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/The-Myth-of-Americas-Decline>
- Kenneth Waltz, *Structural Realism After the Cold War*, *International Security* (Summer 2000) revised version in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Cornell University Press, 2002). <http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100500840>



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The Defense of Europe

Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



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