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**A NEW WORLD ORDER?: DIALOGUE,  
INTEGRATION AND UNDERSTANDING**

1. Some New Questions.

While the general consensus is that the post-Cold War order has been characterized by US hegemony and unipolarity, there is little consensus on:

- the new contours of the *in statu nascendi*, post-crisis, new international order: the increase or decreased of the level of competitiveness/cooperation in the years to come;

- the implications that this has had on international order and

- the effects on the stability of the new system (whether or not we will see a positive correlation between multi-polarity and stability) and, lastly

- whether the new system will require a different IR “logic” (corresponding to the new conditions of a multiplicity of economic and political and culturally distinct centers which may create a logic of “non-linearity” where the effects of IR actions would not be proportional to their causes, thus creating large amount of fluctuations and uncertainty).

Indeed, many have argued that US hegemony has been detrimental to international order and have been advocating a return to

a multipolar system. Such new system – obviously – will have more independent actors that will have to form new alliances and coalitions. Multipolarity might imply a healthy degree of balancing and lead to new coalitions that in turn might create some constraints on nations' international behavior. On the other hand having Russia (along few other countries such as China, India, Brazil, Turkey perhaps South Africa) play leading roles in an increasingly multilateral world may cause uncertainty and raise obstacles to cooperation as the former relations among these countries will under major changes and leaders of these countries will be thrust into new roles on the international stage.

What is certain that a more complex geopolitics is returning to the center stage in the international relations. Most probably we will see new initiatives for greater regional cooperation/integration by which smaller countries will try to achieve greater strength or security or market standing. New lines of alliances may be created beyond religious, ethnic or cultural solidarities or to reinforce them.

If we are indeed moving in the direction of a multilateral/multi-layer order there are a number of questions and issues to consider in better understanding the possible future.

#### Security and Stability.

First, what are the international security implications of a return to multi-polarity? Proponents of unipolarity fear the power struggles that will ensue if the United States loses its preeminent position and is unable and unwilling to underwrite global security. A key question to consider is what happens when states like Germany and Japan become responsible for their own security. While this lead to arms racing, nuclear proliferation and the potential for greater crises and conflicts? Uni-polar optimists argue that multipolar systems are prone to great power wars as evidenced by World War I and II. They argue further

that multipolarity would see a return of balance of power politics which increases the possibility of conflict on both a limited and more extensive scale. Multipolarity would also change the alliance dynamics that have characterized international politics for the last twenty or so years and it is impossible to predict the nature of future alliances formation (e.g. Russia-Iran, China-Russia).

Obviously proponents of multilaterality/multipolarity disagree with some of these dire scenarios and argue that unipolarity has given the United States the opportunity to expand and wage war. A return to balance of power politics and equilibrium in the international system world, proponents argue, contribute to international order. Multipolarity, especially a multipolar system of nuclear states, would instill more cautious foreign policies and might even result in greater respect for state sovereignty (as states will be less a free agents). States that are roughly equal in terms of power do not typically fight each other. A return to multipolarity does not necessarily entail the rise of revisionist powers but might create new alliances and coalitions.

Stability within new system is another key question – that is whether or not is to be expected – as the system moves away from unipolarity toward multi-polarity, the frequency and intensity of war should be diminish; so far there is no empirical evidence to prove such proposition.

### **Cross-Cultural Harmonization or Conflict?**

The end of U.S. dominance in the global economy comes soon after the abandonment of the “Washington consensus” on free markets and light government as a universal guide to economic development. The success of China and the 1997-98 economic crisis in liberal Asian states had already called into question all Western models of economics and political order as a route to prosperity.

However, it is unclear what new models will emerge for political and economic growth and whether they will be regionally differentiated or globally accepted. Will the “Chinese model” of a strong state, authoritarian politics and profit-led growth spread to Africa and Latin America? Will an Islamic model based on Koranic law and economic regulation prevail in all Muslim countries or in any? Will different regional models lead to a new “cold war” of competition among different models of political and economic organization? Will new regional trade blocs based on culture or region (the EU, OAS, AU, ASEAN) create the new pattern of IR? Or will broader principles based on human rights, democracy and the U.N. charter and other international agreements provide a basis for harmonious cooperation of different nations and regions?

## **Economy**

What will be the economic implications as US dominance erodes and the international system comes to be characterized by a number of great powers? One scenario suggests that nothing would change. All states have benefited from the liberal economic system that the US helped to build after World War II and would continue to follow the basic rules and norms associated with globalization. It is in the interest of Russia, China, Brazil and other powers that US decline is not too steep because the American market will continue to be the engine of economic growth. On the other hand, US decline and the rise of new great powers could result in economic chaos such was the case during the interwar period when a liberal hegemon did not exist. A loss in confidence of the US dollar could contribute to an even greater financial crisis than what we have just witnessed. There is also no guarantee that key institutions such as the World Bank, International

Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization would be able to function without the dominant role of the United States.

In any event the basic mechanisms of the global economy will undergo a rapid change. During the period of US dominance, Europe, Japan and America were the major consuming economies and the developing and developed economies focused their production on meeting the demands of these markets. Labor and raw materials from throughout the world were drawn to low-capital intensive economies to produce for consumption in the capital-intensive economies. In the coming multi-polar world the large developing countries (Mexico, Turkey, Brazil, Russia, India and China) are becoming more capital intensive and are becoming major consumer markets – indeed their consumption is growing more rapidly than that of the rich nations. What will be the shape of the international economy and what rules for currency, capital, investment and trade will prevail as consumption in the developing countries becomes the main driver of global growth, production in all countries becomes more focused on those markets and the relative financial leverage of America and Europe greatly diminishes?

## **Leadership and Global Governance**

Finally, the issue of leadership or the lack of leadership needs to be considered as we ponder the transition to a multi-polar system. There are a number of challenging issues – climate change, human rights, terrorism, energy, poverty, failed states – facing the global community. It is unclear now or if they can be dealt with in the absence of a leading state. While there has been a good deal of displeasure with the United States there is some truth to the point that if the US does not take the lead on an issue nobody else will either.

It will be important for a single state or group of states to take the lead in dealing with global problems. This will be difficult considering the vastly different political systems, ideologies and beliefs of the top-tiered states in the international system. If this is not possible then again dealing with problems on a regional basis might have to suffice. But it's unclear if regional solutions are sufficient to address the problems and issues facing to the globe.

## **Conclusion**

We suggest that Russia will play an important role in the new international system but her role will depend on sound policies and alliances. At the same time the future of Russia is closely connected with the future of the modern world system as it seeks to move from its current heavy dependence on exporting natural resources to acquire capital to becoming a more capital-intensive, knowledge-based, high-value producer, with broader links to the global economy. Trade – however – will be only one variable in setting Russia's global position; more important will be the innovativeness of the social socio-economic system and institutional strength. The quality of “politics” played by the elite (and quality of the elite itself) will also be important factor.

For all these reasons we think that a more systematic approach to analyzing the future of the international system will serve well the intellectual community.

*“Dialog tsivilizatsii I postkrizisny mir”,  
M., 2010, p. 17–20.*



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