

## Editor's Note

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Regular readers of *The Washington Quarterly* will know that I am not a fan of editor's notes. You read these articles for the authors' thoughts, not my summaries of them. Every once in a while, though, a section needs an explanation for its origins and potential significance. "Do the Major Powers Matter?" is one of those sections.

This idea started with debates over multipolarity and multilateralism and what, in my opinion, has been missing from them. In military affairs, it is clear that U.S. power is unparalleled and that working with other countries complicates major combat operations and may jeopardize lives, even if it brings other benefits. Events in Iraq and elsewhere, however, have made it increasingly clear that military power has its limits in today's international system. Other powers may not have the military assets of the United States, but other than help pay the bills, what can they do? For what economic, diplomatic, or military purposes does the United States need other countries? How seriously should implicit or explicit threats to balance U.S. power be taken?

The first step in answering these questions is to determine the sources and limits of power in today's most powerful countries other than the United States. Given the speed at which the international system has changed over the last 15 years and the rapid rise of the United States as the unparalleled superpower, the fact that few scholars and policymakers have systematically assessed the role of other powers in the absence of a bipolar, Cold War framework is both striking and understandable. Determining the best way to define the current international system, much less to evaluate the place of major powers in it, has been difficult enough. These articles try to help fill that void.

Invitations were sent to U.S. experts on Russia, China, Europe, and Japan. Solicitations were just a page long, leaving the authors plenty of room

for creativity, and based on a single question: Why does \_\_\_\_ matter today? An invitation was also sent to a U.S. expert on India, asking, “Is India a major power today?” The particular powers included in this issue were selected with an eye to the future as well as the past, with one author asked to write about Europe as a whole, rather than multiple authors invited to write about its constituent countries, and India selected to examine how close yet another country is to gaining major-power status.

U.S., rather than indigenous, authors were chosen to try to minimize the chances that authors would feel compelled to promote or exaggerate the power of their particular countries. A concern still existed that U.S. experts would feel compelled by “client-itis” to promote the country they study, but perhaps the most noteworthy conclusion from these articles is that nearly all authors emphasize the limits of each of the major powers.

The purpose of this journal is to stimulate your thoughts, not condense those of others. Still, one particular question stands out as important to consider while reading through these articles: Do other major powers aspire to global power? Sitting in Washington, it can be easy to forget that each of these other major powers is consumed with domestic political and/or economic reform that simply does not face the United States. What ends does each of these other actors seek with its power?

The answers to that question may not be what strikes you most about these articles. Each reader will take different lessons away depending on your background and perspective. Regardless, our goal is to challenge the best thinkers from around the world in these pages to provide you, our readers, with diverse perspectives on issues of global strategic significance. We hope that the exceptional work of these authors will provoke you to learn from their expertise, challenge their thoughts, and continue the debates yourselves (in the classroom or the halls of power, online, or elsewhere) and expand the scope of discussions of multilateralism and multipolarity by contemplating why exactly in today’s world do the major powers matter ...

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