

# The Global Puzzle: Order in an Age of Primacy, Power-Shifts and Interdependence

Graeme P. Herd

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# About the Author

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# Executive Summary

How can the US maintain its relative primacy in an age of power-shifts and interdependence? Power-shifts generate multiple peer competitors, who first establish their predominance within their geopolitical neighbourhoods, and then selectively challenge the US for leadership of global strategic agendas. The net strategic effect is the incremental erosion of US relative primacy. By contrast, growing interdependence generates a shared realization that all states are weakened by structural and systemic threats which no one state – even the US – can manage alone. Paradoxically, with regards to US relative primacy, the net strategic effect is the same: to maintain its relative primacy, the US must take the lead in managing structural and systemic strategic challenges interdependence generates; if this management is to be effective, efficient and legitimate then power needs to be shared, “prime player” status is eroded, primacy is lost by design.

Can the US escape this strategic dilemma? The Obama administration implicitly redefines the meaning of primacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the US acts as *primus inter pares*, as the “indispensable partner” in a “multi-partner world” – “coalitional primacy” replaces primacy of the “unipolar moment”. The realization of “coalitional primacy” is predicated on two implicit assumptions holding: first, hegemonic transition will not be violent and it is not imminent; second, shared threats generate the need for collective action which translates into collective policy responses. The first assumption holds, though its strategic effect does not: the emergence of Great Power-led regional orders does change the relative nature and quality of US primacy. As yet there is little empirical evidence to support the second implicit assumption. Multiple challenges and dilemmas undercut effective, efficient and legitimate collective action.

This paper argues that the sum of these two contradictory impulses combine to counter-intuitive strategic effect: US relative primacy is sustained. Power shifts and the future perception and prospect of relative decline promote US strategic



caution and hedges against haste and hubris. In addition, the US can act as the “geopolitical tipping point” to maintain regional and so global balance. Increased interdependence necessitates the adoption of “network governance approaches”, partnerships and alliances, all of which need to be led and coordinated. The US with power in all dimensions is best placed to maintain its role as the leading voice in addressing and framing approaches to manage strategic sources of insecurity. US primacy will be opportunistic, pragmatic, ad hoc, flexible, adaptive and, above all, sustainable. The US has the power capability and strategic context to maintain primacy; does it have the political will and skill?

The introduction of this paper argues that there is no consensus over what constitutes a compelling world order paradigm, one that can account for the strategic effect of US military primacy, on-going power-shifts within a multi-polar world and increasing interdependence. The first part examines the nature of these competitive and cooperative dynamics. The second part focuses on the Obama administration’s rhetorical response to meeting this challenge, with a narrative of partnership, cooperation and reciprocal “win-win” outcomes in the face of common threats. The third part identifies and analyses a number of challenges, obstacles and dilemmas to collective action, which undercut the rational alignment of vision, policies and resources. Finally, the conclusion suggests that the sum of power-shifts and interdependence, two contradictory impulses, combine to catalytic and counter-intuitive strategic effect: US relative primacy can be sustained.

# Introduction: Power, Great Power and World Order Paradigms

The notion and practice of global governance is in its infancy. Experts and practitioners within the development, environment and energy sectors, finance and economics, strategic and security studies, military and defence fields all seek to identify the three key variables that characterize global governance today. Firstly, what is the essence of traditional, current and emergent strategic challenges/threats to human, societal, state, regional and global security? Secondly, which actors should address these challenges and how to manage and coordinate their policy responses? Thirdly, how can a collective need for more efficient, effective and legitimate strategic responses be best translated into reformed and new security architectures?

Ultimately, power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes. Although, national power is hard to measure (particularly if we give weight to inherently subjective and changing perceptions of power), traditional crude substrates of material power are multidimensional and include, for example, the size of GNP, territory, population, armed forces, and lack of strategic vulnerabilities.<sup>1</sup> Recent scholarship reflects a more nuanced understanding of power. Leslie Gelb, President Emeritus of the Council of Foreign Relations, notes that in this century “economic concerns typically – but not always – outweigh traditional military imperatives.”<sup>2</sup> “Attractive”, “co-optive”, “soft power” – the power of culture and values to attract support for preferred outcomes – can be included within “correlation of forces” or “basket of capabilities” calculations used to measure the balance of power.<sup>3</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter, Director of Policy Planning for the US State Department, argues that “In this world, the measure of power is connectedness.”<sup>4</sup> At the start

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1 H. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1967, pp. 106-144.

2 L. Gelb, “GDP Now Matters More Than Force”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No.6, November/December 2010, p. 36.

3 J.S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means of Success in World Politics*, New York, Public Affairs, 2004.

4 A.-M. Slaughter, “America’s Edge: Power in the Networked Century”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 1, January/February 2009, p. 94.

of the post-Cold War era the US enjoyed unprecedented and unequalled strength and power. As the “prime player” it set the rules of the game in international relations – it enjoyed “primacy”.<sup>5</sup> Given power and so primacy are relative and not absolute, the rise of Great Powers has consequences. Great Power status is attained through a combination of self-belief and declaration, as well as bestowed through acknowledgement and recognition by other Great Powers that states with this status have the military and economic capability to play a key role in international affairs, perhaps even to challenge the US’s superpower status in the short or medium term.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, national security strategies (NSS) and speeches at recognised global security venues indicate which states are considered to be in the Great Power club.

At the 46<sup>th</sup> annual Munich Security Conference held in February 2010, for example, leading foreign and security policy makers and practitioners identified “centres of global influence” and “new powers”. General James Jones, US National Security Advisor noted: “We are forging new partnerships with key centres of global influence, including, Russia, China, India and Brazil.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the US NSS of 2010 looked to increase engagement with Russia, China and India, rising or resurgent powers which the previous two Strategies had characterized as “centers of global power.”<sup>8</sup> For Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union (EU), “new powers” included “China, India, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico and Turkey.”<sup>9</sup> A 2008 European Council report on the implementation of the EU’s Security Strategy of 2003 identifies the US as the “key partner for Europe.” At the same time, the report notes that the EU has “substantially expanded our relationship with China”, “Russia remains an important partner on global issues”, and

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5 S.P. Huntington, “Why International Primacy Matters”, *International Security*, Vol.17, No.4, Spring 1993, pp. 68–83; C. Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment Revisited”, *The National Interest*, Vol. 70, No.1, 2002-2003, pp. 5-17; M. Mastanduno, “System Maker and Privilege Taker: US Power and the International Political Economy”, *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No.1, January 2009, pp. 121-154. For a recent discussion of how analysts have measured power, see E.S. Edelman, *Understanding America’s Contested Primacy*, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Washington, DC, October 2010, pp. 1-79, [http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/PubLibrary/R.20101021.Understanding\\_Amer/R.20101021.Understanding\\_Amer.pdf](http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/PubLibrary/R.20101021.Understanding_Amer/R.20101021.Understanding_Amer.pdf).

6 L. Gelb, *Power Rules: How Common Sense Can Rescue American Foreign Policy*, New York, Harper Collins, 2009, pp. 73-90.

7 J.L. Jones, Speech at the 46<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference, 6 February 2010, Munich, <http://www.securityconference.de/Jones-James-L.566.0.html?&L=1>.

8 See *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, Washington, DC, 2010; *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, 2006; *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, 2002.

9 C. Ashton, Speech at the 46<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference, 6 February 2010, Munich, <http://www.securityconference.de/Ashton-Catherine.567.0.html?&L=1>.

that “there is still room to do more in our relationship with India.”<sup>10</sup> According to the “New National Security Strategy of Russian Federation for the period through 2020” (May 2009), while Russia will seek to build a strategic partnership with the US, the US remains Russia’s primary strategic rival. It emphasizes the need to expand partnerships with the EU as well as China, India and Brazil to promote a globalised multipolar world which balances the US.<sup>11</sup> Although India has yet to publish a national security strategy, Shivshankar Menon, India National Security Advisor has called for the creation of a real Concert of Asian powers to address maritime security in South and East Asian oceans. The US is understood to be an Asian power as it has a “major maritime presence and interests in Asia.” Menon notes that “As Asia becomes more integrated from Suez to the Pacific, none of Asia’s seas or oceans can be considered in isolation. This would be a major co-operative endeavour, and a test of Asian statesmanship.”<sup>12</sup> Finally, China has re-emerged as a centre of global power, with its growing diplomatic and economic weight in global affairs (reinforced by the relative speed of its recovery from the global financial crisis), deepening integration into a more globalized world, and its increasing ability to shape the future world order.

International security paradigms have a real utility and can be a tool for policy-makers and practitioners. Paradigms are conceptual frameworks that try to capture the complexity of the world around us. World order paradigms purport to provide mental map that characterise at a glance the organizing principles of global stability. There is currently no consensus as to what constitutes the contemporary world order paradigm, perhaps indicating that it is easier to identify the unfolding core logic of a world order in retrospect than at its creation. The process of constructing paradigms is as important as the predicative value (or not) of the outcome: paradigms teach us to become more strategically aware through integrating complexity, counter-intuitive realities and disparate perceptions into our thinking.

As the world becomes more interconnected and complex, paradigms that have purchase are harder to elaborate: unlike the Cold War period dominated by US-Soviet rivalry, today “it would be impossible to draw one dividing line, to find a

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10 *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy: Providing Security in a Changing World*, Council of the European Union, Brussels, S404/08, 11 December 2008.

11 The text (in Russian) is available at the Russian Security Council website, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>.

12 S. Menon, *Maritime Imperatives of Indian Foreign Policy*, New Delhi, National Maritime Foundation, 2009, cited by S. Varadarjan, “Global Threats and India’s Quest for Strategic Space”, in G.P. Herd (GCSP ed.), *Great Powers and Strategic Stability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Competing Visions of Global Order*, London, Routledge / GCSP, 2010, p. 168.

common denominator for all the fault lines that divide the contemporary world.”<sup>13</sup> Over the last twenty years, not all world order paradigms have focused on the centrality of states. Indeed, the first three such paradigms to emerge in the post-Cold War 1990s highlighted the role of ideological-political and economic principles, religion and identity and global inequalities as drivers of global order.<sup>14</sup> But in this century, and on the eve of the global financial crisis, the growing visibility of power-shifts returned our focus to the role of states in shaping international and global order, particularly the most powerful states – the Great Powers.

World order paradigms in the 2000’s have themselves acknowledged this power-shift, incorporating Great Powers into their conceptual frameworks. In 2007, Robert Kagan offered a “Return of History” bipolar world order paradigm structured around an intense ideological struggle between two Great Power constellations – the enlarged democratic West that incorporates “New Europe” and a “New Second World” led by authoritarian capitalist Russia and China. Each side now enters a contest for control over resources.<sup>15</sup> In 2008, Parag Khanna turned our attention to the forgotten “Second World”. Khanna suggests that China and the European Union are joining the US to form a world with three “relatively equal centres of influence.” Each power centre has its own “diplomatic style”: the US effectively working through “coalitions” (following Donald Rumsfeld’s dictum: “the mission determines the coalition”), China operating through “consultations”, and Europe seeking “consensus”. The resultant world order, Khanna suggests, is determined by how the so-called “Second World” or “tipping-point states” ally themselves with or resist these three competing poles. As a result, the “Second World” holds the balance of power within the “geopolitical market-place” in the new century: “The world’s superpower map is being rebalanced-but without a single centre. By challenging America’s position in the global hierarchy and securing allies and loyalty around the world, the EU and China have engineered a palpable shift towards three relatively equal centres of influence: Washington, Brussels, and Beijing.”<sup>16</sup>

13 H.A. Kissinger, Keynote Address, “Power Shifts and Security”, 8<sup>th</sup> IISS Global Strategic Review, *Global security governance and the emerging distribution of power*, 10 September 2010, Geneva, <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/global-strategic-review/global-strategic-review-2010/plenary-sessions-and-speeches-2010/keynote-address/henry-kissinger/>.

14 F. Fukuyama, “The End of History?”, *The National Interest*, No. 16, Summer 1989, pp. 3-18; S.P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49; R.D. Kaplan, “The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of our Planet”, *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 273, No. 2, February 1994, pp. 44-76.

15 R. Kagan, “End of Dreams, Return of History: International Rivalry and American Leadership”, *Policy Review*, No. 143, 2007, pp. 17-45.

16 P. Khanna, *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order*, New York, Random House, 2008, p. xv.

According to Singaporean diplomat Kishore Mahbubani, India emerges as a bridging power between the rich and the poor (Global North and South) and between the US and China, as it is the Asian hemisphere that holds the keys of global leadership.<sup>17</sup> Mahbubani identifies the strategic implications of this power shift, arguing that Asian societies are successfully rising due to their effective implementation of Western best practices, in areas ranging from free market economies to science and technology. Modernization projects embrace free-market economics, science and technology, meritocratic practices, pragmatism, a culture of peace and the rule of law, but not liberalism – modernization therefore promotes a de-Westernization process. The “end of history” did not herald the triumph of the West but rather its retreat and the related failure by most Western intellectuals to recognise the imminent “return of Asia” – though the dilemmas the West faces is clear: to accept and work alongside Asia’s rise or attempt to prevent it.

Fareed Zakaria disagrees with the Kagan, Khanna and Mahbubani paradigms. Kagan is predicated on a Cold War redux: Khanna ignores the growing roles of Russia, India and Brazil as centres of global power; and Mahbubani is too geopolitical and competitive. Rather, Zakaria argues that the rise of Brazil, Russia, and India, as well as China, reflects a seismic shift in global power and attitudes. A post-American world order driven by “the rise of the rest” promotes accommodation, the creation of a rich and globalized amalgam of East and West, in which the US remains a “pivotal player”.<sup>18</sup>

This introduction has argued that there is no consensus over what constitutes a compelling world order paradigm, one that can account for the strategic effect of US military primacy, on-going power-shifts within an economically multi-polar world and increasing interdependence. The first part of this paper will now examine the nature of these competitive and cooperative dynamics. The second part focuses on the Obama administration’s rhetorical response to meeting this challenge, with a narrative of partnership, cooperation and reciprocal “win-win” outcomes in the face of common threats. The third part identifies and analyses a number of challenges, obstacles and dilemmas to collective action, which undercut the rational alignment of vision, policies and resources.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the conclusion suggests that the sum of power-shifts and interdependence, two contradictory impulses, combine to catalytic and counter-intuitive strategic effect: US relative primacy can be sustained.

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17 K. Mahbubani, “End of Whose History?”, *New York Times*, 11 November 2009, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/12/opinion/12iht-edmahbubani.html?\\_r=1&ref=global](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/12/opinion/12iht-edmahbubani.html?_r=1&ref=global). See also K. Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, New York, Public Affairs, 2008.

18 F. Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2008, p. 219. For a review of the paradigms of Khanna, Mahbubani and Zakaria, see C. Layne, “The Waning of US Hegemony – Myth or Reality?” *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 1, Summer 2009, pp. 147-172.

19 S.D. Krasner, “An Orientating Principle for Foreign Policy: The Deficiencies of Grand Strategy”, *Policy Review*, No.6, 2010, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/49786>.

# Power-Shifts and Interdependence: Competitive and Cooperative Dynamics?

How has the global financial crisis shaped our understanding about its strategic effect on the evolving nature of world order? The transition from Cold War bipolarity to a unipolar moment in the post-Cold War has been crowned, according to Haass, by an era of non-polarity, where power is diffuse – “a world dominated not by one or two or even several states but rather by dozens of actors possessing and exercising various kinds of power.”<sup>20</sup> Highlighting the emergence of what he terms an “interpolar” world – defined as “multipolarity in an age of interdependence” – Grevi suggests that managing existential interdependence in an unstable multipolar world is the key.<sup>21</sup>

## Power-Shifts: a Competitive Imperative

The global financial crisis is widely perceived to accelerate a centrifugal shift in the relative balance of financial, economic and moral power from the US and Europe to Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the BRIC states) – fast growing developing countries, which were predicted in 2003 to form a powerful economic grouping that would surpass the share of global GDP of rich democratic states (the US and EU) by 2050, if not sooner.<sup>22</sup> Goldman Sachs also highlighted the potential of the next echelon of states to become this century’s largest economies, coining the acronym Next-Eleven (or N-11 states).<sup>23</sup> The impact of the global financial crisis has differentiated more widely among this group than the BRICs.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, in 2010 China passed the US as the world’s largest energy consumer and world’s number one automobile manufacturer and possesses the world’s fastest super-computer. It surpassed Japan as the world’s second largest economy, having become the world’s largest exporter. Even in the military sphere where US primacy is

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20 R. Haass, “The Age of Nonpolarity: What Will Follow US Dominance?”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 3, 2008, pp. 44-56.

21 G. Grevi, “The Interpolar World: a New Scenario”, *EU-ISS Occasional Paper No. 79*, Paris, 2009.

22 Goldman Sachs, “Dreaming with BRICs: The Path to 2050”, *Global Economics Paper*, No. 99, 2003.

23 Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea, Turkey, and Vietnam constitute the N-11. See Goldman Sachs, “The N-11: More than an Acronym”, *Global Economic Paper*, No. 153, March 2007.

24 Goldman Sachs, “The Long Term Outlook for the BRICs and N-11 Post-Crisis”, *Global Economics Paper*, No. 192, December 2009.

overwhelming – in 2009 the US accounted for a 46.5% share of global military spending, with France (4.2%), UK (3.8%) and Russia (3.5%) in the top five global spenders – China moved to second spot (6.6%).<sup>25</sup> Two-thirds of global growth in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century came from Asia, with half of the world's population living in India and China. President of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, identifies two lead indicators evidencing the case for an ongoing economic power shift in stark terms: first, Asia's stock markets account for 32% of global market capitalization, placing them above Europe and the US; second, while in 1978 the Asian share of the global economy in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms was 7%, it was 21% by 2008.<sup>26</sup>

This evident redistribution of power is especially visible in the context of the global financial crisis and the relative decline of the US and Europe. From Brussels, Javier Solana has observed: “the crisis is accelerating the power shift from the West to the East. This is true both in terms of material resources (military and economic) and ideological pull.”<sup>27</sup> From Moscow, Fyodor Lukyanov, influential editor of *Russia in Global Affairs* journal, supports this contention, noting that “shifts in the global economic balance have weakened the West's monopoly on the world's modernization reservoir. For the first time ever, the theme of modernization is not tied exclusively to Europe, but includes the Chinese, South Korean and Singaporean models of development.”<sup>28</sup> From Washington DC, a US National Intelligence Council report, aptly entitled *Global Trends 2025 – A Transformed World*, predicts a revolutionized global multipolar international system, as new players gain seats at the international high table to which they will bring new stakes and rules of the game.<sup>29</sup>

What are the strategic effects of this power-shift? Stephen Walt, a leading US realist international relations theorist, argues that China's economic rise renders security competition with the US “virtually inevitable”, evidencing the rapid expansion of Chinese military, particularly naval, capability as “a classic manifestation of great power status”: “Beijing is seeking to build its economy, then expand its military capacity, achieve a

25 S. Perlo-Freeman et al., “Military Expenditure”, *SIPRI Yearbook: 2010*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 203.

26 *Reuters*, 14 April 2010.

27 J. Solana, “Discours du Haut Représentant de l'Union européenne pour la Politique étrangère et de sécurité commune”, Annual Conference of the EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 30 October 2008.

28 F. Lukyanov, “Tapping into West's Modernization Reservoir”, *Moscow Times*, 16 December 2009, accessed on 19/10/2010, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/tapping-intowests-modernization-reservoir/396223.html>; R. Chan, “The West's Preaching to the East Must Stop”, *Financial Times*, 4 January 2010, p. 11.

29 *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, US National Intelligence Council, November 2008, [http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC\\_2025\\_project.html](http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_2025_project.html). This report was all the more startling given its predecessor published in 2004 predicted that the US would still control the levers of global power and discounted counter-balance. See *Mapping the Global Future: Report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project*, US National Intelligence Council, December 2004, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/2020/2020.pdf>.



position of regional dominance, and then exclude other major powers from its immediate neighborhood.”<sup>30</sup> With regards to the US-China relationship, Minixin Pei reinforces this conflictual narrative, arguing that: “Because of the deep and unbridgeable differences between the two countries in terms of their political values, conceptions of international order and geopolitical interests, constant frictions, even minor conflicts, should be the rule.”<sup>31</sup> Martin Jacques understands friction as a consequence of power shifts: “Google and climate change are relatively new disputes. But we should not be surprised by them. China’s rise means that it is now involved in areas of the world and on issues where previously it had little or no stake. As China becomes a global power it is bound to come into conflict with the United States on a number of subjects.”<sup>32</sup> Paul Krugman paints the portrait of a “rogue economic superpower, unwilling to play by the rules” of the game, citing “China’s grossly protectionist exchange-rate policy” as key evidence.<sup>33</sup>

If such trends continue and grow, we might hypothesize that a Hobbesian zero-sum, hierarchy and balance-of-power world order would emerge, one in which Great Power competition is unconstrained and aggressive self-help behavior the order of the day. Great Powers would consolidate their order-producing and managerial role in their hinterlands and regional neighbourhoods. Geopolitical-bloc formation would result. Regional hegemonies could use hard coercive force if necessary, but trade concessions, development assistance and market access or denial would more likely be the sticks and carrots of first resort. A re-division of the world in the 2010s and 2020s into multiple regionalisms creates the 21<sup>st</sup> century variant of a competing mercantilist 19<sup>th</sup> century regional order.<sup>34</sup> According to this “multiple regionalisms” scenario, regional collectivities of diverse political units consolidate around regional hegemonies: limited inter-regional cooperation

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30 S. Walt, “China’s New Strategy”, *Foreign Policy website*, 26 April 2010, [http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/04/25/chinas\\_new\\_strategy](http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/04/25/chinas_new_strategy). For a more nuanced understanding of China’s foreign policy motivations, see L. Jakobsen and D. Knox, “New Foreign Policy Actors in China”, *SIPRI Policy Paper*, No. 26, September 2010, [http://books.sipri.org/product\\_info?c\\_product\\_id=410](http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=410); L. Zhu, “China’s Foreign Policy Debates”, *Chaillot Paper No. 121*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, September 2010, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/nc/actualites/actualite/news/back/article/chinas-foreign-policy-debates/>.

31 P. Minixin, “The Tension is Over-stated”, *International Herald Tribune*, 17 February 2010, p. 6. See also “China seized the trade and investment opportunities, but economic liberalism has failed to deliver its political counterpart. The present trend is in the opposite direction: success is fossilizing China’s political system and spurring nationalism and a military build-up.” From P. Bowring, “Who Needs Whom More”, *International Herald Tribune*, 5 February 2010, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/who-needs-whom-more>.

32 M. Jacques, “Crouching Dragon, Weakened Eagle”, *International Herald Tribune*, 17 February 2010, p. 6.

33 P. Krugman, “Rare and Foolish”, *New York Times*, 17 October 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/18/opinion/18krugman.html>.

34 H.A. Kissinger, “The Chance of a New World Order”, *New York Times*, 12 January 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/12/opinion/12iht-edkissinger.1.19281915.html>.

occurs only when benefits are very apparent; regional hegemons organize and structure intra-regional cooperation. In this competitive paradigm, the principle of legitimate authority as embodied by states co-exists with the principle of exchange as characterised by the efficiency of decentralised markets and embraced most strongly by transnational corporations.<sup>35</sup> The principle of solidarity, enacted most widely by participative collective movements operating in increasingly transnational and global civil society groups is subordinate. Under such conditions, the previous durable, tolerable hegemony exercised by a single state – the US – is understood to be “decreasingly sustainable”.<sup>36</sup>

### Interdependence: a Cooperative Imperative

However, alongside power-shifts, deepening economic, demographic, environmental and energy interdependence gathers pace. This process is revolutionary, the speed and intensity akin to war-time rate of change experienced between 1940-1945. Niall Ferguson has characterized the global financial crisis as an “axis of upheaval”, with unpredictable and unintended geopolitical consequences, as it coincides with the depletion of non-renewable energy sources, a tipping point for global climate change and turbulence associated with a declining world hegemon – the US.<sup>37</sup> The ability of states to pursue multiple interlocking goals is severely tested. For example, states are committed to eradicate poverty through economic growth. As a result, it is estimated that global energy demands will increase 45% by 2050 (with demand driven primarily by fast-growing middle classes in China and India). How then to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 50% in this period?<sup>38</sup>

What are the strategic effects of growing interdependence? The economy-environment-energy nexus, the rise of non-state actors – whether organized crime or terroristic in nature, and systems collapse triggered by systemic shocks present two hard truths: all states are threatened; no single state can address them alone. This dynamic suggests the emergence of a world order driven by a cooperative imperative as reciprocal cooperation and collective action constitutes a rational response to shared threats. A Kantian world order paradigm presents itself, one in which the recognition of mutual indispensability creates incentives for peace with

35 S. Khagram, “Possible Future Architectures of Global Governance: A Transnational Perspective/Prospective”, *Global Governance*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2006, pp. 97-117.

36 I. Clark, “Bringing Hegemony Back in: The United States and International Order”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 1, 2009, pp. 23-36.

37 N. Ferguson, “The Axis of Upheaval”, *Foreign Policy*, No. 171, 2009, pp. 56-60.

38 *Global Trends 2025*, pp. 41-57.

a global security community. The 19<sup>th</sup> century British politician Richard Cobden, following Adam Smith, contended that market forces act in the moral world: “the principle of gravitation in the universe — drawing men together and thrusting aside the antagonism of race, and creed, and language.”<sup>39</sup> The “capitalist peace” thesis notes an “indirect link running from free trade or economic openness to prosperity and democracy and ultimately to the democratic peace” and that “trade and economic interdependence by themselves reduce the risk of conflict.”<sup>40</sup> The West’s strategic engagement with China is shaped by the assumption that its powerful market knowledge economy, fuelled by an information revolution and facilitated by the free flow of ideas will raise expectations of political liberalization and democracy, and so buttress China’s peaceful rise.

Transnational and global threats break longstanding but increasingly false dichotomies between global North and global South, developed and developing states. This is reinforced by power-shifts in the economic sphere: “The outdated categorisations of First and Third Worlds, donor and supplicant, leader and led, no longer fit.”<sup>41</sup> Instead, “developed”, “emerging developing” and “poor developing” categories have a greater purchase on reality. While states are the key stakeholders that address such challenges and transgovernmentalism may well predominate, network governance involves international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media and wider civil society actors, including industries, corporations, business organizations and private foundations.<sup>42</sup> Here the principle of legitimate authority, expressed most insistently by hierarchical states, particularly ascending and Great Powers, will be balanced by a market-based principle of exchange and the civil society principle of collective solidarity.

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39 P. Brendon, “For China, Will Money Bring Power?”, *International Herald Tribune*, 21 August 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/opinion/22brendon.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/opinion/22brendon.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print).

40 E. Weede, “The Diffusion of Prosperity and Peace by Globalization”, *The Independent Review*, Vol. IX, No.2, Fall 2004, p. 181; R.O. Keohane and J.S. Nye, “Power and Interdependence in the Information Age”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 5, September/October 1998, pp. 83-93.

41 “‘Third World’ Concepts No Longer Relevant: Zoellick”, *Reuters*, 14 April 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE63E02S20100415>.

42 Khagram, 2006.

# Maintaining US Primacy: the Obama Doctrine

Given it is in US national interest to maintain its primacy, how has it responded to the challenges and opportunities posed by power-shifts and growing interdependence? The Obama administration has progressively sought to discard the Bush Doctrine of America “*über alles*” – which has been characterized as a “largely unilateral project of hegemonic renewal and global transformation”<sup>43</sup> and a “grand strategy aimed at preventing the emergence of new great powers that could challenge US hegemony.”<sup>44</sup> When we examine the Obama doctrine, can we argue that its underlying logic implicitly suggests an attempt to find a *modus vivendi* between these two contradictory processes?

Great Powers by virtue of their global interests and responsibilities share latent, potential and actual strategic sources of insecurity and so have a common interest and cooperative imperative to coordinate national policy responses to address these threats. This shared interest is reinforced by the realization that unilateral single-state (and increasingly even narrow ad hoc coalitions) responses to transnational sources of insecurity are ineffective. Collective action where Great Powers optimize rather than maximize the role of the state through burden-sharing is thus the rational response. As ascending powers gain Great Power status, they too, need a predictable rules-based global system and will make use of a set of shared tools (regimes, shared norms and institutions) appropriate to the nature of the strategic threat in the regional/global context. A global consensus emerges supporting the notion that there can no longer be a Western monopoly of operational responses. To that end, consultative procedures in formal and informal multilateral bodies need to constantly recalibrate a negotiated equilibrium point between three constants: effectiveness (joint approach and performance or output legitimacy), efficiency (speed of response, optimum opportunity cost/benefits

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43 C. Reus-Smit, “The Misleading Mystique of America’s Material Power”, *Australian Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 2003, pp. 423-430, cited by Clark, 2009, p. 26.

44 C. Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States’ Unipolar Moment”, *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2006, pp. 7-41.

equilibrium) and legitimacy (representation/inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making and implementation) of policy responses.

Thus, rather than preventing Russia, India, China and the EU emerging as independent “peer competitors” in a multipolar world, it appears that the operational concept of world order embraced by the Obama administration is America *primus inter pares* – “indispensable partner” rather than “indispensable nation” focussed on “engagement” and “common interests”. In the words of Secretary of State Clinton, the US strives to “lead by inducing greater cooperation among a greater number of actors... tilting the balance away from a multipolar to a multi-partner world.”<sup>45</sup> The NSS itself states that “Power, in an interconnected world, is no longer a zero-sum game”; rather, the challenge is to manage global interdependence.<sup>46</sup> In essence, the Obama administration is seeking to redefine hegemony as primacy based on material power (namely, the large military and economic resource-base necessary to lead) to embrace a new understanding of hegemony as “a status bestowed by others, and [one that] rests on recognition by them. This recognition is given in return for the bearing of special responsibilities.”<sup>47</sup>

The US has reformulated its orienting principles to redefine its vision, policies and resources to lead the management of interlinked strategic threats effectively, efficiently and with legitimacy.<sup>48</sup> Within this framework the US first moved to “reset” relations with Russia in early 2009 and engage China (“strategic reassurance”) and India in a more sustained manner and to greater effect. During a state visit to China in November 2009, President Obama stated America’s “most important bilateral relationship in the world” is with Beijing, and in a Joint Statement emphasised the importance of building and deepening “strategic trust”. The US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue constitutes a framework and agenda on how to cooperate on a broad range of common issues, including the changing structure of world power. Later that month India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh arrived in Washington, DC, as the first state visit hosted by President Obama, further deepening the US’s strategic partnership with a “rising and responsible” and “indispensable” India, particularly through closer military and nuclear cooperation.

45 H. Clinton, Address at the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 15 July 2009.

46 *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, Washington, DC, 2010, p. 3.

47 Clark, “Bringing Hegemony Back In”, p. 24. See also J. Joffe, “The Default Power”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 5, September-October 2009, pp. 21-35.

48 Other global powers lack the capacity to shift this dynamic, not least because their ability “to adapt their grand strategies to a new American agenda is extremely limited, giving the United States a significant silver lining.” P. Doherty and B. Katcher, “Time to Focus on Great Powers”, *The Washington Note*, 7 August 2009, [http://www.thewashingtonnote.com/archives/2009/08/time\\_to\\_focus\\_o/](http://www.thewashingtonnote.com/archives/2009/08/time_to_focus_o/).

Both the US and India seek to “restore global growth, protect the global commons, enhance global energy security, and ensure a balance of power in Asia...”<sup>49</sup> On 6 November 2010 President Obama not only endorsed India’s claim to a UNSC permanent seat, but defined the relationship between India and the US as one of the “defining and indispensable partnerships of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>50</sup>

These partnerships envisage a world in which Great Power and emergent power authorities (presidents or prime ministers) assemble in new, more flexible and informal “network organizations”, the G-20 being a prime example. These groupings have a “steering group” and decision-making role: “the network provides power to achieve preferred outcomes with other powers rather than over them.”<sup>51</sup> A global policy network emerges in which a division of labour becomes apparent. Once the steering groups have set the policy agenda, implementation is passed on to global organizations and institutions (for example, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and UN bodies and agencies) in conjunction with rules and norms-based regional organizations, institutions and regimes (for example, the ASEAN, AU, EU and NAFTA<sup>52</sup>), as well as civil society. Implementation occurs in ways appropriate, affordable and acceptable to regional contexts. The civil society actors include security NGOs and think-tanks, media as well as industries, corporations, business organizations and private foundations. These actors can add value as they are able to: mobilize resources across the public-private sphere; provide specific expertise; play an advocacy role and influence the political and civil discourse or narrative that can legitimize action and embed emergent or highlight new norms, regulations and standards; disseminate information and independent analysis; and, provide platforms or forums for a diverse range of actors to discuss strategic challenges across a broad range of issues.

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49 E.A. Feigenbaum, “India’s Rise, America’s Interest: The Fate of the US-Indian Partnership?”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 2, March/April 2010, p. 91.

50 A. J. Tellis, “Triumph in New Delhi”, *Foreign Policy* website, 16 November 2010, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/16/triumph\\_in\\_new\\_delhi?page=full](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/11/16/triumph_in_new_delhi?page=full).

51 J.S. Nye, “The Future of Power”, *Moscow Times*, 13 October 2010, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/the-future-of-power/419906.html>.

52 ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations; AU: African Union; NAFTA: North American Free Trade Area.

# Questioning “Competitive and Cooperative Imperative” Assumptions

What are the embedded assumptions within this cooperative shared control but US-led world order paradigm? We can identify two. First, hegemonic transition will not be violent and it is not imminent. Second, shared threats generate the need for collective action which translates into collective policy responses. As a result, US leadership of collective policy responses buttresses its relative primacy in this century. Can we challenge these embedded assumptions? Do Great Powers have a common interest in addressing shared threats through the logic of a collaborative agenda for common action?

## Hegemonic Transition will not be Violent nor is it Imminent

Historically, with few exceptions, the transfer of primacy from one hegemon to another (hegemonic transition) occurs when the gradual accumulation of political-ideological, military and economic power reaches a tipping point and a paradigm shift is then enacted through violent overthrow. Hegemonic transition has been inherently destabilizing. However, in the contemporary world the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) amongst potential hegemonic challengers, especially those with secure second strike capability, renders violent transition improbable: ambiguities about the costs of war have been reduced. Indeed, proxy confrontations between Great Powers are now very rare. The controlled and limited nature of contemporary confrontation between the Great Powers is a function of the rational desire to avoid mutual destruction: conventional war would too easily escalate to nuclear warfare, and nuclear warfare would destroy the very object that the transition would seek to secure – the leadership of a viable and functional global system.

The task is insurmountable. A Western-centred system of multilateral, regional and bilateral institutions and alliances is a dense, encompassing, broadly endorsed system of rules, norms and institutions of non-discrimination and market-openness. Its leadership is coalition-based, the aggregate of all democratic-

capitalist states that include, alongside the US, the EU at 27, India, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Australia, Brazil and South Africa amongst others. For this reason the system is deemed legitimate, accessible and durable, and its integrative nature – as well as its ability to engage and accommodate – renders it resistant to potential challengers.<sup>53</sup> However, China, India and Russia benefit from the current status quo. All seek to modernize through deeper integration into the global system, and all therefore need to maintain access to US markets, technology and investments. Indeed, the global financial crisis has highlighted mutual economic interests (even if we formulate this in terms of mutually assured economic destruction), interdependence and the ability of Great Powers to profit within a regulated environment without the direct use of force. In short, Great Powers have a shared interest in the functioning of the world trade and financial system, rather than the chaos that would follow its collapse. If they do seek primacy, it is primacy of the existing global order.

For peaceful hegemonic transition to occur, challengers must be both willing and able to attempt it. However, those that are able are not (yet) willing; those willing are not (yet) able. Is there an emergent ideational challenge – a Moscow, Brussels, Beijing, Jakarta or New Delhi consensus? Are such models replicable elsewhere? Or, indeed, are challengers both unable and unwilling to realise their potential given that market capitalism is the accepted global default system?

### China: Able but Unwilling?

To take China as an example, not only does Chinese military power projection fall short of threatening US vital security interests and ability to deter, but, as Minxin Pei has observed: “Those who think Asia’s gains in hard power will inevitably lead to its geopolitical dominance might also want to look at another crucial ingredient of clout: ideas. *Pax Americana* was made possible not only by the overwhelming economic and military might of the United States, but also by a set of visionary ideas: free trade, Wilsonian liberalism, and multilateral institutions.” By contrast, “self confidence is not an ideology, and the much-touted Asian model of development does not seem to be an exportable product.”<sup>54</sup>

53 G.J. Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1, January/February 2008, pp. 23-37. See also A. Gat, *Victorious and Vulnerable: Why Democracy Won in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and How it is Still Imperiled*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2010; C. Norloff, *America’s Global Advantage*, Cambridge University Press, 2010; L. Freedman, “A Subversive on a Hill”, *The National Interest*, May-June 2009, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/a-subversive-on-a-hill-3096>; S.G. Brooks and W.C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008.

54 P. Minxin, “Think Again: Asia’s Rise”, *Foreign Policy*, No. 173, 2009, pp. 32-38. For an alternative and more recent analysis, see E.C. Economy, “The Game Changer: Coping with China’s Foreign Policy Revolution”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 6, November/December 2010, pp. 142-52.



China places a premium on bilateral and multilateral cooperation within key international organizations and international law, as they are considered the most appropriate instruments to mediate challenges to global and regional stability within a “democratic world order”. Its current focus is more on “domestic” or “internal” threats to Chinese statehood, such as: managing corruption, pollution and chronic water shortage, social discord, huge wealth disparities, massive internal migration flows and meeting the expectations of an expanding urban middle class.<sup>55</sup> Per capita income, rather than total GDP, “provides a measure of the sophistication of the economy” and it is on this metric that Chinese power should be judged.<sup>56</sup> We should consider the quality of power when considering whether it can be translated into preferred outcomes. China’s population structure – with its embedded 4:2:1 (four grandparents, two parents, one child) “dependency ratio” challenge (by 2050 elderly will account for one-fifth of the total population) – matters more than its overall size.<sup>57</sup>

#### Russia: Willing but Unable?

Russia’s governance model appears to be already in crisis, proving vulnerable in the face of the global financial crisis. In a remarkably frank article, President Medvedev himself criticised Russia’s “humiliating” dependence on raw materials, as well as its “inefficient economy, a semi-Soviet social sphere, an immature democracy, negative demographic trends, unstable Caucasus.”<sup>58</sup> On his 12 November 2009 Message to the Federal Assembly, President Medvedev noted that Russia could either modernize or deteriorate and argued that modernization would provide a touchstone: “how we can overcome our chronic backwardness, dependence on raw materials exports, and corruption.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the 2010 Transpar-

55 J. Yang, Minister of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, Speech at the 46<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference, 5 February 2010, Munich, <http://www.securityconference.de/jiechi-Yang.565.0.html?&L=1>. Yang noted that China’s progress is balanced by the realization that China faces “weaknesses and challenges... Big cities like Beijing and Shanghai can in no way represent the whole of China, and many rural and remote areas are still very poor. One hundred and thirty-five million people are living on less than one dollar a day and 10 million have no access to electricity.”

56 J.S. Nye, “The Future of American Power”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 6, November/December 2010, pp. 2-12.

57 Edelman, “Understanding America’s Contested Primacy”, p. 57; N. Eberstadt, “The Demographic Implosion”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 6, November/December 2010, pp.54-64.

58 President Dmitry Medvedev, “Forward, Russia!”, *Gazeta*, 10 September 2009.

59 “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation”, Moscow, 12 November 2009, [http://eng.kremlin.ru/speeches/2009/11/12/1321\\_type70029type82912\\_222702.shtml](http://eng.kremlin.ru/speeches/2009/11/12/1321_type70029type82912_222702.shtml). See also A. Goltz et al., “Russia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Vision for the Future”, Abridged Report, *Institute of Contemporary Development*, 2010, pp. 1-22, [http://www.riocenter.ru/files/INSOR%20Russia%20in%20the%2021st%20century\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.riocenter.ru/files/INSOR%20Russia%20in%20the%2021st%20century_ENG.pdf); G.P. Herd, “Russia’s Strategic Choice: Conservative or Democratic Modernization?”, *GCSP Policy Paper No. 2*, Geneva, May 2010, <http://www.gcsp.ch/International-Security/Recent-Publications/Russia-s-Strategic-Choice>.

ency International Corruption Perception Index places Russia 154<sup>th</sup>, between Papua New Guinea and Tajikistan.<sup>60</sup>

When we look to Russia's relations with EU and NATO member states, a fundamental source of tension is a trust deficit. Divergent narratives underline this reality. The European Security Strategy of 2003 characterizes Europe as "whole, at peace and free", while the Georgia crisis of 2008 brings such words into serious question. Russia's dissatisfaction with the status quo is vocal: NATO-centric dominance and balance of power Cold War bloc mentality dominates; Russia has had little influence on strategic decision-making in Euro-Atlantic space over the last twenty years. The estrangement of the Russian political elite from the West and opposition of internal vested interests to modernize Russia's economy and society, as this implies a different political order, explain the utility of "US encirclement" and neo-containment narratives that shape the discourse. As a consequence, according to the Russian argument, current European security architecture is fragile and ill-suited to counter effectively and jointly shared threats and address root causes of crisis. Russia's European Collective Security Treaty proposal and its reception suggest the dialogue of the deaf will be ongoing: EU and NATO states argue that these two conflicts point to the need to build on and make better use of the framework of existing institutions, structures and mechanisms – including the OSCE, the NATO-Russia Council and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council – by working to reform them, rather than replace them with an all encompassing legally-binding treaty.<sup>61</sup>

### EU: Unable and Unwilling?

Jolyon Howorth suggests that the EU is able "to pursue norms-based effective multilateralism" to achieve "influence and impact" in a multi-polar context.<sup>62</sup> However, the EU can all too easily be viewed through a different prism – not as a potential Great Power challenger but rather as a progressively weaker US partner, unable to translate its collective power into preferred outcomes. Does the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009 signify a marker on the long road back from the EU's strategic marginalization which began as the Cold War paradigm disintegrated? The selection of Herman Van Rompuy and Catherine Ash-

60 "Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2010 Results", [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2010/results](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results).

61 P. Dunay and G.P. Herd, "Redesigning Europe? The Pitfalls and the Promises of the European Security Treaty Initiative", Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2009*, Vol. 15, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2010, pp. 77-98.

62 J. Howorth, "The EU as a Global Actor: Grand Strategy for a Global Grand Bargain?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 3, June 2010, pp. 455-474.

ton as the EU’s new President of the Council and High Representative for Foreign Affairs – candidates with low international profiles reflecting their lack of diplomatic, defence or foreign affairs experience – suggests that EU member states want existing policies to be better coordinated by “honest bureaucrats” rather than candidates willing to actively lead and show “vision”: “The Lisbon Treaty’s improved procedures and institutions can only supplement – not substitute for – political will and leadership.”<sup>63</sup>

More importantly, the euro crisis has demonstrated that the “gap between the rhetoric of a united and integrated Europe and the reality of national interests and politics” has the potential to be lethal.<sup>64</sup> The global financial crisis contributes to this sense of malaise, undercutting as it does the standing of the US and Europe as a credible model, while creditor autocracies now enjoy greater influence over and independence from debtor democracies and are less constrained in their foreign and security policy behaviour. The road to further European strategic marginalization over the next decade is well signposted: the political will to push forward further institutional reform, enlargement and integration, is waning. In the military sphere, defence budget cuts of 7% in the UK have legitimized greater Anglo-French military cooperation. Given that the UK and France constitute 50% of EU military spending and within this account for 65% of all research and development, it is likely that the EU’s strategic culture will continue to embrace an enlarged vision of security, a comprehensive and internationally legitimated approach to threats.<sup>65</sup> However, it remains highly unlikely that an EU Defence White Paper and military doctrine, a unified European army, an EU Minister for Defence will emerge.

## Do Shared 21<sup>st</sup> Century Threats Generate a Cooperative Imperative?

This logic is compelling in the abstract but in practice a broken promise. In 1913, British economist Sir Norman Angell memorably argued that economic integration between European states had rendered war between them pointless and so ob-

63 A.L. Gardner and S.E. Eizenstadt, “New Treaty, New Influence? Europe’s Chance to Punch Its Weight”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 2, March/April 2010, p. 118.

64, S. Tilford, “Closing the Gap Between Rhetoric and Reality is Key to the Euro’s Revival”, *Centre for European Reform Blog*, 10 May 2010, <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.com/2010/05/closing-gap-between-rhetoric-and.html>.

65 A. Biava, M. Drent and G.P. Herd, “Characterizing the EU’s Strategic Culture: An Analytical Framework”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 6, November 2011, forthcoming.

solete.<sup>66</sup> Although self-interest driven economic rationality suggests that increased connectedness raises the costs of rupturing symbiotic relations, the Great War (1914-1918) did occur with devastating result. When we fast-forward a century and examine responses to the global financial crisis we find general agreement that systemic failures – including the lack of credible mechanisms for international policy coordination, inadequate financial regulation, and inadequate liquidity provisioning – need to be addressed. There is also consensus that responses should be inclusive, equitable, credible, efficient and effective. Despite this, as yet no strategic blueprint to prevent the next crisis has been agreed by even G-20 states. The lack of a global response in the face of a near systemic collapse of the contemporary financial and economic order, as well as the global imbalances that lead to currency wars in 2010, suggest interstate relations do not have the strength and solidarity to treat the economic crisis as a common endeavour.<sup>67</sup> How can we explain this?

#### BRICs: Is the Sum Less than its Parts?

True to their genesis as an artificial Goldman Sachs analytical construct and marketing tool, BRIC states show little ability to band together to even balance the US in a coherent manner, never mind combine policy responses for the common good. Although Brazil, Russia, India and China share the experience of high economic growth, relative economic backwardness and are large in size, differences abound: they have distinctive cultural and historical trajectories, as well as domestic political systems, economic development and structure, location and interests.<sup>68</sup> Joseph Nye notes that in economic opportunity terms China's undervalued currency harms the economies of India and Brazil and that "it would make more sense if Indonesia replaced Russia".<sup>69</sup> In addition, strategic mistrust and rivalry predominates, evidenced not least by China's more robust claims through 2009 to

66 N. Angell, *The Great Illusion*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913, pp. x-xi.

67 The most recent meeting of G-20 leaders in Seoul on 11-12 November 2010 was loud on the rhetoric of global cooperation, but silent on clear numerical targets to address global imbalances. See "G20 & South Korea", *Financial Times*, Special Report, 11 November 2010, pp. 1-12.

68 A. Hurrell, "One World? Many Worlds? The Place of Regions in the Study of International Society", *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 1, 2007, pp. 127-146; R. Foot, "China and the United States: Between Cold War and Cold Peace", *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, 2009-2010, pp. 123-146; C. Cookson, "BRIC Nations See Big Shifts in Scientific Landscape", *Financial Times*, 26 January 2010, p. 3.

69 J. Nye, "What's in a BRIC? Not as much as Many Observers Imagine", *The Daily Star*, 14 May 2010, [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=10&categ\\_id=5&article\\_id=114822#](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=114822#); C. Raja Mohan, "East Asian Security: US Wants Bigger Indian Role", *RSIS Commentaries*, No. 129, 12 October 2010, <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/commentaries.asp?selRegion=6>.

the north-eastern Indian state of Arundchal Pradesh to counter-balance US-Indian strategic partnership.<sup>70</sup> Under what conditions (if any) would China ever join the US in support India’s efforts to become a UN Security Council (UNSC) permanent member?

A relative gains and zero-sum logic is at work undermining BRIC coherence, rather than a desire for absolute collective gains. When China expressed interest in joining the India-Brazil-South Africa forum (IBSA) – to create a CHIBSA group (China-India-Brazil-South Africa) – Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh emphasized IBSA commonalities in terms of open political and market systems (an embryonic “League of Southern Democracies”), which precluded China’s membership.<sup>71</sup> Just as, for example, the Soviet Union’s collapse removed one of China’s key strategic rivals and therefore constituted a strategic gain for China, China’s continued rise implies the displacement of Russia through its marginalization from regional and global decision-making.<sup>72</sup> For India, the collapse of the Soviet Union also had a profound impact, allowing for a reinvention of the state: “from a stultified, socialist economy to a more dynamic, capitalist one; from a foreign policy defined by suspicion of America to one defined by shared interests and even mutual affection; and from public attitudes that frowned on individualism, consumerism and ambition to a nation that today exalts those same qualities.”<sup>73</sup>

### Multi-polarity without Multilateralism

While ascending and Great Powers can identify strategic challenges, they cannot yet agree cooperative and sustainable responses. The results of multilateral forums are meagre. As Moisés Naím has forcefully noted: “deadlines have been missed; financial commitments and promises have not been honoured; execution has stalled; and international collective action has fallen far short of what was offered and, more importantly, needed. These failures represent not only the perpetual lack of international consensus, but also a flawed obsession with multilateralism as the panacea for all the world’s ills.”<sup>74</sup> Thomas Wright argues

70 R. Kaplan, “Center Stage for the Twenty-First Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No.2, March/April 2009, pp. 16-32; B. Emmott, *Rivals: How the Power Struggle between China, India and Japan Will Shape Our Next Decade*, New York, Harcourt Inc., 2008, pp. 1-16.

71 N. Gvosdev, “IBSA Deserves Long-term US Commitment”, *World Politics Review*, 30 April 2010, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/5474/the-realist-prism-ibsa-deserves-long-term-u-s-commitment>.

72 B. Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing and the New Geopolitics*, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2008, p. 89; P.R. Gregory and K. Zhou, “How China Won and Russia Lost”, *Policy Review*, No. 158, December 2009 & January 2010, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/72997307.html>.

73 A. Kapur, “India’s Path Was Paved by Soviet Fall”, *New York Times*, 19 November 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/20/world/asia/20iht-letter.html>.

74 M. Naím, “Minilateralism”, *Foreign Policy*, Vol.173, 2009, pp. 136-137.

multilateral institutions are not working as genuine policy disagreements “on how to tackle shared challenges” exists: “Placing the priority on broader participation and inclusion will likely increase deadlock, thus weakening the architecture of cooperation, not strengthening it.”<sup>75</sup>

Let us take the Copenhagen Summit of December 2009 which brought together 192 states to address climate change as an example to illustrate this contention. The “Copenhagen Accord” represents a three-page non-binding agreement which “took note” of emissions targets; legally-binding commitments were never formally “adopted”. Though the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon welcomed the “Copenhagen Accord” as an “essential beginning”, most observers characterised the accord as a divisive and “toothless failure”, one that symbolizes the limitations of global multilateral fora.<sup>76</sup> In climate research, the rise of the mean global temperature over the last century is not in dispute, but its causes and consequences are. When considering how best to address the risk of catastrophic climate change, for example, research indicates negotiations to cut green-house gas emissions are gridlocked in part because there is a fundamental misunderstanding as to what constitutes “fairness”.<sup>77</sup> Should the focus be on the largest ten world economies that generate 80% of the emissions, or the rest (100 of the world’s smallest economies emit less than 3% of the total)? Should the focus on pollution be calculated in total amounts or on a per capita basis (the US emits 20 tonnes per person each year, China 6 tonnes)? Should states that manufacture products and so generate greenhouse gases cut emissions or should the states whose publics consume those greenhouse gas products? Can post-industrial economies which benefited from an unsustainable coal-fired and industrial-driven development model to achieve global power and current wealth now determine the modernization pathways of rising powers?<sup>78</sup> Can states today agree what constitutes “common but differentiated historical responsibility”; should we measure historically cumulative emissions or current levels; should the sins of the fathers be visited upon their sons? Since each of these considerations have their own merit but carry with them huge strategic

75 T. Wright, “Multilateralism: Why Bigger May Not Be Better”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2009, pp. 136-137; J. Stiglitz, “One Small Step Forward”, *The Guardian*, 28 June 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentis-free/2009/jun/28/joseph-stiglitz-un-economic-crisis>.

76 “Copenhagen Climate Deal Meets Qualified UN Welcome”, *BBC News Online*, 19 December 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8422133.stm>.

77 N. Birdsall and A. Subramanian, “Forget Emissions, Focus on Research”, *Financial Times*, 18 November 2009, p. 11.

78 China’s Foreign Minister noted: “A review of the history of industrialization shows that over the past 200 years and more, only developed countries, with a combined population of less than one billion, achieved modernization, and their modernization came at a huge cost of global resources and the eco-environment. It represented an unsustainable development model.” J. Yang, Speech at the 46<sup>th</sup> Munich Security Conference, Munich, 2 February 2010.

implications in the way green-house gas emissions of individual countries would be measured, it is not difficult to see why a consensus was not reached.

Despite the foreign and security policy rhetoric coming out of Beijing, Brasilia, New Delhi and Moscow, in reality multilateral global governance is only supported when it is in their immediate interests, privileging domestic priorities and regional organizations above the longer term interests of the preservation of peace through support for global bodies. Brazil, India and South Africa push their own agenda in the UN when sitting as rotating members on the UNSC, in the General Assembly or on specialized bodies, such as the Human Rights Council. Former Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda, for example, argues that Brazil, China, India and South Africa privilege free-riding above the construction of workable international regimes.<sup>79</sup> We might caricature this notion with the mantra: “G-20 representational status, privileges and decision-making rights; G-7 funding, responsibilities and obligations”. When analysing the involvement of emerging powers in the G-20 and as rotating members of the UNSC, stagecraft trumps statecraft. The status of their membership appears to be more important than their active participation leading to constructive outcomes. As a result, the UNSC does not function as the “management committee of our fledgling collective security system”, in the words of Kofi Annan, or as a concert of the Great Powers – India, Brazil, Japan, South Africa or Nigeria are not present and Europe is over-represented – but simply one important place for debate and argument.<sup>80</sup> The logic of diffuse reciprocity (the notion that cooperation distributes costs and benefits evenly over the longer term) which underpins multilateralism has less and less traction within multilateral bodies: costs appear to be concentrated, benefits too diffuse; leaders unwilling or unable to think in generational terms; international organization bureaucracies themselves can be “inefficient, ineffective, repressive and unaccountable” so impeding practical outcomes.<sup>81</sup> As a result, institutional adaptation does not keep pace with the breadth and depth of global change.

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79 D. Rodrik, “Can Developing Countries Carry the World Economy?”, *Daily Star*, 13 October 2010, [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=1&categ\\_id=5&article\\_id=120288](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=5&article_id=120288).

80 K. Anderson, “United Nations Collective Security and the United States Security Guarantee in a Multipolar World: The Security Council as the Talking Shop of the Nations”, *Chicago International Law Journal*, Vol. 10, Iss. 1, 2009, pp. 55-91; B. Rubin and B.D. Jones, “Prevention of Violent Conflict: Tasks and Challenges for the United Nations”, *Global Governance*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2007, pp. 391-408.

81 M. Barnett and M. Finnemore, “The Politics, Power and Pathologies of International Organizations”, *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 4, Autumn 1999, p. 726.

## Complex Networked Threats: Crossing Critical Thresholds?

We can also locate part of the explanation for the inability of shared threats to generate cooperative responses in the nature of contemporary strategic threats themselves. Contemporary threats increasingly raise questions of ownership, obligations and responsibilities and the role of enabling transnational networks. There are instances of co-operative interventions against transnational strategic threats in our generation – the recognition of the ozone hole, the rapid improvement in global pandemic cooperation after the SARS and then H5N1 experiences, and nuclear accident handling after Chernobyl – but what might the future hold? These networks – whether they be proliferation, terrorism, cyber, finance, critical infrastructural (e.g. transport and energy), food-production or migration-based – integrate developed and developing states, as well as functional and time boundaries. Geographical proximity and shared network membership and connectivity render all states, but especially ascending and global powers, vulnerable to crisis, contingency and catastrophe. The greater frequency and impact of Black Swan-type events, with unintended consequences, spill-over and cascading second and third order effects, can be more devastating and the resultant disorder much harder to manage than the initial source of insecurity. Increasing synergy, the promiscuous interconnectivity and coupling of complex systems generates unpredictable non-linear behaviour and effects. It creates a power vacuum, raising questions of authority and control – who “owns” the crisis, who must manage it? As the *Global Risks Report 2010* notes: “the ownership of these risks remains fragmented and unclear, and it is often difficult to identify actors willing and able to take ownership. This, coupled with the complexity of interdependencies, is perhaps why so many of these issues remain endemic and systemic in nature, although their existence and potential impact is known.”<sup>82</sup> Indeed, “10/04” or the “ash attack” on airspace around Europe and across the Atlantic following the volcanic eruption in the Icelandic glacier Eyjafjallajökull, on 10 April 2010, illustrated this concern in full. Who had responsibility for banning flights? To what extent did regulators manage the perceived risk rather than the actual one?<sup>83</sup>

Time is not neutral. International Relations have always occupied the gap between chaos and order: are we entering an age in which the capacity and timeliness of global management will always be less than the magnitude and complexity of the threats to be addressed? It is the size of the gap which will define strategic “success” in this century. Certainly, prescriptions, policies and strategies

82 World Economic Forum, *Global Risks Report 2010: A Global Risks Network Report*, 2010, p. 36, <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/globalrisk/globalrisks2010.pdf>.

83 A. Alemanno, “The European Regulatory Response to the Volcanic Ash Crisis between Fragmentation and Integration”, *European Journal of Risk Regulation*, Vol. 2, 2010, pp. 1-12.



to manage sources of insecurity lag behind both action to implement them and the unfolding of global trends themselves that generate the threats – but how far behind? Will the tragedy of the Great Power politics not simply be that Great Powers are destined to be competitive, even conflictual<sup>84</sup>, but that legitimate, efficient and effective cooperative efforts to manage shared threats will only occur when the possibility of effective management is no longer an option<sup>85</sup>? If this is so, what are the critical thresholds and global tipping points of no return? Can they even be identified to allow the possibility of coordinated and effective action? If an equilibrium that represents the lowest common denominator agreed coordinated response between Great Powers can be achieved, might it have “input legitimacy” in that it is elaborated and implemented by a critical mass of states but lack “output legitimacy”, as it fails to manage let alone solve the threat it purports to address? Must the trade-off between representational/procedural legitimacy and performance legitimacy be inherently zero-sum? Shared strategic threats have forged a negative Great Power co-dependency which allows for the acknowledgement of common threats but not yet the incentive that translates this into positive agreement on joint policy approaches.

### Normative Splits and Incompatible Perceptions

Divergent expectations and understandings as to what constitutes appropriate international behaviour also help nuance the explanation for the nature of cooperative efforts. Because expectations and understandings are not universally shared by the community of actors, perceived or assumed bonds of mutual trust and so reciprocity are continually severed. We can see that ethical and normative splits occur between the developed and developing states, as well as between the ascending and Great Powers. While “no first use”, “ecological responsibility”, “distributive justice”, “individual privacy”, “democratic governance”, “legitimacy”, “responsible sovereignty”, “exclusive economic zone” and “responsibility to protect” (R2P) are emergent norms, they are not always universally espoused and often disagreements arise over where, when and how they are to be applied. When General Assembly president d’Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua characterized “R2P” in terms of “redecorated colonialism”, he reflected a sense of grievance and exclusion felt by many developing countries in that Assembly,

84 J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York, Norton, 2001.

85 To take an example regarding proliferation of nuclear weapons: “The world is nearing a ‘proliferation tipping point’ where nuclear weapons have spread beyond the capacity of any effort to rein them in and the danger increases that they will be used in a war, or by accident, or by terrorists.” W. Ischinger and U. Weisser, “NATO and the Nuclear Umbrella”, *International Herald Tribune*, 16 February 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/16/opinion/16iht-edischinger.html>; see also G.P. Schultz, “Confronting a Nuclear Tipping Point”, Council on Foreign Relations, 12 March 2010, [http://www.cfr.org/publication/21633/confronting\\_a\\_nuclear\\_tipping\\_point.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/21633/confronting_a_nuclear_tipping_point.html).

the majority of which have historical experience of colonial subjugation. Differing perceptions of great power global humanitarian interventions – the accusation that the political West uses the language of virtue in pursuit of economic interests, for example – suggest that the assumed normative convergence which underpins so many contemporary global order paradigms can be questioned.<sup>86</sup> International norms, rules and internationalism are continuously trumped by powerful domestic politics, agendas and national norms when national interest or advantage is at stake. States still are unprepared to subordinate narrow domestic goals for the larger public good. This makes the challenge of effective, efficient and legitimate cooperation even more pressing.

The perceptions of elites and societies in ascending as well as traditional Great Powers are malleable. Here narratives, branding and the framing of story-lines which support and legitimise particular world views and can generate “global outrage” are all important: they can increase the possibility that Great Power regional entanglements will lead to conflict between the Great Powers themselves. Crises generate narratives that reinforce a prevailing notion of what constitutes “normalcy” and what “chaos”. For this reason, understanding strategic pathologies is critically important. Historical narratives and memories, traditions, foundational myths, mind-sets, have a powerful pull and will provide the most immediate prism through which future systemic shocks are refracted and so interpreted. The media can be a “game changer”, driving narratives of fear: “News outlets win by presenting stories that are more frightening, angry and simple than those of their competitors, not by supplying historical perspective and reassurance. If no danger exists, it must be created, or at least creatively implied.”<sup>87</sup>

Although future global strategic catastrophes could reinforce global confidence in US strategic competence, in the US as a responsible global custodian of a benign multilateral order, they might also exacerbate a latent perception of US strategic incompetence and arrogance, so shaping US relations with other Great and Major Powers. Might the “shadow of the future”, the projected inevitability of rising centres of global power, promote hubris – the display of a premature arrogance of power? Conversely, might the lessons of history prove to be a trap as decision-makers learn the wrong “lessons” and become prisoners of old patterns, encouraging premature containment by the US or can they avoid rear-end collisions? Either outcome would exacerbate Great Power latent competitive rather than cooperative tendencies: “In imperial crises, it is not the material underpinnings of power that really matter but expectations about future power.”<sup>88</sup>

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86 H. Müller, *Building a New World Order: Sustainable Policies for the Future*, London, Haus, 2009, pp. 87-111; B.D. Jones et al., *Power and Responsibility: Building International Order in an Era of Transnational Threats*, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2009.

87 C.J. Fettweis, “Threat and Anxiety in US Foreign Policy”, *Survival*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2010, p. 74.

88 N. Ferguson, “Complexity and Collapse: Empires in the Edge of Chaos”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 2, March/April 2010, p. 31.

# Conclusion: Operationalizing Coalitional Primacy?

The twin impact of increased power-shifts and interdependence shapes a strategic environment that is uncertain and ambiguous. The first part of this paper argued that international relations theory would posit two competing visions. At one extreme, a Hobbesian realist world order driven by the competitive dynamics that flow from power-shifts will be characterised by “multiple competing regionalisms”, in which protectionism, mercantilism, hierarchies and bilateral relations between the regional hegemon and the rest, predominate and little coordination at global and systemic level, only on narrow range of issues where shared interest exist. At the other end of the spectrum, a Kantian liberalist world order will be characterised by “cooperative network governance”, in which states alongside multiple stakeholders, not least institutions which uphold rule-based decision-making, non-discrimination, multilateralism, and transparency as global norms, and address shared threats within a global security community.

The second part focused on the Obama doctrine and identified the implicit assumptions embedded within the narrative of partnership, cooperation and reciprocal “win-win” outcomes in the face of common threats. The third part then analysed a number of challenges, obstacles and dilemmas to collective action. These undercuts both the rational and collective alignment of Great Power visions, policies and resources necessary to produce a Kantian world order, and also the ability of Great Powers to translate their accumulated substrates of national power into preferred policy outcomes.

Strategic mistrust does not allow either impulse to predominate – there is no post-financial crisis world order paradigm. Can both these cooperative and competitive dynamics be harnessed in the service of global peace and stability? We can conclude by hypothesising that the sum of power-shifts and interdependence could combine to catalytic and counter-intuitive strategic effect: US primacy is sustained. Indeed, to state the case more powerfully: while power-shifts and interdependence in balance provide a potential platform for continued US relative

primacy, if either were to predominate, US primacy by default or design would be lost. Why?

A number of arguments support the notion that the US is able to maintain its primacy. First, power shifts and the future perception and prospect of relative decline promote US strategic caution, self-discipline and hedges against haste and hubris. Second, the preponderance and composition of US power across the spectrum (military, economic, political-diplomatic, historical-cultural) facilitates its ability to check and balance: the viability of this hedging strategy will be tested by China. Third, interdependence generates unintended sources of insecurity and creates a global need for coordination and leadership: only the US has both convening power on all key strategic security management initiatives and the capacity to create coalitions, networks and partnerships that ensure effective, efficient and legitimate management. For these three principal reasons, power-shifts and interdependence best allow the US to translate its power into preferred policy outcomes. Under these conditions US primacy will be opportunistic, pragmatic, ad hoc, flexible, adaptive and, above all, sustainable.

Embracing the paradox of “coalitional primacy” can avoid a strategic Catch-22 – the double bind of losing primacy either by default through the logic of power-shifts or design through the rationality of interdependence. While the US has the power capability and composition, strategic context and possesses the diplomatic and political skills necessary for the maintenance of “coalitional primacy”, does it have the political will to achieve this goal? In the short term, can a determined Obama presidency overcome unprecedented levels of domestic political polarization, the realities of the new Congresses legislative gridlock, protectionist and isolationists strains, to focus on maintaining US primacy?

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