

# Post-Western World Orders and East Asian Future

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## Abstract

The paper investigates the main macro-political trends at the international level. After reviewing the conceptual maps of international politics and the various future scenarios for globalisation, the paper examines the three main world order arrangements that could emerge in the coming decades. These are derived from the current distribution of power at the international level and from current trends, and are extrapolated as possible future developments. These eventualities involve the four major powers in the world to come: China, the European Union, Russia, and the US.

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

Many see the relative decline of the US and the growth of China as setting the two on a collision course. It is difficult to predict whether a real armed conflict will occur between the two superpowers. There are significant

balancing dynamics between the two countries; first and foremost is their economic interdependence. What can be affirmed more easily is that there will be a continuous, if not growing, tension between the two. As outcomes of this tension, three main scenarios of world order can be drawn.

World Order One: The West vs. the Rest. In this scenario, tension remains a central feature, which polarises the world in a new bipolar system. The EU is pulled towards, and even more greatly integrated within, the transatlantic community, while Russia follows a similar trajectory within a Sino-centric Asian community.

World Order Two: Eurasian Integration and US Solitude. In this scenario, a process of inter-regional integration is promoted by China and accepted by both Russia and the EU. The Eurasian mass is progressively integrated within the largest economic area in the world. All other regional aggregations suffer a strong pull effect. The US and the American continent at large goes adrift in geopolitical solitude, generating inward-looking isolationist stances.

World Order Three: Enlarged West vs. China. In this scenario, the West remains predominant, China is more and more isolated, and Russia is pulled back towards Europe and the larger transatlantic community.

In the last part of the paper, the implications of the three scenarios drawn concern for East Asia.

**Keywords** : *World Order, USA, RPC, EU, Russia, IR, Globalization, Multicentrism*

## 1.1 Theories of international order

A classical understanding of international order sees it as a system of settled expectations (Bull, 1977). In Bull's view, order has little in common with the notion of justice. It is, exclusively, a set of mechanisms that enable a group to interact smoothly. Of course, the mechanisms that generate these settled expectations vary depending on the specific circumstances of the political group in question. At the international level, a number of different order-generating mechanisms have been identified in line with major theoretical perspectives. While realists tend to find the origins of such mechanisms in the mere distribution of power, liberals include the added value of the institutional framework as a mitigating factor, and constructivists point to inter-subjective constructions in terms of shared understandings.

Realists identify two key mechanisms generating stability in the system: the balance of power and hegemonic stability. Whereas the first entails a balanced distribution of power (Waltz 1979), the second identifies the source of international stability in an uneven distribution of power, balanced in favour of the hegemon (Gilpin, 1987). Liberals identify the following three elements as key mechanisms for stability in the international system: democratic peace, through which the spread of democracy decreases the likelihood of war (Doyle, 1986); complex interdependence, through which the increase in international and transnational exchanges brings about stability (Keohane & Nye, 1977); and finally, institutionalism, through which the creation of common institutions yields the promise of stability because it distributes the payoffs of reduced transaction costs and increased chances of cooperation due to the presence of a common authority able to solve conflicts and impose sanctions (Keohane, 1984). Constructivists provide a twofold reading of current reality. On one hand, they see the consolidation of common narratives, shared

principles, and ultimately, individual mindsets, caused by processes of transnational homogenisation, the key order-generating mechanism in an age of global politics (Wendt, 2003). On the other hand, however, they also take into account the endlessly competitive nature of (international) politics. In the same way, they also point to the continuous competition for legitimacy in the world order, especially in times of (re)emerging powers and increased assertiveness by non-Western powers.

The debate on world order in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first has been driven by these different theoretical underpinnings. The current debate on world order re-emerged with the end of the Cold War. However, the discussion had not been abandoned during that period. There were interesting contributions, but they remained on the fringe of the political and academic debate (Cox, 1987; Falk & Mendlovitz, 1966). An influential exception was the classic work by Bull (Bull, 1977) and later, the study by Suganami (Suganami, 1989), which opened up the subsequent debate in the 1990s. The post-Cold War debate in the 1990s was lively. It centred on the growing phenomenon of global governance (Archibugi & Held, 1995; Czempiel & Rosenau, 1992; Slaughter, 1997) and its alternatives (Huntington 1996). With the new millennium, 9/11, and an increasingly evident power shift, the debate intensified towards the present day (Bremmer & Roubini, 2011; Buzan, 2011; Fabbrini & Marchetti, 2017; Ikenberry, 2011; Khanna, 2011; Kupchan, 2012).

We must add that since the beginning of the 2000s, IR theory in general, and debates of world order in particular, have been confronted by what could be defined as a 'non-Western turn' in global politics. This means scholars from non-Western countries and what was once called the 'Third World', repeatedly called for a growing inclusion coming from non-Western realities about IR

theorizing. In this stance, they recognize the fact that the dichotomy between the “West” and “the Rest” has always been problematic. However, such scholars believe that to talk about a ‘Global IR’ still rests among one of the greatest challenges of IR to truly become a global discipline. Even more, they argue that to recognize the place or contribution for the world order of the non-Western countries is not the same as to recognize their positive agency, that is, seeing them as active ‘subjects’ rather than passive ‘objects’ in international politics (Acharya 2018). In this light, ‘pluralism’ is also often considered as the missing link between Western and non-Western academia, but IR scholars should become aware that it represents the only way to legitimize the production of systemic knowledge of IR theories (Qin 2018).

## **1.2 Powershift : from the cold war to multicentrism**

Today, the debate on world order is intense (Marchetti, 2016). As is always the case in moments of transition, the global restructuring of international affairs is generating profound reflection on how the world is being, and should be, re-organised. After the long period of the Cold War and the following decade marked by American unipolarism, the world has entered the new millennium amid major shifts.

The relative decline of the US, the crisis of the EU, the consolidation of the BRIC countries, and the diffusion of power to non-state actors all constitute significant demands for a new conceptualisation of the rules of the global game. The US has emerged from its unipolar period rather weakened. Economically downgraded, wounded by 9/11, and diplomatically debilitated by multiple failures, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine, but the US still retains a degree of global leadership. The EU, after a period of ambitious self-promotion, is now at a serious

impasse. The economic crisis has generated political weakening. Internally, the once solid liberal consensus has opened up to a much more pluralist debate within the EU, but this has also allowed populist parties to become significant actors in European politics. Externally, the EU is unable to address crises both to its east and south. In the BRIC camp, China is increasing its economic, military, and political power. Brazil and India are reaffirming their regional, quasi-global, power. Russia is proving an obstacle to many Western projects. The Islamic world is in turmoil, with the Sunni-Shia cleavage dividing numerous countries and generating regional instability. Finally, globalisation has generated abundant opportunities for non-state actors to play a significant role in international affairs. From classic intergovernmental organisations to standard-setting bodies, international non-governmental organisations to multinational corporations, criminal organisations to terrorist networks, the world seems a level playing field for these non-state actors.

With the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the world entered a period of unmatched unipolarism that lasted for almost two decades and was marked by growing global integration. The 1990s began with the first Gulf War and were later shaped incisively by the two Clinton presidential terms. A number of significant events occurred in this decade, including the war in Yugoslavia (1991-5) on the security front, the creation of the WTO (1995) with Chinese membership in 2001 on the economic front, and Russian membership of the Council of Europe on the political front. All in all, the world moved clearly towards global integration under uncontested American leadership. From 2001 on, however, the path of global integration came into question. Most acutely, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 posed a challenge to unrivalled American leadership. In a very different form, but equally challenging, was the creation of the World Social

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

2008 can arguably be considered a turning point for the international system. A systematic change seems to have begun in 2008 which is slowly pushing the world order towards a more multipolar or multicentric model. The American economic crisis, which began in 2007 but erupted in 2008 with the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, weakened US status at the international level. The EU followed a similar pattern a few years later. Precisely when the West was experiencing these moments of weakness, a number of other major powers became more assertive and confrontational towards the Western international system that had dominated the scene after 1989. As a consequence of the crisis, in 2008, the first G20 heads of state meeting was organised in Washington with the intention of tackling the economic crisis by bringing in the emerging economies. The G8 was no longer seen as an adequate means of properly addressing this major instability. In the same year as this institutional revolution, the (re)emerging powers asserted their role in world politics in other ways too. Russia intervened militarily in Georgia to reassert its influence in its immediate region. China organised the Olympic Games in Beijing to assert its return to the world stage.

The world after 2008 looks like a world in which the project for single global integration in political, economic, and security terms is ever further away, and instead, regional fragmentation and West vs. BRIC tension has been accentuated. Regional blocs

increasingly seem to be in competition: the Eurasian Customs Union was created in 2010 as a barrier to the European Union's power of attraction and as a further response to the flashpoints in Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia. Inter-regional trade agreements were signed (TTP, 2015) and are being negotiated (TTIP) as a substitute for the multilateral WTO rounds and as a way of re-establishing Western leadership by systematically excluding the BRICs from the negotiating table. New financial institutions were created—the New Development Bank (formerly, the BRICS Development Bank) in 2014, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015—which alter the US-centrism of the world economy. Finally, huge infrastructure projects such as the Chinese One Belt One Road initiative (OBOR) aim to connect the entire Eurasian region within a single platform while excluding the US.

In this pluralist and changing context, a number of different scenarios are materialising. A summary of the various scenarios is provided by Joseph Nye, using a chessboard metaphor. According to Nye, the best way to think about international politics is to conceive of it as being played simultaneously on three chessboards. On the first chessboard, the military one, the system is unipolar, with the US firmly ahead of its rivals. On the second chessboard, the economic one, the system is multipolar, with the US this time having to share power with the EU, China, and the other big economic powers. Finally, on the third chessboard, the mixed one, the system is a-polar, with power spread on a transnational scale. On this last chessboard, the players are many and among the great powers, only the US and the EU have the necessary skills to influence the game, thanks to their ability to forge synergies with non-governmental actors (Nye, 2004).



### 1.3 Maps and models of international politics

Our mental map of international politics tends to see the globe as a jigsaw puzzle composed of around 200 tiles. To be more precise, we conceptualise the world as comprised of 194 states, the official members of the United Nations. From this point of view, in order to understand international politics we have to observe the behaviour of the states, which we take as the international system's unit of analysis. This state-centric worldview derives from the Westphalian system and the intellectual dominance of realism. Throughout history, however, the perception of the international system's nature has not always been like this. Before the Westphalian system, the world was seen as divided between large supranational empires with history as the product of their interaction. During the Cold War, the mental map of international politics was essentially based on only two tiles, the two blocks, capitalist and socialist, with Washington and Moscow as capitals, plus the 'third world' of non-aligned countries which had a truly marginal position.

From the 1980s until the 2008 financial crisis, many commentators argued the global jigsaw had eight pieces, the member states of the G8. The global north, 'the West', no longer guided the world by colonial control but through economic leadership. More recently we have come to realise that those eight states are no longer able to govern the world alone and as a consequence, the map has been widened to include a number of countries in the global south, primarily the so-called emerging powers. The meetings of the G20 have institutionalised this geostrategic enlargement.

Since the 1990s, Samuel Huntington has argued, however, that the real jigsaw of world politics is not made up of 194 pieces, or even two, eight, or 20 pieces, but rather has nine macro pieces which he calls civilisations (Huntington, 1996). Accordingly,

history today is decided by the interaction of nine macro-regional areas: 1) a Western area, which includes North America (without Mexico), Western Europe, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New-Guinea; 2) an Orthodox area, which runs from Greece to Russia, taking in Kazakhstan and Bosnia-Herzegovina; 3) an Islamic area, stretching from Morocco to Indonesia, passing through Albania, including Sunnis and Shiites, but without a lead country; 4) an African area, including all the sub-Saharan countries; 5) Latin America, from Argentina to Mexico; 6) a Hindu area, centred on India; 7) a Sinic area, centred on China, excluding Tibet but including Vietnam and the entire Korean peninsula; 8) a Buddhist area, with Tibet, Mongolia, and other countries in Southeast Asia; and finally, 9) Japan on its own.

The outlines presented above are linked to a number of models for the international system that suggest different distributions of power. A classic model—in the terms of the last twenty years at least—is that of American unipolarism, by which the world continues to be led by the US as the unchallengeable military, economic, and thus political power. This kind of interpretation represents a traditional and widely held view across the US government. According to this perspective, the US is destined to guide the rest of the world, given its exceptional nature as the ‘shining city upon a hill’, which gives it a role of responsibility towards the rest of the international community. We find this vision embedded among both Republican (Bush, 2002) and Democrat (Obama, 2007) readings of US world leadership, but it also widespread among scholars (Kagan, 1998; Krauthammer, 2003) and found in many official documents (Department of Defense, 2012).

A second much-discussed model is the so-called G2, between the US and China, whereby the two superpowers confront each other in an atmosphere of increasing rivalry and the destiny of the

international community depends on the resolution of this competition. According to the most accredited data, in aggregate terms the Chinese economy is destined to become the largest in the world, having already surpassed the Japanese economy in 2010. The US, after a long period of global economic primacy, is thus doomed to relinquish the top position in favour of the (re)emerging power, China, which accounts for around 23% of global GDP, exactly the position it had before European colonial expansion. According to American liberals, this change in economic leadership will not destabilise the international system because existing international institutions are sufficiently robust to face the change while forcing the new leader to accept the current rules (Ikenberry 2011). American realists, however, think the United States will continue to be the hegemon, but if it did decline that the international system as we know it would change radically, insofar as it is the byproduct of power distribution (Kagan 2012). From the G2's perspective, much will depend on the kind of relationship that will be established between the US and China, be it cooperative and win-win, or competitive and zero-sum.

A third model is a tripolar system led either by the US, the EU, and China, economically, or by the US, China, and Russia militarily. From this perspective, the logic of the old US-EU-Japan triad would see China take the Asian role, but would remain substantially unaltered, with most of the world's economic and political interactions taking place among the three macro-regions, with their imperialistic features (Khanna 2008). In military terms, the EU would be submerged within the transatlantic alliance and make way for Russia as the third key pillar in the triad.

A much-discussed model is that of a multipolar world in which, alongside the US and the EU, emerging economies consolidate their position, especially the BRIC countries, i.e., Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with the addition of South Africa. Other

countries with considerable economic weight could also exert influence, such as the MIKTA countries: Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia. In this model, the world is moving towards a roughly balanced, if unprecedented, model of power, because for the first time for several centuries, Western countries will have to share power with other countries from the global south.

There is then a fifth model: the a-polar world (Avant, Finnemore, & Sell, 2010; Haass, 2008; Hale & Held, 2011; Khanna, 2011, Marchetti, 2009). This is a world in which power is spread between multiple players, included non-governmental actors. This is a world strongly molded by globalisation, a model that rejects realist state-centric exclusivity. From this point of view, the best conceptual map to guide our understanding and actions in the global age is much more complex than the previous six maps we have examined. On one hand, the state as a unitary actor is seeing its central role wane in favour of a disaggregation into sub-state authorities with increasing transnational agency (Slaughter, 2003, 2004). Transnational governing networks are acquiring ever more importance: courts; public authorities; inter-parliamentary assemblies; and central banks are all increasing their cooperation with international counterparts. On the other hand, there is an increasing number and range of non-governmental actors demanding inclusion in the international decision-making process or directly acquiring authority, expertise, and power to influence international affairs in parallel to and regardless of state authority. From international gatherings such as the World Economic Forum to global terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda or Daesh, from the philanthropic foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to social movements such as the Movimento Sem Terra, to international NGOs such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International, to the Tibetan diaspora, from alternative media like

Wikileaks to the stars of charitable work like Bono of U2, to the think tanks like the Council on Foreign Relations and investment banks like JP Morgan Chase, from the rating agencies like Standard & Poor's to the major global media players like CNN, and new media like Facebook and Twitter, non-state actors are everywhere in global politics (Naim, 2013).

#### **1.4 Scenarios of globalisation**

In the most fervent hyper-globalist projects, the final step of humanity's evolution coincides with a world system perfectly integrated in every way: a single global market, a single legal code and a global supreme court, and a single political-institutional system. Analytically, as far back as 1969, Deutsch stressed that "societal borders dissolve when there is no more critical reduction in the frequency of social transaction" (Deutsch, 1969, 99). This is the goal numerous hyper-globalists would like to achieve. Are we on such a path? The answer is not straightforward. Whereas liberals argue that global integration is proceeding gradually but—at least for some—inexorably, for realists, the phase of integration that we are witnessing currently is subject to future change that will be shaped by the redistribution of power at the global level.

Liberals argue that the world in which we live is increasingly integrated and that this is generating significant benefits for humanity in terms of—in the final analysis—reducing the likelihood of armed conflicts. Trade, and economic interaction more generally, is constantly rising and because of this, the cost-benefit-analysed irrationality of war increases. International institutions, both those which are classically intergovernmental and other hybrid or private institutions of global governance, are increasingly more robust and omnipresent. Intrinsic distrust of international affairs is diminishing thanks to repeated interactions in institutional contexts. Finally, the specific form of

democratic government is spreading and this, according to democratic peace theory, will lead to the pacification of the international environment.

In parallel to progressive economic integration, we are also witnessing the increasing difficulties faced by national political structures in tackling new global challenges. The interpretations of this phenomenon are numerous: for the most radical, globalisation marks the end of the state itself (Ohmae, 1995) or, at least, the end of the social democratic era (Scharpf, 1997). Others argue we are witnessing a retreat of the state (Strange, 1996) that will make it residual (Cerny, 2010), and an impoverishment of politics (Narr & Schubert, 1994) due to the so-called global trap (Martin & Schumann, 1997). The logic of the global market thus creates a state which is completely focused on competition (Hirsch, 1997), which leads, in turn, to a race to the bottom (Krugman, 1997).

Different understandings of the state have been formulated to contradict these interpretations. Some still recognise a role for the state within the phenomenon of globalisation. Others see global transformations as a by-product of the very governmental action of the great powers. For the former, the state would, in any case, retain significant functions for deciding and implementing public policies. National politics would exist to soften the effects of integration as a kind of risk insurance, or at least to mediate external pressures. Sovereignty would thus be spread across many levels and among many institutions, but it would not be completely lost, and citizens would still have effective tools to determine their own lives. Another more accentuated statist perspective is linked to hegemonic stability theory, which sees the current state of globalisation as the product of recent decades of US hegemony, just as the period of global integration of the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century were

linked to the hegemonic power of the British Empire. Globalisation, or globalisations plural, is here a product of hegemon, but states which decide, more or less freely, to adopt the political direction of the leading country also benefit from bandwagoning. Globalisation, in this reading, is animated by an open dynamic, but precisely because of this characteristic, experiences tendencies towards instability, tension, conflict, and war because of the ambition of emerging powers to challenge the hegemon's leadership. This was Germany's story before World War One and World War Two, and this, according to some, is the destiny of the new emerging power, China. If this interpretation is correct, the signs of the decline of American power suggest a worrying outlook.

In short, there are six different scenarios for the future of globalisation spurring contemporary debate. The first liberal scenario sees globalisation as an unstoppable movement, in regard to which emerging powers should strategically adapt, ultimately by way of Western liberal-democratic values. Globalisation would thus be destined for constant growth, albeit not necessarily at an increasing pace, and will only reach its end when it has achieved complete integration.

The second liberal scenario forecasts that once a certain physical line has been reached, beyond which it is difficult to go, globalisation will slow down or even halt, so as not to risk the results of the integration achieved so far. A self-controlling socio-political mechanism that would impose correction on integrationist forces would be activated in order to mitigate globalisation's social costs.

The third scenario, of a more critical liberal nature, is based on the idea that the processes of globalisation are not governed and thus cannot be stopped voluntarily: they will continue to accelerate until the social costs become unsustainable and they will give political space, in keeping with a dramatic dynamic of self-

consumption, to the emergence of nationalist, anti-systemic, or regionalist forces which will overturn the logic of integration in favour of a return to nationalist barriers and isolationism.

A fourth realist scenario argues similarly that the future is bound towards compartmentalisation. From a geopolitical point of view, although it may be true that transatlantic globalisation has offered opportunities for political growth and economic emancipation to emerging powers, it is, however, increasingly evident that this imbalance of power between West and East seems to have placed the ability of the system to hold together in doubt. It also suggests a return to a compartmentalised logic of a multipolar balance of power on a macro-regional basis, with potentially conflicting developments.

The fifth realist scenario argues that the process of globalisation will go on, as it has always done, in cyclic waves, with ups and downs: a phase of global integration will be followed by a phase of nationalist or macro-regional fragmentation, which will probably be ended by a conflict setting the basis for the construction of another future cycle of expansive globalist integration.

The sixth scenario is constructivist in tone, and presents a less well-defined image: it points neither to a shrinking or to a preservation of global dynamics, but to their transformation. From this perspective, which is related to the idea of multiple modernities, the current level of supranational integration will take different paths from those that are today imposed by the West: this will see the formation of new hybrid modalities inspired by previously marginalised non-Western politico-cultural traditions. It is in this scenario that the consolidation of emerging power status will not necessarily lead to a phase of conflict over a new global hegemony, but rather to the formation of differentiated areas of development, some of them governed according to



principles that are alien to the West. This could lead to a world of differentiated capitalism, albeit with features of a single, globally decentralised system (Buzan & Lawson, 2014).

### **1.5 Three world orders**

After reviewing the conceptual maps of international politics and the various future scenarios for globalisation, it is now time to examine the three main world order arrangements that could emerge in the coming decades. These derive from the current distribution of power at the international level and from current trends, and are extrapolated as possible future developments. These eventualities involve the four major powers in the world to come: China, the European Union, Russia, and the US.

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

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

China's growth is undeniable. Economically, China will become the largest economy in the world in the next few years. It already has the largest banking asset, the largest import-export gains, and is a leader in R&D. Militarily, Chinese growth is significantly reducing the gap with its American counterpart year by year. Socially and politically, China is becoming a magnet of attraction for an increasing number of countries and individuals around the world.

Many see the relative decline of the US and the growth of China as setting the two on a collision course (Allison, 2017). It is difficult to predict whether a real armed conflict will occur between the two superpowers. There are significant balancing dynamics between the two countries, first and foremost their economic interdependence: the US needs China to buy its treasury bonds, and China needs the US to buy its products. What can be affirmed more easily is that there will be a continuous, if not growing, tension between the two. As outcomes of this tension, three main scenarios of world order can be drawn.

### **World order one : The West vs. the Rest**

In this scenario, tension remains a central feature which polarises the world in a new bipolar system. The EU is pulled towards, and even more greatly integrated within, the transatlantic community, while Russia follows a similar trajectory within a Sino-centric Asian community. Tensions increase between the US and China but do not reach the point of armed conflict. China is not ready yet for a military confrontation. The US could be tempted to crash the would-be challenger before it is no longer possible, however, a number of parameters suggest that any unilateral American military containment may be too late. Economic relationships, political groupings, and military alliances all tend to be polarised. As a consequence, the two junior partners,

the EU and Russia, are bound to align themselves with the two great powers. Economic pressure is developed through a revival of intra-regional blocs, protectionism, economic geopolitics, economic cyber warfare, and technological competition. Political pressure is exerted indirectly on minor allies and directly through attempts to discredit rivals within their local constituencies. Military escalation is visible in an arms race, a corresponding increase in the military budgets of the two countries and their allies, and the repetition of minor skirmishes in East Asia, especially in the South China Sea.

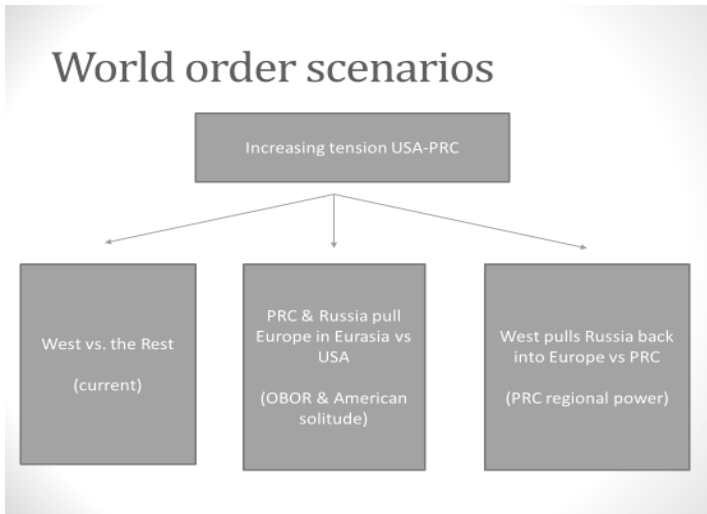
### **World order two : Eurasian integration and US solitude**

In this scenario, a process of inter-regional integration is promoted by China and accepted by both Russia and the EU. The Eurasian mass is progressively integrated within the largest economic area in the world. All other regional aggregations suffer a strong pull effect. The US and the American continent at large goes adrift in geopolitical solitude, generating inward-looking isolationist stances. The US economy enters a stark decline, the country loses political leadership, and the military apparatus gets silenced. Domestic politics become fragmented, ethnic issues become dominant, and the territorial integrity of the federation is challenged with states such as California and Florida demanding independence. The tight grip of American global alliances weakens, and one after the other, former allies open up channels of communication and cooperation with the emerging hegemon. China's power continues to expand, and its attractiveness continues to grow. The global narrative changes and becomes Sino-centric. A new Pax Sinica, with Chinese political and economic principles, is established. Eurasian integration develops significantly with promotion from Beijing. First ASEAN and African countries, then countries in central Asia, then South Korea,

Russia, and Iran all move towards deeper integration with China. Finally, the European Union, India, Japan, and the Gulf countries all enter the Chinese orbit. The US is isolated and barely manages to maintain its few 'light' anti-China alliances with individual countries in Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

### **World order three: Enlarged West vs. China**

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



## 1.6 Implications for East Asia

From the three previous scenarios of world order, a number of consequences can be derived for the specific political context of East Asia.

In the first scenario, World Order 1: The West vs. the Rest, the East Asia region is expected to continue to be splitter among two centres of gravity: USA and RPC. While a number of countries will remain starkly tied to the US and others starkly tied to RPC, the remaining countries will be the object of continuous offering to drop the competitor camp. Overall, we expect a significant number of countries to become more reliant on, yet not necessarily satisfied with, China's growing hegemonic ambitions in the region. This is because within a scenario in which tensions escalate between China and the West, and more precisely, with the United States, Beijing is expected to further try to consolidate its power and self-confidence in East Asia with the intent to construct an image of

China in the international order as the representative of Asian countries and non-Western nations.

In the last decade, Beijing's more assertive foreign policy allowed China to consolidate its position in Asia, politically and economically. Since 2014, China has notably consolidated its military position in the South China Sea. Between 2013 and 2015, the establishment of new initiatives, such as the AIIB or the Silk Road Fund, has grown in parallel with China's consistent engagement with other multilateral initiatives in Asia, i.e., the ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). China, however, has gone much further than simply launching or supporting new initiatives in the region. The aspirations of Xi Jinping and its administration for China's primary role in East Asia can be reassumed by the concept a "community of common destiny of mankind" (more often translated into English as a "community of shared future for mankind"). The phrase expresses China's long-term vision for making the international environment congenial with its interests and governance model, within which countries in Asia stand as key players in order to support China to achieve this goal. Xi Jinping has embarked into a massive diplomatic mission with Asian countries from Cambodia to Laos, from Vietnam to Thailand, in order to support its long-term strategy. While promoting the Belt and Road initiative as a win-win opportunity to develop and consolidate traditional friendship and strategic cooperation among countries, Xi Jinping is also building consensus around the fact that China might represent the only viable alternative to let the XXI century really become the 'Asian Century'. With countries in the north, such as Japan or ROK, China calls for a shared responsibility to promote cooperation for regional stability and peace. However, even if from an economic point of view promoting trade liberalization among the three countries rests a common

priority – at the end of 2018 the three countries held the 14<sup>th</sup> round of negotiations on the China-Japan-ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) –Japan and the ROK are not always satisfied by Beijing’s greater activism in foreign policy. For instance with Japan, disputes in the East China Sea are not set aside and notwithstanding the signing of the Japan-China Maritime Search and rescue agreement in October 2018, the two countries’ sovereignty dispute is still highly complicated.

In the second scenario, World Order 2: Eurasian integration and US solitude, the international relations of East Asia tend to be integrated into the wider Eurasian move, though as a secondary attachment. In such a vision, China can be expected to demand more influence in the international system with its major priorities resting mostly focused to the strengthening of its relations with Russia and the EU, rather than East Asian countries. While the international position of other countries in the region could become further jeopardized because of China’s intent to become a global leader, this at the same time might open new ‘windows of opportunities’ for countries such as Japan or South Korea, and regional organizations such as ASEAN in Asia to play greater roles in the region.

Since Xi Jinping took office in 2012, a key strategy to his foreign policy has been to envision China as a ‘global actor’ in world affairs. More practically, three major priorities concerned Xi Jinping’s vision to build China’s role in the XXI century. First and foremost, it is Beijing’s long-term vision for transforming the international environment to make it compatible with China’s governance model and emergence as a global leader. Secondly, it is the focus on the establishment of ‘a new type of international relations’ that supports, rather than threatens, China’s national rejuvenation. Last, but not least, is the fact that Xi Jinping has made a crucial progression from his predecessors’ rhetoric (from

Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao), proposing China to ‘take an active part in leading the global governance system’ (Tobin 2018). Within such a context, East Asia is not a main or the sole priority of China’s foreign policy.

Amid uncertainty in the light of a consistent ‘pivot to Eurasia’ by China, Japan, for instance, could become a crucial actor on the regional stage. Since the end of the Cold War, Japan’s role in Asia has been challenged by China’s rise. Nonetheless, Japan has so far managed to continue to strengthen its role in Asia: by creating strategic partnerships with Australia and India; by leading a multilateral trade negotiation, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) following the failure of the original project, the TPP, and the US withdrawal. In this scenario, further cooperation between Japan and South Korea rests a common priority.

In the third scenario, World Order 3: Enlarged West vs. China, East Asia appears more supportive of what could still be defined as a Western-led international order, notwithstanding China’s regionally circumscribed power. If China abandons or fails its global ambitions, regional-only priorities guide its foreign policy. These could not be driven by hegemonic intents, rather by security and economic priorities: internal turmoil and Party’s survival along with the continuing decline of Chinese economic growth could be the main interests of future generation leaders in power. In this scenario, Japan and South Korea still maintain their role as key allies of the United States in Asia and the Pacific. Furthermore, with a less-ambitious China, ASEAN’s position in Asia is also expected to change. Since the 1990s, ASEAN’s role has been particularly successful in leading multilateral initiatives in the region, i.e., ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN+3, the Chiang Mai Initiative, etc. However, the majority of these initiatives have been developed in the shadow of a rising China and its growing



hegemonic role. The multilateral organization, founded in 1967 with the aim to counter-balance the communist threats in the region, could finally sit in the 'driver's seat' and play a leadership role in East Asia without worries of seeing its interests and initiatives overshadowed by an increasingly assertive China.

## 1.7 Conclusions

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

In this would-be multipolar order, the strategic dynamics would be sophisticated, more difficult to predict than at present, and more unstable. Given the presence of these four actors and given current trends, three main world order scenarios can potentially come to pass: the West vs. the Rest; Eurasia vs. the US; and the enlarged West vs. China. These have varying degrees of probability. From an analytical point of view, consideration of each eventuality is crucial in order to develop strategic thinking for the future. In this light, the East Asia region rests a vital context through which to analyse future scenarios of world orders. It is true that China's growing hegemonic position in the region could overshadow some countries' role in Asia. However, to what extent China's interests are driven largely by regional intents seem hard to predict. Xi Jinping's ambitions for a 'Global China' are strengthening interregional integration processes and particularly, Eurasian integration. In such a scenario, Asia is not yet 'ripe for rivalry' (Friedberg 1993). Rather, with the declining US in the

West, the real competition concerns the Eurasian region, which necessarily would have to deal with an alternative development model, but for many, still not suitable outside China's borders. To some extent, China has not yet found its 'place in the sun' vis-à-vis the current world order. The emergence of a global China will help East Asia obtain a key role in the global society.

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