

# The Transition of International Order

## Current Debates and Future Directions

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**Abstract:** The early third millennium AD witnessed the outbreak of global crises and challenges that exposed the weaknesses of the possible unilateral order and the negative aspects of globalization. This led to a widespread debate among international relations thinkers about the transition period and the future of world order. The recent occurrence of two major global crises, namely, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, has accelerated this transition period, prompting representatives of different schools of international relations to think through various scenarios for the future of world order. These scenarios can be classified into several categories, including the revival of the unipolar order with new characteristics, multipolar order, new bipolar order, non-polar world, and the emergence

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of multiple regional hegemonies. However, due to the differences and gaps in the consolidation of power centers, as well as the lack of agreement on international norms, it is unlikely that any of these scenarios will be realized in the short term. In the absence of a pervasive, tangible threat or a fundamental shift in political culture, the rules and structures of the old order will persist, albeit in a weakened state. This will prolong the transition period and heighten instability. Thus, it is crucial to manage this transition peacefully by fostering regional alliances, while honoring the cultural and civilizational differences of the key players. Ultimately, a new world order can only emerge through dialog among major powers and consensus on the rules that will shape the international system. Until that time, the global community must prioritize maintaining stability and navigating the transition to ensure a peaceful evolution toward the future order.

*Keywords:* International order; transition; new order; world powers.

## Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States, as the sole surviving superpower of the Cold War, embarked on a mission to spread liberal democracy across the globe. Buoyed by its Cold War victory, it promoted liberal democratic values through a theoretical framework that found expression in Francis Fukuyama's *End of History* thesis.<sup>1</sup> This marked the dawn of the unipolar era, where America envisioned a new world order shaped by its principles. Globalization, already in motion through economic integration, accelerated after the fall of the Eastern Bloc. America's commercial, financial, and cultural networks expanded into much of the world, reinforcing the unilateral order for nearly a decade.

However, signs of a shift away from this unilateral world order began to emerge in the early 21st century. The U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq following the September 11 attacks, coupled with the tragedies that ensued, exposed the vulnerabilities of unilateralism. The failure of color revolutions and the global financial crisis further underscored these risks. By the 2010s, China's rise as a global economic power — along with its growing influence in trade, finance, and monetary policy — coincided with visible cracks in the Western camp. The Eurozone

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

financial crises, Brexit, the surge of nationalism, and unprecedented political and social tensions in the United States made many question the West's ability to sustain a unipolar world order. Some experts, invoking the Thucydides Trap theory, sought to predict the outcome of this great power competition between the established United States and the rising China, offering guidance on how to avoid the potentially disastrous consequences of a disrupted global power balance.

The notion that the world is presently in a state of transition and the world order is yet to achieve its stable form has gained immense popularity in official and academic circles during the past two decades. Proponents of this idea believe that significant changes should be anticipated in the near future that will bring about a more stable order.

Two major events in the past 4 years — the spread of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine — have been widely seen as accelerators in the ongoing transition of the world order. The failure of international institutions to effectively manage these crises forced many nations to rely on themselves to mitigate the pandemic's adverse effects. Meanwhile, the outbreak of the Ukraine war rekindled Europe's long-standing fears about the threat posed by a resurgent Russia and its military power. This, combined with the U.S. strategic use of the conflict to weaken Russia, brought the Western alliance into greater unity.

The October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas on Israel and Israel's subsequent military operations and extensive bombings of Gaza, coupled with the widespread global public outcry in support of the Palestinian people, have added a new layer of complexity. At the same time, the firm backing of Israel by the United States and key European powers (Germany, the UK, and France) has been viewed by many, including U.S. President Joe Biden, as a pivotal moment in shaping the future global order. This event has underscored the growing influence of non-state actors and the renewed significance of the Middle East in the evolving world order. These recent events and trends have prompted a crucial question: What kind of global order will emerge in the post-transition world? This is the central concern of many policymakers and analysts today. This paper explores possible scenarios for the new world order, examines key features of the transition period, and provides evidence to support its vision for the future.

## Proposed Scenarios for the Future World Order

Regardless of the fine line between analyzing facts and expressing aspirations, each proposed scenario is rooted in the theoretical frameworks of its proponents in the field of international relations. These views are shaped by their understanding of the current state of global politics and recent developments on the world stage. Before presenting the author's perspective, this section will introduce several key theories regarding possible international configurations for the future world order.

One theory regarding the future of the world order is the revival of the unipolar system, which predicts that the United States will reassert its position as the dominant global superpower, while the influence of emerging powers will diminish. According to this view, global trends show no significant signs of American decline, and no rival powers — particularly China and Russia — appear poised to control a significant portion of the world or challenge the U.S. in the key components of global power.<sup>2</sup> Supporters of this theory point to several factors: the vast communication network<sup>3</sup> of the Anglo-Saxon countries, which constitutes the world's largest financial, informational, and cultural system; the dominance of the U.S. dollar in the global monetary and financial order; the constraints facing China, America's biggest competitor, in expanding its geopolitical and economic reach; and the robust economic growth the U.S. has experienced in recent years, even after the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

The multipolar order, or the new balance of power, represents another perspective on the future of the world order. One of the most prominent proponents of this scenario is Kenneth Waltz. In 2000, at the height of the unipolar era, he asserted, based on his theory of structural realism, that the unipolar period would not endure. He argued that a superpower would

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<sup>2</sup>Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The Once and Future Superpower: Why China Won't Overtake the United States," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (May/June 2016), p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>William Kindred Winecoff, "'The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony,' Revisited: Structural Power as a Complex Network Phenomenon," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 26, No. 1\_suppl (September 2020), pp. 209–252.

<sup>4</sup>Mingtang Liu and Kellee S. Tsai, "Structural Power, Hegemony, and State Capitalism: Limits to China's Global Economic Power," *Politics & Society*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (June 2021), pp. 235–267.

inevitably pursue interests beyond its borders, creating constant anxiety among other nations. In response, these nations would work to undermine the superpower's influence. Thus, the end of the unipolar era would signal the emergence of a multipolar order.<sup>5</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski also supported this scenario, asserting that global conditions are rapidly evolving toward a landscape characterized by multiple great powers. He believed that the United States would have no choice but to adapt to these new circumstances in order to protect its interests.<sup>6</sup> G. John Ikenberry is another prominent thinker who has written about the emergence of a multipolar world. He argues that the decline of Western hegemony and the rise of non-Western actors are significant trends that not only signal the waning of Western influence but also threaten the sustainability of the liberal order in the international arena.<sup>7</sup>

Proponents of this scenario view the factors that have contributed to the current transition as precursors to the emergence of a multipolar order. The growing economic influence of China, along with the rise of new powers such as India, Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia, is interpreted by supporters of this theory as indicative of U.S. weakness. Additionally, the increasing roles of Russia and various regional powers — including Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey — in strategic areas, as well as the expanding presence of China and Russia on the African continent, are frequently cited as examples supporting the multipolar perspective. China's growing involvement in the Middle East, particularly its role in mediating reconciliation between key regional rivals like Iran and Saudi Arabia, reflects a shift toward a multipolar system. Furthermore, China has established a certain balance in the foreign policies of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and, more recently, Saudi Arabia. While Russia has historically supported the existing international order, its recent foreign policy and national

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<sup>5</sup>Kenneth N. Waltz, "Intimations of Multipolarity," in Birthe Hansen and Bertel Heurlin, eds., *The New World Order: Contrasting Theories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000), pp. 1–17.

<sup>6</sup>Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), pp. 7–25.

<sup>7</sup>G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?" *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (January 2018), pp. 7–23.

security documents have clearly expressed a desire for a multipolar international system.

A bipolar world order is another widely discussed prediction for the future. Advocates suggest that China's growing economic power, along with its influence spilling over into political, military, technological, and cultural spheres, and the weakening of ties between some non-Western countries and the West and its allies, coupled with the increasing alignment of these non-Western countries with China, could foreshadow the rise of a bipolar world. The U.S. aggressive actions, such as imposing extensive sanctions on non-Western actors like Iran and Russia, may drive these countries to strengthen economic ties with China, forming alliances that pose a threat to Western global dominance.<sup>8</sup> This emerging bipolar order, with the U.S. and China leading two opposing blocs — one comprising the United States, the European Union, and their regional allies, and the other including China, Russia, Iran, and their respective partners — represents a potential shift in global power dynamics.

Cliff Kupchan, director of the Institute of Eurasian Studies, argues that the world has already entered a bipolar era dominated by China and the United States, pointing to data on military strength, economic influence, and nuclear capabilities.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Jo Inge Bekkevold of the Norwegian Security Research Institute asserts that China and the United States are the only truly influential major powers. He warns that the popular notion of a multipolar world could mislead policymakers in other countries when it comes to assessing global conditions and making strategic decisions.<sup>10</sup>

The post-polar world — a world without dominant poles — is another theory that has gained traction among experts. Stephen M. Walt supports this scenario, arguing that the liberal order was never as global as many in the West believe. While U.S. hegemony is in decline, it still holds significant advantages over other major powers. Though great power

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<sup>8</sup>Stephen Blank, "The Un-Holy Russo-Chinese Alliance," *Defense & Security Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2020), pp. 249–274.

<sup>9</sup>Cliff Kupchan, "Bipolarity Is Back: Why It Matters," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter 2022), pp. 123–139.

<sup>10</sup>Jo Inge Bekkevold, "No, the World Is Not Multipolar," *Foreign Policy*, September 22, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/22/multipolar-world-bipolar-power-geopolitics-business-strategy-china-united-states-india>.

competition persists, it isn't intense enough to compel other nations to choose sides, preventing the emergence of a truly multipolar world.<sup>11</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter, known for her analysis of international relations through the lens of networks, also endorses this theory. She suggests that in today's world, power in international relations is shaped by networks of alliances and interconnected relationships. The central role of governments has diminished compared to the past, while non-governmental actors have increasingly found space to influence these networks.<sup>12</sup>

According to this theory, the decline of the United States as a superpower and guarantor of international order will lead to a weakening of the global system. As a result, disorder and uncertainty will grow in international relations, prompting countries to seek new alliances outside established international frameworks to protect their interests and ensure peace and security.<sup>13</sup> This model mirrors the relations between European nations in the 19th century, when no single power had decisive superiority, and balance was maintained through alliances driven by national security and interests. Some argue that this pattern may reemerge in the modern era, citing the diminishing role of international organizations in global governance and the rise of bilateral and multilateral relations between nations, outside the structures of the unipolar order.<sup>14</sup>

## Criticism of the Proposed Scenarios

While acknowledging many of the points raised in the various future world order scenarios, and considering the analysis that follows, this paper argues that despite the weakening of the current system's foundations, the

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<sup>11</sup>Stephen M. Walt, "What Sort of World Are We Headed for?" *Foreign Policy*, October 2, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/02/what-sort-of-world-are-we-headed-for>.

<sup>12</sup>Anne-Marie Slaughter, *The Chessboard and the Web: Strategies of Connection in a Networked World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 159–201.

<sup>13</sup>Barry Buzan, "The Inaugural Kenneth N. Waltz Annual Lecture: A World Order Without Superpowers: Decentred Globalism," *International Relations*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 2011), pp. 3–25.

<sup>14</sup>Mohammad Javad Zarif, S. M. K. Sajadpour, and A. Moulai, "The Transition Period of International Relations in the Post-Western World," Publications of the Center for Political and International Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017.



emergence of a fully formed new order in the near future is unlikely. In this section, we will reexamine these potential scenarios and assess their feasibility.

In the current global context, the emergence of a unipolar order led by the United States seems unlikely. The first reason is the decline of American dominance in the political, military, and economic arenas, as previously discussed. Acknowledging the failure of unilateralism in confronting its rivals, the United States has shifted toward regional alliances and is developing new mechanisms to counter opposing forces — an approach markedly different from that of the unipolar era. Additionally, beyond the decline of America's relative global power and the rise of regional and extra-regional powers, we must also consider the internal challenges facing the United States. In recent years, American society has become deeply fragmented. Experts on U.S. affairs note that political polarization has intensified over the last decade, leading to widespread social unrest and political instability. The growing preoccupation with politics, with society split between two opposing poles, reflects deep divisions, as each side supports values and ideals that are often in direct conflict with the other.<sup>15</sup> This fragmentation not only undermines the U.S. domestic affairs but also diminishes its capacity to lead on the global stage.

The decline of American prestige and values on the world stage is another key reason why a return to a unipolar order is unlikely. Beyond the loss of U.S. economic hegemony and the fading allure of the American Dream, U.S. moral credibility has also come under scrutiny in recent years. Reports on the conduct of U.S. soldiers, from abuses committed in the name of fighting terrorism and promoting Western values in Iraq and Afghanistan to the disturbing use of cluster bombs against civilians in conflicts like Syria, have tarnished the reputation of America's military and political leadership.<sup>16</sup> Under President Trump, the United States was seen as an unpredictable and chaotic force, pursuing its interests without hesitation, even at the expense of undermining the credibility of international institutions and world order frameworks that it helped establish and that

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<sup>15</sup>Gordon Heltzel and Kristin Laurin, "Polarization in America: Two Possible Futures," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 34 (August 2020), pp. 179–184.

<sup>16</sup>Ronald Lorenzo, *The Puritan Culture of America's Military: US Army War Crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: Routledge, 2014).



many of its allies supported. This inconsistent approach to values has eroded the U.S. moral standing and, by extension, the appeal of Western values globally.

Despite the evidence, it remains doubtful that the world is heading toward a bipolar order. Unlike the past, today's world is not shaped by the competition of grand ideologies. Factors like identity politics, which could potentially divide nations in the international system, have played a limited role in global affairs since World War II, with a few notable exceptions such as the September 11 attacks. Modern international relations are more often analyzed through the lens of economic interdependence, making the world less susceptible to the formation of large-scale blocs than in the past. For a bipolar order to emerge, a power on the scale of the United States would need to rise, along with a coalition of allied nations. Although the West's relative influence has declined, no other power of comparable stature currently exists. Even if such a power did exist, it lacks a network of dependent allies. Neither of America's major rivals — Russia and China — currently demonstrates the capacity to function as a true superpower in this regard.

China, which has long regarded international trade as a cornerstone of its national power and has established a strong reputation in global financial, monetary, and technological arenas, is not seeking to confront the current world order. With an annual foreign trade volume of six trillion dollars and exchanges of approximately 700 and 50 billion dollars with the United States and 800 and 50 billion dollars with the European Union, China is not prepared to engage in full-scale confrontation with the Western alliance in the short term. The substantial mutual investments with these two entities — amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars — pose significant challenges should tensions escalate. A full confrontation could lead to reduced economic growth, rising unemployment, and potential economic stagnation, which would be particularly difficult for a nation with a population of over one billion to 400 million.<sup>17</sup> Given these factors, the People's Republic of China is inclined to support the continuation of the current order, relying on its commercial, monetary, and

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<sup>17</sup>World Bank, "Trade (% of GDP) — China," 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS?locations=CN>.

financial infrastructure. Disrupting the existing world order would be a risky move for China, at least in the short term.

During the Cold War, aligning with one of the two conflicting poles provided greater security for countries that were members of either alliance, but it also curtailed their freedom of action and limited their choices. However, with China's emergence as a great power and rising tensions between Russia and the West, many countries now have increased opportunities for negotiation. The rigid alignments characteristic of the Cold War are undesirable for many nations today, especially as ideological divides wane. Most countries are now prioritizing economic development, and dependence on a single side would constrain their ability to achieve their economic goals.

Despite numerous studies and hopeful rhetoric regarding the realization of a multipolar order, evidence suggests that the emergence of such an order in the short term is uncertain. Over the past decade, the discourse surrounding revisionism in the world order has gained traction alongside the narrative of American decline, prompting many emerging non-Western powers to call for a reassessment of the Western-dominated world order and for reforms to institutions and organizations established during the post-war era. However, neither the theoretical framework of a multipolar world order suggests fewer conflicts than other orders, nor does it demonstrate that today's emerging powers possess the capability to establish and manage order within their regions.<sup>18</sup> Proponents of the multipolar world theory often overlook the heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting interests among these countries. Each emerging power pursues its own agenda, leading to a lack of common goals. The divergent interests of non-Western powers, such as China and India, complicate the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar order, as each nation creates obstacles for the others in their quest for superpower status and in their relations with the United States and the West. Consequently, both major and middle powers show limited enthusiasm for a multipolar order, often influenced by internal challenges or rival considerations. Similarly, middle and smaller states are also reluctant to embrace the emergence of a multipolar order or

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<sup>18</sup>Hal Brands, "Don't Let Great Powers Carve Up the World," *Foreign Affairs*, April 20, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-04-20/dont-let-great-powers-carve-world>.

to engage with a new superpower in an already tumultuous global landscape.<sup>19</sup> In this multipolar system, characterized by heightened competition among superpowers and accelerated changes, many countries prioritize security concerns. This shift can lead to increased military expenditures, a decline in economic growth, and a deviation from development objectives. In the long run, these dynamics may foster public dissatisfaction and internal unrest.

In general, while the multipolarization of the world has been partially realized through the emergence of new powers and the practical implementation of multilateralism in international and regional trends, skepticism remains about whether a truly multipolar international order can replace the current situation in the short term. Although there is a growing recognition of cultural and civilizational diversity and the need for interaction among different cultures, the formation of a stable multipolar order based on the foundations of global power remains uncertain. The ambiguities and challenges inherent in the scenario of a post-polar world are similarly complex. The diminishing influence of traditional poles and the rise of regional coalitions are indicative of the ongoing transitional period, which has yet to reach a stabilization stage. Over the past 5 years, this situation has fluctuated between positive and negative growth due to various developments. Presently, many observers are concerned about the implications of the 2024 presidential elections in the United States, particularly regarding the potential return of Donald Trump, which could fundamentally challenge Western global and regional alliances.

## **Fundamental Changes in the Components of the International System**

The contemporary era, encompassing the three decades following the collapse of the bipolar order, can be analyzed from various perspectives. However, many future scenarios for the world order tend to approach these trends primarily through the lens of power balance and past paradigms. This paper examines transitional developments by focusing on the changes

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<sup>19</sup>Arta Moeini, Zachary Paikin, Christopher Mott, and David Polansky, "Middle Powers in the Multipolar World," Institute for Peace and Diplomacy, March 2022, <https://peacediplomacy.org/2022/03/26/middle-powers-in-the-multipolar-world/>.

in the foundational components that shape the order and the international system, analyzing these shifts at three scales: micro (individuals as components of larger systems), medium (within countries and their social, economic, and political systems), and macro (developments in the international system). These transitional developments indicate fundamental changes at all three scales while simultaneously strengthening centrifugal forces that challenge the centripetal forces underpinning the previous world order. Civilizational and social developments in recent decades have impacted individuals as integral parts of social systems. The accumulation of these effects has the potential to bring about a transformation in power systems.

At the micro level, the crises surrounding ethnic and national identities that captivated scholarly attention in the 1980s and 1990s have evolved significantly. While the expansion of communication and the processes of globalization posed considerable challenges for governments then, we now face the continuing impact of these trends alongside a profound transformation in individual and social identities. A new generation of young people has emerged, largely detached from the individual and social values of previous generations, presenting fundamental challenges for both domestic and global governance. A prominent example of this shift is the fluidity of sexual identity and the concept of gender in the 21st century, particularly in Western societies, which now recognize a diverse array of sexual orientations. This evolving perspective has permeated the official social and political discourse in the West, despite pushback from opposing factions such as conservatives and religious groups. The ramifications of this approach have been significant, influencing various domains, including legislation, culture, socio-political issues, and even fields like psychology and linguistics.<sup>20</sup>

The rapid advancement of technology, the fast pace of modern life, and the overwhelming volume of data that individuals encounter in urban environments have surpassed the tolerance thresholds of the human mind and body. This mounting pressure is likely to result in an increase in both mental and physical health issues. Additionally, it may contribute to social challenges, such as the erosion of family structures and various forms of addiction, including mobile device dependency and compulsive use of

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<sup>20</sup>Meg D. Bishop *et al.*, "Sexual Identity Development Milestones in Three Generations of Sexual Minority People: A National Probability Sample," *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 56, No. 11 (November 2020), pp. 2177–2193.

specific applications. The continuous transformation of the human living environment, particularly in large cities, threatens to undermine meaningful aspects of life, including traditional lifestyles, religious beliefs, family dynamics, and community ties. Beyond the mental and physical stresses associated with the age of artificial intelligence, some experts argue that society has yet to establish social structures and ethical frameworks that are compatible with this new era. The search for new perspectives suitable for life in an age dominated by artificial intelligence is likely to give rise to divergent discourses that challenge prevailing narratives.<sup>21</sup> This inconsistency in the development of human environmental and mental landscapes is a fundamental factor contributing to instability in both national and global governance. It can serve as a critical starting point for analyzing the future trajectory of global developments.<sup>22</sup>

At a broader level, shifts in domestic power dynamics during transitional periods in key international players can significantly influence government behavior on the global stage. The weakening of political systems and the rise of political polarization worldwide are central to this trend. For some time, experts have pointed to the decline of democratic systems in non-Western countries, where leaders often win elections despite competition, rewrite constitutions, control the military and judiciary, and carefully avoid the appearance of absolute rule. While elections provide these leaders with domestic and international legitimacy, they gradually consolidate their power. Experts argue that today's strongmen have found ways to undermine the mechanisms designed to limit the concentration of power in democratic institutions, allowing them to tighten their grip on authority.<sup>23</sup> The weakening of political systems is not confined to non-Western nations. In the years following 2010, widespread dissatisfaction driven by severe wealth inequality and the growing divide between the masses and elites gave rise to anti-globalization movements and fueled the

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<sup>21</sup>Henry A. Kissinger, Eric Schmidt, and Daniel Huttenlocher, *The Age of AI: And Our Human Future*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2021).

<sup>22</sup>Anne Warfield Rawls, "Durkheim's Theory of Modernity: Self-Regulating Practices as Constitutive Orders of Social and Moral Facts," *Journal of Classical Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 3-4 (August/November 2012), pp. 479-512.

<sup>23</sup>Gideon Rachman, *The Age of The Strongman: How the Cult of the Leader Threatens Democracy Around the World* (New York: Other Press, 2022).

rise of populism in Western countries. The demands of certain segments of society stand in stark contrast to the dominant liberal values promoted by the political mainstream. The fierce political competition between far-right and liberal parties — spilling from the political arena into the streets — reflects the deep polarization of these societies. Over time, this polarization not only escalates social unrest but also risks triggering political instability.

At the macro level, the rise of emerging economic and geopolitical powers over the past decade is a key factor driving changes in global dynamics. These powers seek to expand their influence and play a larger role in shaping the world order. BRICS is one of the leading international coalitions advocating for a revision of the global system, calling for reforms in global governance and a stronger role for emerging actors in key institutions such as the United Nations Security Council, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund.<sup>24</sup> In recent years, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have emerged as key symbols of the push for international multilateralism. However, following the war in Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Russia, both organizations, while likely to continue and possibly expand their membership, will face significant challenges in asserting their influence on the global stage.

Reconsidering the world order extends beyond international politics. A key aspect of this shift is the search by various countries for alternatives to the dominance of the U.S. dollar. The weaponization of the dollar — using it to block international economic exchanges and impose sanctions — has prompted sanctioned nations like Iran, Venezuela, and Russia to explore new methods for cross-border trade without relying on the dollar. This concern over the dollar's weaponization goes beyond official rhetoric and protests. The Chinese yuan is steadily gaining a larger share of the world's central bank reserves and now surpasses the dollar in China's international trade.<sup>25</sup> The growing influence of the yuan and its adoption by

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<sup>24</sup>Michael A. Peters, "'Declinism' and Discourses of Decline: The End of the War in Afghanistan and the Limits of American Power," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 55, No. 14 (2023), pp. 1591–1598.

<sup>25</sup>Jindong Zhang, Winni Zhou, and Tom Westbrook, "Yuan Overtakes Dollar to Become Most-Used Currency in China's Cross-Border Transactions," *Reuters*, April 26, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/yuan-overtakes-dollar-become-most-used-currency-chinas-cross-border-transactions-2023-04-26/>.



other countries as a trading currency signals a broader global movement to reduce the dollar's dominance in the international monetary system.

Today, the influence of international institutions and organizations that uphold the liberal world order — such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which once played key roles in advancing globalization and spreading liberal values to non-Western countries — has diminished. In recent years, there have been numerous examples of the inefficiency or weakening of these institutions across various areas. Notable failures include the ineffectiveness of UN Security Council resolutions in addressing crises in West Asia, the inability of international bodies to swiftly manage the COVID-19 pandemic, and their inaction in response to the mass killings of Palestinians in Gaza. The very leaders who once championed the liberal world order and international law have shown little commitment to upholding its principles.

The changes of recent years have disrupted the monopoly once held by traditional international institutions. Organizations like the New Development Bank and the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement now operate alongside the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the fields of international finance and monetary policy.<sup>26</sup> These developments highlight the diminishing role and weakening influence of established international institutions within the global system.

Political groups can also be seen as influential actors in shaping international relations. At the start of the 21st century, Al-Qaeda was one of the first non-state actors to significantly impact the world order. In the recent Gaza conflict, the Palestinian group Hamas demonstrated that even a small non-governmental actor can challenge state powers both militarily and in the information space, swaying global public opinion. These examples show that the range of actors in international relations is becoming more diverse, with power increasingly dispersed. This fragmentation of power and the growing number of actors on the global stage contribute to greater instability and disorder in international relations.

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<sup>26</sup>Mahdi Sanayi and Gholamreza Ebrahim Abadi, "The Emerging Economic Powers (BRICS): Goals, Capabilities and Status in the International System," *World Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (April 2013), pp. 1–40.



## Forecasting the Future of World Order

A study of international relations history reveals that the conditions for the emergence of a new global order have not yet been fully realized. Historically, new world orders have arisen in the wake of large-scale threats, sweeping changes, or major wars — none of which have occurred since the end of the Cold War.<sup>27</sup> While the post-World War II order has been shaken, it has not collapsed to the extent that a new order can be built from its remnants. Recent developments suggest growing solidarity in response to shared challenges, but these threats have not been widespread or universal enough to drive the global community toward broad, trans-regional coalitions. For example, the escalating tensions between Russia and the West — beginning with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and culminating in the war in Ukraine — have strengthened solidarity among European countries and reinforced NATO's presence in Europe. However, the strengthening of NATO alone does not signal the birth of a new world order. Similarly, the defense alliances between Arab countries in the Middle East, formed to address shared security concerns, are regional in scope and unlikely to trigger the creation of a broader global order. Although the era of the past order has ended, many of its political, economic, and security institutions remain intact. Key elements such as the United Nations, international trade regulations, and financial systems — including the role of the dollar as the global reserve currency and the SWIFT network — are still operational and, in some cases, are even more widely used today. Despite the decline of certain aspects of the unipolar order, the continued relevance and adaptation of many of its components to the modern world sustain the global structures we live in today. These structures may, in fact, form part of the foundation for a future global order.

Some thinkers argue that humanity has entered the era of artificial intelligence, yet the implications of this new age — and the extent of the changes it will bring to social, political, economic, and international relations — remain unclear.<sup>28</sup> As long as the defining characteristics of this modern era

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<sup>27</sup>G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>28</sup>Henry A. Kissinger, Eric Schmidt, and Daniel Huttenlocher, *The Age of AI: And Our Human Future* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2021), pp. 203–227.

are not fully understood, it will be challenging to comprehend the world and the prevailing global order in the post-transition phase. Predictions about the future world order, grounded in past interpretations of the balance of power, are likely to encounter significant obstacles in offering a comprehensive understanding of emerging realities or making accurate forecasts.

It is important to recognize that the developments associated with the transition period have resulted in a rise in the number and strength of centrifugal forces. As these changes continue, the capacity of centripetal forces to restore the previous order is likely to diminish, suggesting that the components of the current order will gradually weaken compared to the past. Furthermore, an examination of future scenarios for the world order does not indicate the emergence of a new system that could effectively counter these centrifugal forces and establish stability. Consequently, it appears that the continuation of the transition period will lead to increased chaos in the global order.

Beyond the weakening of the world order, these developments indicate fundamental changes in the factors that constitute it. Shifts such as the diminishing authority of governments over domestic affairs and the rising influence of non-state actors in international relations are not merely detrimental to the current order; they may also signal the onset of profound transformations that could pave the way for a new order, characterized by its own unique attributes and differing from the past. Contemporary technological advancements play a crucial role in the emergence of this new era. However, it is important to recognize that not all indicators of this transitional phase stem solely from technological and civilizational changes. Some developments arise from the historical and cultural contexts of specific societies, and their interplay with technological advancements influences these changes. The convergence of these factors with the rapid and extensive technological progress of our time suggests that we may be on the brink of a new order that differs qualitatively from previous ones.

It is important to recognize that, in the short term, this chaos does not guarantee the emergence of a future order characterized by qualities distinct from today's, nor one that aligns with the technological and civilizational advancements of the future. The destructive potential of contemporary weaponry — including mass-killing weapons, biological agents, and advanced cyber capabilities — far exceeds that of 20th-century nuclear arms. If the tensions of this turbulent period are not effectively managed, the

transition could lead to catastrophic consequences. Moreover, despite the significant technological advancements and the vast global communication networks that connect people, the mentality and ethics of humanity have not kept pace with these changes within political societies. Minor conflicts among political and international actors can still easily escalate into major confrontations. Therefore, this paper suggests focusing on civilizational and cultural differences as a means to manage the transition period and foster constructive discourse.

Predictions about this era envisioned an expansion of globalization and an increase in cultural and social exchanges, suggesting that enhanced communication would reduce sensitivities, misunderstandings, and differences among various identities and cultures, ultimately leading to a more peaceful world. Additionally, the West's victory in the ideological struggle introduced the hypothesis of the "end of history," positing that the spread of liberal democracy would stabilize societies and foster global peace. However, today we are witnessing the weakening of meaning systems, which has created a vacuum in interpreting the world and humanity's role within it. The erosion of these meaning systems acts as a centrifugal force for many individuals. Unless power centers can provide a compelling framework for people's lives in this contemporary era, the persuasive authority of those guarding the established order will diminish, leading to an increased reliance on coercive measures to maintain control and order.

However, the armed conflicts that erupted after the end of the Cold War in various regions have undermined the optimism surrounding globalization and the notion of the "end of history." Disasters over the last two decades in the Balkans, West Asia, and Africa, more than other conflicts following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, have drawn global attention to the role of identity in regional conflicts. These events have highlighted, once again, that the coexistence of diverse identities and cultures in neighboring areas can lead to tension and even the outbreak of war. To explain these developments, Samuel Huntington proposed the theory of the "clash of civilizations," asserting that ideological conflicts between the Eastern and Western blocs have given way to identity-based and civilizational conflicts.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Jeffrey Haynes, *From Huntington to Trump: Thirty Years of the Clash of Civilizations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019).

This theory challenged the optimism of the end of history and painted a picture of a chaotic world, in which increased communication among people would not lead to prosperity but rather to endless violence and conflict. The September 11 attacks, which marked a turning point in the world order, along with the wars in the Middle East and the recent massacre of the people of Gaza, have further illuminated the significant gap between the policies of Western governments and the public sentiments of their citizens. These events reaffirm the validity of Huntington's focus on civilizational dynamics.

In the theoretical realm, efforts were made to portray globalization as a force for peace following the Cold War. Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, the then-president of Iran, proposed the theory of the dialog of civilizations. He argued that by transforming the mindset of key actors, it would be possible to mitigate identity conflicts globally and better harness the benefits of globalization.<sup>30</sup> According to this theory, the concept of the "end of history," which implies that all societies must adopt Western values, is itself a catalyst for civilizational conflict. Instead of attempting to reshape the political and social structures of other countries, Khatami advocated for a mutual exchange of knowledge and learning in an era characterized by globalization and increasing cultural, social, and economic interactions. Unfortunately, no mechanisms were established to facilitate dialog between civilizations or to incorporate diverse identities and cultures into the frameworks of international forums. Furthermore, there was a lack of space for dialog between cultural and civilizational experts and political leaders, who often operate within a framework focused on power and balance. Today, however, given the realities of the world and the potential dangers we face, there is a greater need than ever for dialog among nations at various levels. Such exchanges are essential for reducing tensions and managing the transition period in a peaceful manner.

## Conclusion

To forecast the future of the world order, this paper first introduces existing predictions on the subject and then examines various scenarios, concluding

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<sup>30</sup>Walter D. Mignolo, "De-colonial Cosmopolitanism and Dialogues Among Civilizations," in Gerard Delanty, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 103–118.

that, based on current evidence, we cannot anticipate the emergence of a new order in the foreseeable future. The paper presents signs of transformation across three scales: micro, medium, and macro. All these changes exhibit a centrifugal nature, and given the disparities in consolidating power centers and the lack of consensus on governing rules, the formation of a new order is unlikely without a profound crisis and the emergence of a pervasive and tangible threat. Instability is expected to intensify in the short term.

Certainly, the increasing number and strength of centrifugal forces, both domestically and internationally, will provoke responses from the guardians of order in various fields. Nationally, governments will seek to maintain stability by enacting laws, enhancing the capabilities of monitoring and supervisory agencies, and implementing policies reflective of their historical and cultural contexts. On the international stage, the United States and its Western allies will endeavor to safeguard the existing Western unilateral order through various containment strategies, including financial sanctions, trade wars, and even military interventions. This approach aims to strengthen alliances among Western nations while also competing in emerging fields such as cyber technology and artificial intelligence against rivals like China and Russia. To counteract centrifugal forces, the West may resort to subversive operations, including cyber infiltration, espionage, and disinformation campaigns. This ongoing conflict between emerging centrifugal forces and the established order will likely escalate instability and conflict in the near future. The outcomes of these actions in the medium to long term will determine the shape of a more stable world order following this period of instability.

The significant changes currently occurring at all levels are profoundly influencing the structure of the global landscape. These transformations are not solely driven by centrifugal forces but encompass a much broader scope. As a result, we can anticipate considerable shifts in the characteristics and conditions of the world. While these developments may serve as a prelude to the emergence of a new order, the transition process necessitates extensive management and cooperation among various actors. To facilitate a peaceful transition from the current transitional phase to a future order, this paper advocates for recognizing the long-term nature of this transition period and respecting the cultural and civilizational differences among actors involved.

## **Publisher's Note**

As of December 19, 2024, the author bio has been updated at the request of the author. This update reflects a minor adjustment to the order of titles and affiliations, with no new information added.