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# BRICS **Institutionalization & Macau**

Edited By  
Ya-Nan Song and David Ritchie



澳門科技大學  
MACAU UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



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Panel I    BRICS Institutionalization &  
New International Regime



# Changing Contours of World Politics: Emerging New Groupings in International System

Andrey Volodin \*

**Abstract:** The dismantlement of Soviet Union was a watershed in world history, as the United States of America no longer had a rival on the global scale. The world is becoming more diverse and differentiated. The future role of BRICS in world politics is, to a large extent, dependent on India-China-Russia relations.

**Keywords:** Unipole, Diversity, Differentiation, India-China-Russia Relations

The day after the dismantlement of the Soviet Union is addressed by some analysts in the West as a watershed in world history. (Some of them even envisioned “the end of history.”) Their reasoning for this sentiment was transparent: The United States of America no longer had a rival on the global scale. Some internationally reputed writers called this newly-born phenomenon an “Empire,” whilst other scholars named this situation in the then world system (a few years later) a “uni-pole” or “unipolar moment.”

Nevertheless, it is an historical fact that empires come and go. The

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“imperial” scenario, as it is understood, has its natural, territorial, and temporal limitations. Put differently, such a scenario has no chance of materializing in the world that is becoming more diverse and differentiated. So, it goes without saying that sooner or later all empires tend to decline, because “empire-holders,” obsessed with triumphalism, make efforts to overextend their reach economically, territorially, and militarily. At the end of the 1980s, when the bipolar world system (USSR vs. US) was still in existence, the noted historian Paul Kennedy prophetically anticipated that “the only serious threat to the real interests of the United States can come from a failure to adjust sensibly to the newer world order.”<sup>①</sup>

As anticipated, the “end of history” paradigm has proved invalid. With the debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US-generated worldwide financial crisis, the “Iran nuclear program” imbroglio, the new independent regional centers of gravity asserting themselves, and the stalemate in the Ukraine, the “Empire” or “Unipole” has found itself on the retreat. The world system is being continuously diversified, and the geopolitical clout is being proactively dispersed. As argued aptly by the French analyst Come Carpentier de Gourdon,

a brief era of unipolar American hegemony ... is now waning fast partly as a consequence of inner processes of decay and disintegration in the USA and partly because of the rapid rise of the Asian giant states of China, Indonesia and India—from which many countries such as Australia and even the USA are becoming economically very dependent—the revival of Russia, the increasing autonomy of Latin America under the aegis of Brazil and the undefeated defiance of a few “resistant” states such as Iran, North Korea, Cuba and Syria, backed to a certain extent by the new great powers of the East and South. The coming international order addressed by some intellectuals as “After Empire”

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① Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, New York: Vintage Books, 1989, p. 534.

does not revolve around America. Nor is it dialectica—the United States versus China, the West against Asia, or democracies versus autocracies. The developments ... have cumulatively led to an international order with multiple poles, cooperating and competing with one another, with no single pole being allowed to act as the hegemonic power. Quite simply, the age-old balance of power is back at work.<sup>①</sup>

Developments outside North America and Europe have put an end to “the end of history” as a paradigm of Western supremacy. Also challenged are America’s global “unipolarity,” undermined by sharpening conflicts over natural resources (including the Arctic area now) and by ideological questioning of the Western-style “liberal” democracy as an instrument of expanding an American vision of the international system. Put differently, we are witnessing the aggravating conceptual conflict of national versus imperial “universalist” identities and of respective paradigms of world history.

The end result of the failure of “unipole” was the revival of the pre-Second World War pattern of interrelationship where powers with different influence jostling for primary and secondary positions in the global hierarchy, with no single nation occupying the apex of the “pyramid.” By now, the pyramid’s tip is surrounded by China, Russia, India, and Brazil, to name just a few, who are steadily carving out niches for themselves near the top.

On the one hand, the nations mentioned above are not striving to deprive Washington of its dominant position in the international system. On the other hand, they are no longer prepared to continue as junior partners to America as the Kremlin used to do under president Boris Yeltsin in the “roaring” 1990s. Instead the “new influentials” are engaged in a dexterous game of involvement and containment with America, cooperating on certain issues and competing on others.

Maintaining tight commercial links with Washington and progressively

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① Dilip Hiro, *After Empire: The Birth of a Multipolar World*, New York: Nation Books, 2010, pp. 5-6.

accumulating US Treasury bonds, Beijing has ultimately emerged as the world's only financial "superpower." The logic of geo-economics has led China to create an alternative global financial architecture. Russia, for its part, continues to defend its vital interests in Eurasia. Accordingly, American dominance is not destined to be the exception to "The rise and fall of empires." More importantly, the very model of capitalism put into operation in the early 1980s by Ronald Reagan and "ossified" by the "Washington Consensus" was discredited throughout the world economically and ideologically.

Another geopolitically important movement is the Hugo Chavez phenomenon, which has been symptomatic of the rising political consciousness of the people of American Indian and African racial background who have taken to using the ballot box to win power at the expense of white settlers favored by the "senior northern brother." This trend was repeated in a number of Latin American societies some years later. The self-assertion of the "sons of the soil," manifested in a left-of-center political strategy, is a wider societal phenomenon and a manifestation of continuing fundamental changes in social structures in the continent.

Equally disturbing for a unipolar world order is the on-going viable existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran. By holding regular elections for parliament and president, its regime shows the rest of the world—particularly the monarchies of the oil-rich Gulf states—that the relationship between Islam and representative governance can be symbiotic. Similarly, the "Arab awakening" of 2011-2012 dealt a devastating blow to the political systems of the "oil monarchies." Whether America, under the pressure of "overextension" (an idiom of Stratfor's George Friedman), is in a position to come to rescue its "strategic allies" in the region will be seen in the not too distant future.

Also, the credit for accelerating America's decline (as well as the West's in general) must go to the model of globalization imposed on the world by the proponents of the "Washington Consensus." The results of this mode

of globalization have been an increasing concentration of economic, and therefore political, power in the hands of multinational corporations, the growth of inequality, the further marginalization of the lower classes, and an inevitable environmental degradation. The “disappearance” of the state has been instrumental in the diminishing security and welfare beyond the borders of the industrially advanced countries. The critics of globalization see the “visionary state” (Edward Kennedy) as precisely the desired strategic institution to accomplish this purpose. As the internationally renowned scholar Baldev Raj Nayar argues, globalization “is largely an affair of the developed world (USA, Western Europe, Japan- A.V.). With some exceptions, the involvement of the developing countries in globalization is very low.... Globalization is asymmetrically distributed; it is truncated.”<sup>①</sup>

These developments describe the broader social, economic, and political context of the continuing decline of the unipolar, western-centric world and of the emerging polycentric organization of the newer international system, where “a superpower” is gradually substituted by an ensemble of newly emerging “great powers.”

Equally helpful for understanding innovative geopolitical trends is the definition of “powers of critical margin” introduced into the social science discourse by Walt W. Rostow (1916-2003), one of the most influential thinkers of contemporary scholarship. According to this author,

the notion of the U.S. as a super-power has been an illusion since 1948 at least (the loss of a unilateral nuclear capability? - A.V.). The United States does represent a significant margin of power and influence when it both expresses the majority will and is prepared to back its rhetoric with action. If the United States seeks to do something which runs against the grain of majority thought and feeling in the world, it can be easily frustrated....

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① Baldev Raj Nayar, *The Geopolitics of Globalization: The Consequences for Development*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 44.

The United States cannot impose its will on others as a hegemonic power, but big things are difficult to do in the world community without our active participation. <sup>①</sup>

According to Patrick Buchanan, the famed author of “The Death of the West,” every nation that rose to world primacy status

did so by protecting and nurturing its manufacturing base.... No nation rose to world power on free trade...free trade has been the policy of powers that put consumption before production, today before tomorrow.... Nations rise on economic nationalism. They descend on free trade....China puts savings ahead of spending, capital investment ahead of consumption, and manufacturing ahead of finance.... China is now the factory to the world and the banker to America. <sup>②</sup>

All this said, it is high time to give a rough picture of the global architecture existing today. Two groups of nation-states (or state-nations) are clearly discernible as the pillars of contemporary world-system.

The “A” group, the “great powers,” consists of the following states: Brazil, the United States, the “core” countries of Western Europe (despite interstate controversies that have come to the fore quite recently), Russia, India, China, and Japan (with certain reservations). These are the main “gravitation poles” supportive of the international system, whatever the discrepancies among them.

The “B” group, or “the new regional leaders” (or “new influentials” as addressed in the late 1980s) is composed of Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico, South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt (despite its continuing domestic turmoil), Turkey, Iran, and Indonesia. A number of other countries can be added to that

<sup>①</sup> Walt W. Rostow, *Leading the World Economically*, Amsterdam: Dutch University Press, 2003, p. 273.

<sup>②</sup> Patrick J. Buchanan, *Suicide of a Superpower. Will America Survive to 2025?* New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011, pp. 17, 19.

list, according to different criteria used by various experts. The basic function of the “B” group is to sustain the regional order and stability in the absence of viable regional, international peace-keeping institutions. (The demands for the transformation of the United Nations are indicative of the uncertainty in the field of global and universal security.)

What is the general idea standing behind the efforts to find an efficient alternative to the non-functioning Pax Americana (supported also, with various degrees of sincerity, by the US “strategic allies”)? The basic notion of an alternative (sometimes referred to as “another”) world order is the promotion of multilateral cooperation among the countries disappointed with the present mode of interrelationships shaped, ultimately, by the Western powers and the West-born economic, financial and political institutions. For example, the BRICS format represents five important geopolitical poles located in South America, Eurasia and Africa with the “mission” of instituting horizontal cooperation and enhancing greater understanding between the three important continents that are in the process of geo-economic and geopolitical self-assertion. Furthermore, the BRICS format provides the five influential countries with a platform to engage in discussions for cooperation in the field of economy, finance, trade, culture, security and defense, and agriculture, to name just a few. The BRICS format plays an increasingly momentous (if not pivotal) role in foreign policy initiatives articulated by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa as the year of 2014 demonstrated convincingly. In the words of Carmen Amado Mendes and Daniel Cardoso,

[d]uring the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, the BRICS issued a statement rejecting the sanctions that the EU and the US wanted to impose on Russia and condemning the “hostile language” that both used towards Russia over the annexation of Crimea in March. This tacit support from the BRICS compromised the EU and the US strategy to isolate

Russia.<sup>①</sup>

With respect to Macau and Hong Kong, the same authors employ another definition, that of “retrocession.”

The BRICS format has become instrumental in promoting ever closer coordination on global issues that acquired particular significance in 2014 between the five “civilization-states”<sup>②</sup> and enhancing multilateral collaboration in various sectoral areas. The BRICS “platform” is also expected to promote cooperation with other influential “actors” of world politics, mainly with the “new regional leaders,” and aimed at building consensus on issues of international importance. The BRICS, in my view, may facilitate the trade opportunities not only among the five member-states but in a wider international spectrum by promoting multilateral exchange of information, technologies, and skills to complement and augment each other’s strengths. In the near future, the BRICS may focus on the concept of sustainable and equitable development that is of paramount political significance for “the rest” (i.e. for those transitional societies suffering from truncated globalization). We may, moreover, envisage cooperation in vital areas such as climate change and global warming, education, energy security, healthcare, challenges due to the rise of the information society, science and technology, models of social development, investment, transport (keeping in mind the coming transportation revolution), and tourism, etc.

Today, the reform of the central international institution, the United Nations, is becoming not only urgent but, putting it bluntly, inevitable. For this fundamental transformation to materialize, a new global consensus based on subject-subject (not subject-object) relationship should be articulated and

① Carmen Amado Mendes and Daniel Cardoso, “Diversifying Channels in China-Brazil Relations: The Multilateralization of the Bilateral Relationship,” in *Chinese- Lusophone Relations: China and Brazil*, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2015, p. 24.

② M. Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World*, London: Allen Lane, 2009.

agreed upon, accompanied by the far-reaching reforms in a world financial architecture. This is one of the pillars of the agenda of the BRICS on the international arena.

Russia's attitude towards the BRICS is changing in the positive direction. It is an open secret that we in Russia have a tacit opposition to the diversification of Russia's foreign policy in the Oriental and South Occidental directions. The reasoning of a one-sided foreign policy strategy seems to be superficial, if not primitive. The argument runs as follows: The West (US plus Western Europe) remains to be the center of the universe—economically, financially, and intellectually. Even the global economic turmoil, the genesis of which was the United States, has not shattered the conviction of the part of the Russian elites that the model of “development” (to be more precise, decay) imported from the “new political economy” is the ideal economic pattern for Russia and that it needs no modification at all. But probably at the end of 2012, the leading faction within the political elites reached the conclusion that Russia was importing low rates of economic growth from the European Union, the country's major collective economic partner. The sanctions imposed on Russia after the reintegration of the Crimea (“reconnection” as articulated by Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister), and the turmoil that began in the east of the Ukraine, accelerated the trend towards diversification of external economic policies and Russia's international relations generally.

It is expected that the policy of import substitution originating from the Western sanctions would be instrumental in transforming the “colonial” structure of the Russia's national economy, and it would be instrumental in accelerating economic growth in the country in the short and midterm perspective. It goes without saying that the main sources of economic strength, that is growth and development, are to be of domestic origin. Nevertheless, Russia's economic recovery is also dependent on expanding relations with non-Western nations—the member-states of the BRICS in



particular.

Still, our trade relationship is more or less satisfactory with China (that is emerging as Russia's "number one" economic partner) whilst our economic relationships with India (12 billion dollars) and Brazil (less than 5 billion dollars) are intolerable. The improvement of the status quo is within Russia's reach. The ruling circles in Moscow are aware that qualitative changes in our economic relations with the BRICS partners are deducible from Moscow's pro-active policy targeted to involving the business community (including small and petty entrepreneurs) in the process of bilateral and multilateral relations. Also important is a more vigorous emphasis on the concept of "region-to-region" relations that can have a significant "multiplier effect" on Russia-India and Russia-Brazil economic ties. The success of upgrading Russia's economic cooperation with India and Brazil is ultimately dependent on the institutionalization of the information banks accumulating all the meaningful data relating to economic potential (main industrial clusters, possession of sensitive technologies, commercialization of Research and Development, role of Science and applicability of its achievements in the process of economic transformation, etc.) of both civilization-states. This kind of activity is not a direct responsibility of the central state. Collection of the necessary information and its systemic processing is, in the final analysis, the prerogative of the Russian Academy of Sciences, including its regional affiliations and of the leading universities as well as provincial government institutions.

In the present author's view, the future role of the BRICS in world politics is, to a large extent, dependent on India-China-Russia relations. We in Russia fully understand that India-China relations have had a history of mutual distrust dating back to the tragic events in October 1962—sometimes referred to as the "border conflict" between "the Dragon" and "the Elephant." Still, the historic memories of these developments have not escaped the conflict that had taken place more than half a century back. But events of the