



A changing << and highly unstable world order

From the end of the Cold War until the first decade of the 21st century the world order has undergone a series of transformations; going from the bipolar model, to a short unipolar period, all the way to the current multipolar system where BRIC countries have become economic locomotives in the search of military and strategic prestige which, in turn, and according to the realist theory, leads to tighter competition for power and security.

JULIÁN ANDRÉS VARGAS

Researcher at the Center of Strategic Studies on National Security and Defense (CEESEDEN) War College Colombia.

E-mail: vargasj@esdegue.mil.co

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Un ordre mondial changeant et instable

Depuis la guerre froide jusqu'à la première décennie du siècle XXI, il y a eut une transition depuis un modèle bipolaire, développant une petite période unipolaire avant d'arriver à la multipolarité, où les Etats Bric émergent économiquement cherchant développer leurs pouvoirs militaires, stratégiques et le prestige international. Selon la théorie réaliste, cette situation conduira à une compétence encore plus fermée pour le pouvoir et la sécurité.

Introduction

This article is presented as part of the research project "Scenarios of Colombia's Geopolitical Security in the 21st Century" developed at the Center of Strategic Studies on National Security and Defense (CEESEDEN) War College Colombia. The main purpose of this research was to describe and analyze the geopolitical criteria on which the state depends in order to guarantee its survival; these include: the access and control over strategic natural resources, the consolidation of the territory, the development of infrastructure, the protection of international borders, the defense of the national sovereignty and safety of commerce among others.

Therefore, this article proposes the existence of a new global geopolitical scenario deeply altered after the end of the Cold War. Describing such scenario is fundamental for understanding future transformations, tendencies and crises which have to be tackled by Colombia globally and regionally. This is why the main idea of this article is that:

The post-Cold War world has been rapidly changing: the unipolar model of the 1990s, where the United States was the sole superpower and world police, went into crisis after the terrorist attacks on September 11 2001. The world has become multipolar, a model in which new world powers, with increasing influence, emerge in the international arena. This transition, however and, according to the Realist theory of International Relations, will not be peaceful.

In order to support this hypothesis, this document makes a description of the changes in the world order from the end of the Cold War to the first decade of the 21st century. Second, we will analyze the arguments behind the idea that, in recent years the United States and the western world have been in constant and relative decline. Third, we analyze the status of emerging powers, also known as BRIC countries. And finally, we examine why according to Realism, the variations in US power make the transition toward a multipolar world highly unstable.

➤ A changing world order: from the end of the Cold War to the first decade of the 21st century

The breakdown of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991 supposed the victory of the United States, and with it, that of modern western values¹. At that moment it seemed like a new age of peace and prosperity –The Pax Americana– would rule the world in agreement with modern precepts and the scientific and technological legacy of the western civilization². During the 1990s this view produced the theory that argues that the post-Cold War system is unipolar and that the United States is the great hegemony or global empire³.

Nevertheless, a series of problems in the international system swiftly undermined the unipolar world theory. On the one hand, there is the failure of the United Nations-United States military coalitions to handle ethnic and nationalist movements in sub-Saharan Africa (Ruanda 1994; Somalia 1992-95)⁴.

On the other hand, violence and drug-trafficking in Colombia⁵ and Mexico challenged the US capacity to impose models for collective security and world order; this would, in turn, warn about US military inability to fight asymmetric and low intensity wars⁶.

In addition, and paradoxically, the civilization called upon to lead and govern the new world order assumed a neo-isolationist posture⁷. Similarly, although it kept an eye on the globe, the Clinton administration embarked on a non-involvement policy on international affairs. Meanwhile, Europe set out on a new phase of ethnocentrism, welfare and opulence⁸.

Moreover, “the end of history” euphoria that resulted from the unipolar theory⁹, obscured two important political phenomena of December 1991.

1 Patiño, Carlos. (2006). “Religión, Guerra y Orden Político: la ruta del siglo XX”. Medellín: Editorial Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. P. 281.

2 “Economic globalization is mostly a code word for ‘Americanization’ and dynamic, open markets. (...) U.S. conventional military forces now dominate those of any adversary, and again our allies account for the next most modern military forces. (...) For Better or worse, American culture, especially American popular, is pervasive; (...) And American principles of inalienable individual politics right continue to find increasing acceptance.” Donnelly, Thomas. (Enero de 2003). Preserving Pax Americana: Defense reform for the unipolar moment. En: Outlook: ideas for the future from Hudson Institute, Volumen 3, Número 1.P. 4.

3 This idea appeared in an article published by Charles Krauthammer ‘The Unipolar Moment’, in which the author argues that: “Thinking about post-Cold War US foreign policy has been led astray by three conventionally-accepted but mistaken assumptions about the character of the post-Cold War environment (1) that the world is now multipolar, whereas it is in fact unipolar, with the USA the sole superpower, at least for present policy purposes (2) that the US domestic consensus favours internationalism rather than isolationism (3) that in consequence of the Soviet collapse, the threat of war has substantially diminished.” Krauthammer, Charles. (Diciembre de 1990). The Unipolar Moment. En: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 70, Nº 1. P. 23.

4 One important example regarding western failures in Sub-Saharan Africa is the case of Somalia and the so called CNN effect or Mogadishu Effect which put forward the US unwillingness to sacrifice human lives in order to become “world police”: “America’s involvement in Somalia is an example of the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ effects of televisión imagery. The heart-wrenching images of starving people in Somalia ‘pushed’ UStroops into Somalia coining the phrase ‘the CNN effect’. Within a year, the horrible images

of an American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu ‘pulled’ US troops out, coining the phrase ‘Mogadishu effect.’” BELKNAP, Margaret. The CNN Effect: Strategic Enabler or Operational Risk? In: US Army War College, Strategy Research Project, March 2001. P 8. Available online at : <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army-usawc/cnn-belknap.pdf>

5 Instead of reducing drug-trafficking from Colombia to the United States, drug-trafficking measures taken in the Caribbean encouraged illegal activities in Central America and Mexico along with corruption and violence associated to large scale drug-trafficking. Bagley, Bruce. (Mayo-diciembre de 2000). “Narcotráfico, Violencia Política y Política Exterior de Estados Unidos Hacia Colombia en los Noventa”. En: Colombia Internacional, Nº 49-50, Universidad de los Andes. p 8. Available online at: <http://colombiainternacional.uniandes.edu.co/view.php/369/index.php?id=369>

6 American public, strategic, and military culture is not friendly to the means and methods necessary for the waging of warfare against irregular enemies. The traditional American way of war was developed to defeat regular enemies. It reflects many of the strengths of American society and culture. The pertinent question, therefore, is “Can that traditional way of war adapt so as to be effective against irregular enemies?” The answer of this monograph is “perhaps, but only with difficulty.” GRAY, Colin. Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt? In: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2006. p vii. Available online at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=650>

7 “The new isolationism subscribes to a fundamentally realist view of international politics and thus focuses on power. Its advocates ask: who has the power to threaten the sovereignty of the United States, its territorial integrity, or its safety? They answer that nobody does. [...] Like traditional isolationism, this strategy observes that the oceans make such a threat improbable in any event. The new isolationism is strongly motivated by a particular understanding of nuclear weapons. It concedes that nuclear weapons have increased the potential capacity of others to threaten the safety of the United States. But nuclear weapons make it very hard, indeed nearly inconceivable, for any power to win a traditional military victory over the United States.” Posen, Barry; Ross, Andrew. (Invierno 1996 – 1997). Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy. En: International Security, Vol. 21, Nº 3, p 10 y 11.

8 Patiño, Carlos. Op.Cit. p 282.

9 “The end of history” euphoria refers to Francis Fukuyama’s controversial book: The end of History and the Last Man, published in 1992 and based on his article from 1989: The end of history? Fukuyama, Francis. “El Fin de la Historia y el Último Hombre”. Editorial Planeta, 1994.

First, the demise of the Cold War ended an era of stability and governability of world affairs. Second, the collapse of the USSR left a power vacuum in the international system that the United States was unable to fill.

The Cold War can be considered a relatively stable framework of relations and world governability. The race between the two world powers, mediated by the Mutually Assured Destruction policy of nuclear weapons, thwarted the development of a third power that could disrupt the international system¹⁰. Each block had control over the politics and the security conditions in its area of influence. As a result the world order was only affected by friction between the two world powers perceivable only in the periphery (this is the case of the Korean and Vietnam wars and other low intensity conflicts caused by the communist guerrillas of Latin America and Asia)¹¹. Moreover, the international legal framework built after the Second World War, embodied by the United Nations, brought some of the regional conflicts to diplomatic solutions instead of reverting to war¹².

Second, a power vacuum appeared after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics dissolved on December 25 1991¹³. The power vacuum was consolidated for two reasons. On the one hand, the United States lacked the capacity and will to geopolitically control

the Soviet Union's area of influence after its demise. On the other hand, the Mutually Assured Destruction policy based on the use of nuclear weapons endured even after the collapse of the Soviet block¹⁴. In international politics, when a political vacuum exists it will be occupied by the first actors willing to do so¹⁵.

As a result, a number of state and non-state actors, invisible during the ideological polarization of the Cold War, emerged to control the resources in Eastern Europe, Euro-Asia, Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East¹⁶. The problem posed by these new actors (Islamic extremists like the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, regional powers like Iran, South Korea, Turkey and Brazil, or re-emerging powers such as China, India and Russia) is that they represent different cultures and interests which, in several cases, may be contrary to modern western values that seemed to have consolidated after the fall of the Iron Curtain¹⁷.

Although the power vacuum existed before the collapse of the Soviet Union, it remained mostly unnoticed. During the 1990s, the United States and in general the western hemisphere, were considered the sole world power with the role of world police¹⁸.

10 The outcomes of the Cold War can be viewed in three levels: in the first one, international governability was guaranteed by two world powers; in the second level, the Cold War allowed the spreading of modern Western political values, the development of an international framework and allowed the receding of 19th century European powers by decolonization and the creation of new states". Patiño, Carlos; Ramírez, Laura; Ortiz, Diego. (2006). "Posguerra Fria: acercamiento histórico y político". Medellín, Editorial Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. P. 20.

11 Lourdes, Valeria. "Cuando la Guerra Fria Llegó a América Latina". In: Centro Argentino de Estudios Internacionales. Available online at: <http://www.caei.com.ar/es/programas/historia/08.pdf>

12 "(...) the two blocks, the leading heads of modernity, development and political order, determined the way international conflicts were dealt with, (...) their actions were directed at preventing that major political processes would not go off course. This was assured through the monopoly of the means for war especially of nuclear weapons which, in turn, served as a containment measure against potential emerging powers." Patiño, Carlos; Ramírez, Laura; Ortiz, Diego. Op. Cit. P. 25.

13 One can say that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union have had at least three major effects. These watershed events created 1) an ideological vacuum, 2) a power vacuum, and 3) the largest weapons bazaar and black market in world history." Dennis, Anthony. A new and More Dangerous Era. In: Ariel Center for Policy Research. p 26. Available online at: http://www.acpr.org.il/pp/pp119-Muhammads_Monsters-Dennis.pdf

14 Oelrich, I.C. Sizing Post-Cold War Nuclear Forces. En: Institute for Defense Analysis, IDA Paper N° 3650, octubre de 2001. [En Línea] Disponible en: <http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/doctrine/szngnuclearforces.pdf>

15 "Throughout the Cold War, what the United States and the Soviet Union did, and how they interacted, were dominant factors in international politics. The two countries, however, constrained each other. Now the United States is alone in the world. As nature abhors a vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power. Faced with unbalanced power, some states try to increase their own strength or they ally with others to bring the international distribution of power into balance." Waltz, Kenneth. (Verano de 2000). Structural Realism After Cold War. En: International Security, Vol. 25, N° 1. P. 28. Available online at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/sipa/U6800/readings-sm/Waltz_Structural%20Realism.pdf

16 The Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, that resulted in the emergence of new independent states, which became the pawns of the new rivalry between big powers to fill the power vacuum after the Soviets to utilize from their natural resources. Ahmadov, Ramin. (Primavera – verano de 2005). "The U.S. Policy Toward Middle East in the Post Cold War Era". En: Turkish Journal of International Relations, Vol. 4, N° 1. P. 139. [En Línea] Disponible en: <http://www.alternativesjournal.net/volume4/number1/ramin.pdf>

17 Patiño, Carlos. Op. Cit. P. 280.

18 Depending on its readiness and willingness the United States would be forced to act to stop crimes against humanity anywhere in the world; also to stop any conflicts and their feasible consequences. As a result, the United States would assume the role of "world police" endowed with the legitimate use of force. Guerisoli, Emmanuel. "La Doctrina Clinton: Las guerras humanitarias". In: Centro Argentino de Estudios Internacionales, Working Paper N° 13 de 2006. P. 1.

Only after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in New York and Washington did the western world awake from the Kantian dream and the illusion of positivism¹⁹.

The military and political success of a religious organization like Al-Qaeda produced at least four important political phenomena: 1) it confirmed the Global Empire's incapacity to impose order and a collective security model in regions beyond its geopolitical reach, particularly where political institutions have not been consolidated; 2) religion was reintroduced –and with it other cultural traits such as ethnicity and nationalism- to the international political arena in a moment when modern values such laïcité, secularism, and individual liberty were considered universal and had dispelled the political tension generated by cultural factors²⁰; 3) modern western values were being challenged and attacked which confirmed the crash of civilizations proposed by Samuel Huntington in 1996²¹; 4) the attacks on Pearl Harbor confirmed America's security and defense vulnerabilities making terrorism the greatest threat to its nation and a top priority in the international political agenda²².

However, waking up from the Kantian dream was not as positive for the United States. The neo-conservative, interventionist and unilateral doctrine adopted by the George W. Bush administration in opposition to the isolationist and practical multilateralism policy adopted by the Clinton²³ administration, added the invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan, reflected the erosion of American hegemony and the rise of emerging powers.

> The decline of American relative power

In this point it is important to bear in mind two conditions; first, for now, as things stand, America has the world's largest economy, the world's leading universities, and many of its biggest companies. The U.S. military is also incomparably more powerful than any rival²⁴. Second, the United States has undergone periods when its relative power was considered to be in decline and, therefore, its supremacy was challenged²⁵.

Some examples of these periods occurred during the 1960s when presidential candidate John F. Kennedy, warned that US relative power was in decline in relation to the Soviet Union; and in the 1980s when Erza Vogel's book *Japan as Number One*²⁶, provoked paranoia about Japanese manufacturing techniques and trade policies²⁷.

In the end both challenges were defeated by American supremacy. The economic model of the Soviet Union was highly inefficient and inflexible in an age dominated by innovation and scientific and technological innovation and development²⁸. And, although Japan had mastered scientific and technological innovation which allowed the country's rapid economic development and increasing exporting capacity, its demographic conditions and the lack of strategic natural resources limited its growth²⁹.

19 On 9/11 2001, the western world awoke from the Kantian dream and the illusion of positivism. Patiño, Carlos. Op. Cit. p 9.

20 Ibid. p 10 and 11.

21 Huntington, Samuel. (1997). "El Choque de Civilizaciones". Madrid, Editorial Paidós.

22 Vega, Jorge. "Medidas para la Eliminación del Terrorismo Internacional: Análisis normativo del accionar de las Naciones Unidas post 11-S". In: Centro Argentino de Estudios Internacionales, e-book N° 6. Available online at : <http://www.caei.com.ar/ebooks/ebook6.pdf>

23 Dalby, Simon. (Octubre de 2005). "Geopolitics, Grand Strategy and the Bush Doctrine". En: Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, Paper N° 90. [Available online at : <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/WorkingPapers/WP90.pdf>

24 Rachman, Gideon. (Enero-Febrero de 2011). "Think Again: American Decline". En: Foreign Policy. P. 1. Available online at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/02/think_again_american_decline

25 Ibid. P. 2.

26 Vogel, Ezra. (1979). "Japan as Number One". Harvard University Press.

27 Rachman, Gideon. Op. Cit. p 2.

28 Service, Robert. (2000). "Historia de Rusia en el Siglo XX". Madrid: Editorial Crítica.

29 Japan, of course, also experienced many years of rapid economic growth and is still an export powerhouse. But it was never a plausible candidate to be No. 1. The Japanese population is less than half that of the United States, which means that the average Japanese person would have to be more than twice as rich as the average American before Japan's economy surpassed America's. That was never going to happen." Rachman, Gideon. Op. Cit. P. 2.

Nevertheless, there are a number of elements that indicate that this may be different today. Although it is true that the decline of the United States and the west is presented in relative terms (that is to say, in comparison to the growing power of other countries) it is also true that the growing power of emerging countries is shifting world politics from the Atlantic (United States and Europe) to the Pacific (India and China)³⁰.

As a result, the decline of American relative power will have a multifaceted and long term impact on international politics. Two concrete facts may help explain this: first, the weakening of US power following the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and, second, the growing power of emerging world powers according to two variables, their military spending and economy.

The weakening of US power following the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) is the result of what could be called an ineffective and ambiguous victory in both wars³¹. Only after eleven years and eight months since 9/11 did the US get hold of Osama Bin Laden. And even so, it is hard to talk about a victory over Al Qaeda³². In both wars US enemies have pursued asymmetrical strategies to offset U.S. military strengths; the fact that American victory is ambiguous in both cases undermines US credibility to face these kinds of threats³³.

Additionally, President Bush's administration authorization to use torture in the war against terrorism, as seen in the case of Guantanamo base³⁴, eroded US leadership and undermined western values such as the defense of Human Rights.

Moreover, the false allegations of weapons of mass destruction under Saddam Hussein's regime, the unilateral US attack on Iraq against the UN's resolutions and the international community, provoked the rejection of the war and increased the level of anti-Americanism internationally³⁵. American leadership was clearly hurt. France, Germany, Russia and China among others, rejected the US invasion of Iraq³⁶.

On the other hand, the growing power of emerging world powers can be considered from two variables: military spending and economy growth:

Economic growth: According to recent estimations by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) the world's financial and economic crisis has helped accelerate the long term structural transformations of the world's economy. While in 2000 emerging powers and developing countries shared 40% of the world's acquisition power, in 2010 it was 49% and, it is estimated that by 2030 it will be around 57%. The same study indicates that countries like China, India, Russia, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Chile and Israel are responsible for these structural changes since, in recent years,

30 The multipolar world's asymmetry which favors the United States as sole power, will change over the next century. The axis of power is moving towards Asia. The new faces in the world system will be China and India". Page, David. "China e India no son Rivalos: conquistarán el mundo juntas". En: www.expansion.com. Available online at : <http://www.expansion.com/2010/03/18/economia-politica/1268928928.html> [Accessed online 3 May 2011]

31 Snow, Donald. "The Unresolved Dilemmas in Afghanistan and Iraq". In: National Security for a New Era. Capítulo 12, p 301 y 302 Available online at: http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip_us_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0205779034.pdf

32 Al-Qaeda's war of attrition strategy suffered a strong set-back after the death of Osama Bin Laden; however, its terrorist activities are manifold and remain a threat to western interests. . Reinales, Fernando. Después de Osama Bin Laden: ¿Cómo queda Al Qaeda y el terrorismo global? En: Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 83 de 2011. p 1 Available online at: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/ari83-2011

33 "The war in Iraq is but the latest demonstration of the limits of America's power." Record, Jeffrey. The American Way of War: Cultural Barriers to Successful Counterinsurgency. In: CATO Institute Policy Analysis Series, Nº 577, septiembre de 2006. p 2. Available online at: <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa577.pdf>

34 759 secret reports uncovered the situation in Guantanamo. The documents reveal that the main purpose of the prison was to "exploit" whatever information that could be gathered from the prisoners regardless of their case or feasible innocence. 60% of the prisoners were taken to Guantanamo without any concrete legal accusations against them". Los Abusos de Guantánamo al Descubiertos. En: www.elpais.com Available online at: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/internacional/abusos/Guantanamo/descubierto/elpepuint/20110425elpepuint_4/Tes [Accessed online 3 May 2011]

35 In 2006 the first joint-assessment report on the war against terror leaked out to the press. The report "Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States" indicated that the war in Iraq had become a cause for new terrorist leaders and future terrorist attacks. After the report was published the United States had to publically recognize that the terrorist threat had increased after the war in Iraq. OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE. Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States. 2006. Available online at: http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/Declassified_NIE_Key_Judgments.pdf [Accessed Online 11 May 2011]

36 Mearsheimer, John y Walt, Stephen. (January-February 2003). "An Unnecessary War". In: Foreign Policy. P. 51 y 52.

they have produced the necessary wealth to steadily push consumption up³⁷.

This tendency is confirmed by the International Monetary Fund's 2010 World Economic Outlook report, which states that China surpassed Japan as the world's second-largest economy and is now on course to overtake the US as the world's largest economy. In the same report, Brazil has overtaken Canada and Spain to become the world's eighth largest economy, and Indonesia moved ten positions up in order to become the world's 16th biggest economy³⁸.

Another report presenting the slow but progressive displacement of the US and of the western economies is published by the Institute for Management Development (2010). The report states that for the first time in decades the United States was displaced as the world's biggest economy in the World Competitiveness Ranking. The position was assumed by Singapore, followed by Hong Kong and the United States in the second and third place respectively. It is clear in the report that Asian countries like Taiwan, Malaysia, China and India will have the greatest commercial and economic development during the 21st century, displacing regions like the European Union and the United States³⁹.

Military: According to the annual report published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) the world's military spending has increased by 49% since 2000. However, while the United States represented 51% of the world's security and defense spending during the first part of the century, in 2009 its share was only 43%. This can be seen as a relative decline given that military spending in the United States has increased 81% since 2001⁴⁰.

Simultaneously, in Europe, spending on security and defense in 2010 decreased 2,8% in comparison to 2009 as a result of budget cuts forced by the world's economic crisis⁴¹. China occupied the second place according to the report, displacing the United Kingdom and France. However, US military spending is still six times its nearest rival China⁴². Latin America had the largest percentage growth in military and defense spending with 5,8% and a total of US\$63.300 millions⁴³.

> Emerging powers and the multipolar world order

The weakening of US relative power is so evident that even pundits like Manuel Castells foresee a political and military withdrawal in the years to come:

“When I say that its policy is to put an end to the empire, it means to put an end to unilateralism and the use of military power as the means to organize the world. It means to be more selective, to work as a team and promote multilateral responses in order to pacify some regions of the world (...) with Obama, US military attacks will only be used where its necessary and when its necessary (...) as a result, Obama is a figure similar to Gorbachev, who promoted the structural reforms of the USSR during the 1980s in order to modernize the country”⁴⁴.

37 Developing countries set to account for nearly 60% of world GDP by 2030, according to new estimates. In: OECD Development Center 2010. Available online at: http://www.oecd.org/document/14/0,3343,en_2649_33959_45467980_1_1_1_1,00.html

38 FONDO MONETARIO INTERNACIONAL. Perspectivas de la Economía Mundial 2010: recuperación, riesgo y equilibrio. At: www.imf.org. Available online: <http://www.imf.org/external/spanish/pubs/ft/weo/2010/02/pdf/texts.pdf>

39 INSTITUTE FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT. World Competitive Yearbook 2010. In: www.imd.org. Available online: <http://www.imd.org/research/publications/wcy/index.cfm>

40 STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE. El Gasto Militar Mundial Alcanzó \$1.63 Billones de Dólares. Comunicado de Prensa, 11 de abril de 2011. Available online: <http://www.sipri.org/media/pressreleases/milex>

41 STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE. El Gasto Militar Mundial Alcanzó \$1.63 Billones de Dólares. Op. Cit.

42 STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE. SIPRI Yearbook 2010: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security; Executive Resume. p 11. Available online: <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/yearbook/2010/files/SIPRIYB10summary.pdf>

43 América Latina incrementó el gasto militar en un 5,8% durante 2010, un total de 63.300 millones de dólares. At: www.infodefensa.com. Available online: <http://www.infodefensa.com/?noticia=america-latina-incremento-el-gasto-militar-en-un-58-durante-2010-un-total-de-63-300-millones-de-dolares>

44 Manuel Castells compara a Obama con Gorbachov. At: www.lavanguardia.es. Available online: <http://www.lavanguardia.es/lv24h/20080930/53551801484.html> Accessed online 7 February 2011.

Therefore, it is possible to assert that the US weakening leadership affects the world's power structure. The supposedly unipolar world system has reached its final stage and new world powers are setting the foundation of a multipolar⁴⁵ world order where the leadership of the United States and the West is being challenged and displaced⁴⁶.

Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) are the emerging powers destined to build such multipolar system. These countries have seen great economic, commercial, scientific, technological and military development⁴⁷ which gives them the capacity to influence the structures of world politics (the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank among others). This has given BRIC countries enough power to lead global changes according to their own interests and even against US prerogatives.

For instance, Brazil has been openly campaigning for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council and, although Brazil's increasing position in the international system has been respectful of US interests, its aspirations to assume a leadership role in the international system became apparent in 2010 when President Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva rejected US policies towards Iran's nuclear program⁴⁸.

On the other hand, Russia's President, Dmitry Medvedev, in a press conference on August 3rd 2008, recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South

Ossetia after the war in Georgia and introduced Russia's foreign policy for the new world order.

"The world should be multi-polar. A single-pole world is unacceptable. Domination is something we cannot allow. We cannot accept a world order in which one country makes all the decisions, even as serious and influential country as the United States of America. Such a world is unstable and threatened by conflict."⁴⁹

India has been considered an emerging power with close ties to the West given its multiethnic democracy and because, in case of Chinese expansionism, New Delhi may support other regional powers and allies like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea⁵⁰. However, if the US is forced to politically and economically withdraw from the Pacific, it may be possible that current US allies may comply with the conditions set out by a powerful China⁵¹.

Although India and the United States maintain close cooperation efforts on military, security and nuclear matters⁵², New Delhi may not necessarily

45 Henry Kissinger, the anti-realist model of neoconservatives, wrote before September 11 that: "the relations among states, in the 21st century, will resemble that of the 18th and 19th century system of European states (...) there will be at least six world powers: the United States, Europe, China, Japan, Russia and probably India" Batalla, Xavier. *Bipolar, Unipolar, Multipolar, 1983 – 2006: Los cambios más profundos desde el inicio de la Guerra Fría*. In: Fundación CIDOB, Policy Paper N° 100, Madrid, 2006. p 7. Available online: http://www.cidob.org/es/publicaciones/revistas/dcidob/1983_2006_nuevos_tiempos_nuevas_miradas

46 Patiño, Carlos. Op. Cit. P. 290.

47 BRIC countries will be fighting for economic and political power during the 21st century, pushing the world into a multipolar system, or in the best of cases, a bipolar system with the United States and the European Union at the top. Undoubtedly, the potential of BRIC countries is important: the four countries represent 41.6% of the world's population, 22% of the world's surface and 27% of the world's GDP. China is the fifth place followed by Brazil (10), Russia (11), and India (12). They represent 15% of the world economy and 40% of the world's natural resources. Goldman Sachs predicts that BRIC countries will become the world's most important economies by 2050 with a combined GDP of 35 billion dollars. CIRCULO LATINOAMERICANO DE ESTUDIOS INTERNACIONALES. *El Grupo BRIC: Eje Económico del Futuro*. En: CLAEI Available online: <http://www.claei.org.mx/pdf/GRUPO-BRIC-AL-EL-NUEVO-ORDEN-GLOBAL.pdf>

48 Brazil and Turkey are willing to show the world that the powers that emerged after the second World War do not rule over world politics and that the UN Security Council is no longer big enough. The two countries signed an accord with Iran to enrich uranium outside the country and demand a seat at the G6 (United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom, France and Germany) to participate in all the negotiations regarding Iran's nuclear program. Brasil y Turquía piden igualdad con las potencias. At: www.elpais.com. Available online: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/internacional/Brasil/Turquia/piden/igualdad/potencias/elpepuint/20100518elpepuint_13/Tes. Accessed online 4 May 2011.

49 Russia won't accept unipolar world: Medvedev. At: www.globalsecurity.net Onlien access: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/russia/2008/russia-080831-medvedev01.htm> Accessed online 8 February 2011.

50 "India is on the verge of becoming a great power and the swing state in the international system. As a large, multiethnic, economically powerful, non-Western democracy, it will play a key role in the great struggles of the coming years. Washington has recognized the potential of a U.S.-Indian alliance, but translating that potential into reality will require engaging India on its own terms". Mohan, Raja. (Julio-Agosto de 2006). "India and the Balance of Power". In: *Foreign Affairs*, p 17.

51 "A common Chinese view is that the United States will instead eventually find it can no longer afford its military position in the Pacific. U.S. allies in the region -- Japan, South Korea, and increasingly India -- may partner more with Washington to try to counter rising Chinese power. But if the United States has to scale back its presence in the Pacific for budgetary reasons, its allies will start to accommodate themselves to a rising China. Beijing's influence will expand, and the Asia-Pacific region -- the emerging center of the global economy -- will become China's backyard." Rachman, Gideon. Op. Cit. P. 5.

52 Kiesow, Ingolf; Norling, Nicklas. (2007). "The Rise of India: problems and opportunities". At: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, Washington, p 109 y SS Available online: <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/Silkroadpapers/2007/0701India.pdf>

align with US interests. In fact according to Pablo Bustelo, India may be more inclined to support China as their economies become more complementary and competition decreases, resulting in accords that may benefit their interest in Asia⁵³.

Meanwhile, China has become the most important rival to American supremacy in the world today. 20 years ago, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the western world paid little attention to the economic reforms and social changes which occurred during the government of Deng Xiaoping in 1978. Such reforms have become the source of the “Chinese economic miracle” and turned the country into the world’s second biggest economy⁵⁴. As a result, in recent years, more and more authors have relinquished the idea that the 21st century started with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. These authors prefer to mark the beginning of the 21st century at the reforms that began in China in 1978⁵⁵. This is why the 21st century is believed to be the century of China.

China’s power has grown to the extent that it can afford to be more assertive when it comes to international affairs such as the devaluation of the Yuan in order to favor Chinese exports and against American interests⁵⁶; the restriction of the information published online⁵⁷; and the invasion of Tibet. In the years to come, China may even start discussing the status of Taiwan, an important US ally in Asia.

This explains why neorealists such as John Mearsheimer continuously ask whether the rise of China will be peaceful, or if it threatens the United States. However, the same questions can be asked about other emerging powers like Iran, Venezuela and Turkey and the answers would still be the same: “If China continues its impressive economic growth over the next few decades, the United States and China are likely to engage in an intense security competition with considerable potential for war”⁵⁸.

In any case, the economic, political and military rise of BRIC countries and their tendency to play a role of international leadership based on their own interests will result in a quest to compensate their international position in terms of power, strategy and international prestige, leading to more competition for power and security⁵⁹.

> An instable transition

The main reason why the transition towards a multipolar system is highly unstable is that war is more likely when the relative power of states fluctuates sharply⁶⁰. Therefore, countries go to war because, very often, relative power cannot be calculated without a test on the battlefield; if countries agree on the measure of their relative power, this test becomes futile; if they disagree, armed conflict may be the only way to help realize the weakest state its true condition and therefore give in⁶¹.

Thus, during a period of changes in the balance of power among countries or changes in the shape of international coalitions the following situation may develop: the declining state will want a war sooner than later, when it is still strong; on the other side, the ascending state will want to avoid war until the

53 Pablo Bustelo asserts that “China and India will rule the World in the 21st century, and they will do better if they do it together”. Pablo Bustelo is researcher at the Real Instituto Elcano. He is author of “Chindia: Asia a la conquista del siglo XXI, editado por Tecnos y Elcano”. Page, David. Op. Cit

54 Wilhelmy, Manfred. (otoño de 2000). “El Proceso de Reformas en China y su Política Exterior”. In: Estudios Públicos Nº 78. Editorial Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano. p 243 y SS. Available online: http://avalon.utadeo.edu.co/comunidades/grupos/asiapacifico/uploads/politica_exterior_china_por_wilhelmy.pdf

55 Page, David. Op. Cit.

56 EE.UU. denunciará la devaluación artificial de Yuan cada vez que se reúna con los líderes chinos. At: www.elmundo.es Available online: <http://www.elmundo.es/mundodinero/2010/04/05/economia/1270487163.html> Accessed online 5 April 2011.

57 Google is in China, but its search engine moved to Hong Kong. After several weeks of speculation, the internet giant decided to not to censor its Chinese search engine against the Chinese government. The big question is, Why did Google decide to turn its back on nearly 400 million Chinese users? This happens after a series of attacks were directed at accessing the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists in January. “¿Por qué Google se va de China? En: www.bbc.co.uk Online access: http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/economia/2010/03/100323_1516_google_china_analisis_dc.shtml. Accessed online 2 May 2011.

58 Mearsheimer, John. (April 2006). China’s Unpeaceful Rise. In: *Current History*, p 160.

59 James, Harold. (Summer 2008). “The Rise of the BRIC: and the new logic in international politics”. In: *International Economy*. P. 41.

60 “Van Evera, Stephen. (1999). “Causes of War: Power and the roots of conflict”. Cornell University Press. P. 4.

61 Ibid. p 14 y 15.

balance of power evens out. In this scenario chances are that the declining state may launch a preventive attack before the conditions worsen⁶².

The use of “window”⁶³ as a term for power shift dates from the 1970s. It refers to a period when a state’s relative strength is about to decline, or is in decline and therefore, decides to launch an attack. Windows can be distinguished on three dimensions:

1. *Window of opportunity vs. window of vulnerability.* The former is a fading offensive opportunity, the latter is a growing defensive vulnerability. A single window can be a window of both opportunity and vulnerability, if the declining state expects to fall all the way from dominance to helpless incapacity.
2. *Window of long duration vs. window of short duration.* The former is the result of slow changes in the balance of power, such as changing economic growth rates and military strengthening. The latter, is the result of swift changing conditions in the balance of power including military mobilizations.
3. *Internal window (economic and military) vs. external window (diplomacy).* The former is the result of changes within states (e.g. economic growth of long duration or military mobilizations of short duration), the latter is the result of diplomatic changes abroad (e.g. a states acquires more allies than usual)⁶⁴.

This is based on the Realist theory of International Relations, which asserts that, the main purpose of any world power is to maximize and accumulate power in order to control the international system⁶⁵. Basically, the ascending state aspires to gain more power and authority in the international system, meanwhile, the declining state fears losing its dominant position which may eventually lead to conflicts over the distribution of privileges⁶⁶.

As we have seen in this document, the world is witnessing a series of changes in the relative power of states. Not only is the predominant position of the United States rapidly declining but the power of other states is quickly ascending. As things stand, the current balance of power hinders creating prospective scenarios and creates a major conflict of interest in world affairs. Therefore, realists believe that the transition towards a multipolar system will not be peaceful.

However, a world war is unfeasible; Mutually Assured Destruction policies keep states from relapsing into war. Nonetheless, it is possible that frictions among powerful countries provoke or facilitate regional wars. This can occur as a result of *The Production of Regions in the Emerging Global Order*⁶⁷, a theory that claims that the military and political retreat of hegemonic powers allows the emergence of regional powers which might eventually want to expand their influence.

As a result, it is almost impossible for any given state to reach total hegemony, since it is extremely difficult to project and maintain a powerful position in every corner of the planet. Therefore, states might become regional powers capable of influencing specific geographical zones. After this has been accomplished states may prevent other states from also becoming regional powers and will strive to keep other regions divided among several regional powers in order to promote competition among them. As a result becoming a sole regional power is the closest thing to being a global hegemon⁶⁸.

Latin America can be classified into this theory and explains it widely. US interests in the Middle East have allowed Latin American countries to enjoy a higher degree of autonomy with respect to the United States and compared to the Cold War period⁶⁹. In fact, the

62 Ibid. p 73.

63 James Wade an officer of the Department of Defense in the United States coined the term “power shift” in the 1970s. Ibid. p 74.

64 Ibid. p 74 y 75.

65 Mearsheimer, John. Op. Cit. P. 160.

66 Zhou, Jinghao. “Does China Rise Threaten the United States?” In: *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 32, Nº 3, 2008. P. 171 Available online: <http://www.asianperspective.org/articles/v32n3-g.pdf>

67 Albert, Mathias; Reuber, Paul. “The Production of Regions in the Emerging Global Order”. In: *Geopolitics*, Número 12:4. P. 549 y 550.

68 Mearsheimer, John. Op. Cit. Pp. 160 y 161.

69 Dante, Caputo. Secretary of political affairs OAS in an interview for the BBC: “Washington no longer controls the region like in the past, during the Cold War. US security priorities are directed towards the Middle East (...) the problem is that, I believe that the region’s leaders have not realized their increasing autonomy; they don’t seem to be using it (...) we have to avoid becoming a threat to US security in order to maintain our autonomy. .” *Rearme de A. Latina, ‘Muy peligroso’*. At: www.bbc.co.uk Available online: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_7672000/7672505.stm Accessed online 4 May 2011.

distancing of US interest in the region explains the emergence of socialist projects like those of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador.

Consequently, two political projects of international importance are being developed in South America. On the one hand Brazil is seeking to project its power internationally by using its position as a regional power⁷⁰. On the other hand Venezuela, with a highly ideologized, aggressive and potentially expansionist policy, seeks to change the status quo by confronting the United States⁷¹.

Conclusions

The United States, and the western world, is undergoing a period of relative decline with respect to emerging powers, mainly BRIC countries. This does not mean that the United States has stopped being the world's dominating economic, political, and military power, at least not for now. However, emerging powers are gaining influence within their regional spheres, each chasing after their own interests and struggling to change the way decisions are made; aiming at the establishment of a multipolar system.

The economic development of China and India has shifted world politics from the Atlantic to the Pacific. China's economic and military growth challenge US world supremacy. Moreover, the variations of the relative power of these world powers may result in war.

The variation of relative power with respect to Russia, India and Brazil may also become a source of war. Nuclear war is not very probable; however, the risk of regional and peripheral wars as a response to friction among regional powers is very feasible.

The dissolution of the USSR and the receding power of the United States have resulted in a power

vacuum that favors the emergence of regional powers willing to consolidate their power in order to influence, or dominate, the international system.

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