



Scrutinizing Polarity: Redefining Power in the 21st Century

Bahrooz Jaafar¹, Soz Bashir Mahmood²

^{1,2} Mediterranean Institute for Regional Studies, Sulaymaniyah, 46001, IRAQ

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines the shifting dynamics of global polarity and the potential transformation of the international order in the 21st century. Grounded in the framework of power transition theory, neorealism, and technological determinism, this study investigates whether the current global system is undergoing a transition from unipolarity to multipolarity or a non-polar world. The United States has been the undisputed world leader for the past 3 decades since the Cold War. But then, opinion is divided on the U.S. lead; Some say the United States will remain a global hegemon for the foreseeable future, others say that we are headed for a new bipolar competition with China, and still others assert that we are living in the multipolar now, or at least it is tomorrow. To this effect, this academic research describes a new system that has never existed in the history of international relations "non-polar world". In addition, the research focuses on defining the concepts of "polarization", "international system", "Middle-powers", and explaining the forms and characteristics of polarization. Why has the shift toward global power become inevitable? How do digital technology, economic relations, and global geopolitics work? By integrating historical analysis with theoretical insight, this study contributes to ongoing debates on global power redistribution and the future of international stability. The findings underscore the need to re-evaluation of traditional IR paradigms considering the accelerating trend toward systemic change.

Keywords: Global Power Shift, China's Rise, US Hegemony, Middle Powers, Polarization, Giant Tech.



1 INTRODUCTION

The future of polarization and the issue of hegemony are evolving unexpectedly. It is becoming increasingly evident that the 21st century will not be defined solely by the actions of traditional superpowers but rather by the rising influence of middle powers and non-state actors, particularly multinational corporations. Technology giants such as Amazon, Alibaba Group Holdings Ltd, Tencent Holdings Ltd, Meta Platforms (especially Facebook, and X), Microsoft, Oracle, Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi Corporation, Alphabet, Uber, Zoom, Dell, SpaceX, and IBM are poised to reach their zenith in the era of artificial intelligence [1]. This shift is unlikely to fragment the world, but it will introduce new dimensions to international relations and the global order. The reader is then drawn to a fundamental question: How can the rise of middle powers and non-state actors affect geopolitical changes? Can the United States decline peacefully? Can China truly rise peacefully?

The discussion is deeply connected to the concepts of "balance of power" and "hegemony": It is not an exaggeration to say that removing "power" and "hegemony" from the study of international relations is akin to removing "money" and "banks" from the study of economics. Nations that accumulate more power and hegemony are the ones that shape the decisions within the international system. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the global order entered an unprecedented phase marked by the dominance of a single international power that exerted control over all aspects of the new world order. For the first time in the history of international relations (IR), a country witnessed the necessary structures like economic, military, political, and technological, to control the world. The post-Cold War international reality compelled all other actors within the global system to accept the U.S.-led unipolar order, regardless of their influence within it. There was a widespread acknowledgment of the United States' global power and hegemony [2]. However, three decades from now, headlines and statements are increasingly pointing to a shifting global system.

Historically, Western Europe has been at the forefront of international affairs, but since the latter half of the 20th century, the United States has taken the reins as the dominant global power. Although the European Union remains a significant

player on the world stage, emerging trends indicate a shift in the global balance of power toward East Asia. However, as humanity enters the 21st century, global power dynamics are evolving. The once unchallenged hegemony of the United States is gradually giving way to the rise of East Asia.

In this context, East Asia is the world's most vital economic hub, with China emerging as the primary rival to American dominance. China has rapidly built a foundation of economic, military, diplomatic, and technological muscle, becoming the world's largest exporter and surpassing the United States in key areas. Only over a decade (2013-2023), China has made remarkable progress in integrating itself into the global system through strategic endeavors such as the Belt and Road Initiative, expanding its geopolitical influence, and bolstering its industrial capacity. If these strategies continue unimpeded, then we will likely witness the clear emergence of Chinese hegemony on the global stage [3].

Essentially, the headlines are dominated by discussions of a shifting global order. The narrative of a relative decline in U.S. power and the rising influence of China, Russia, India, and other middle powers has become increasingly prevalent. Scholars are now investigating the possibility of a structural transition from a unipolar world dominated by a single superpower to a bipolar system with two leading states, or even a multipolar system with three or more dominant powers. In any case, the global landscape is far more complex than it was once. In this fragmented world order, middle powers, comprising both democratic and authoritarian states, navigate their alignments based on their unique circumstances and interests, sometimes aligning with the United States and China, or choosing an independent path. This fluidity forms multiple layers of influence and competition. As Professor Emma Ashford of Georgetown University aptly observes, "Yes, the world is multipolar, and this is not bad news for the United States, but it must learn to leverage multipolarity to its advantage"[4].

Hence, this article employs case studies to examine how and why certain middle powers such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, India, and South Korea are responding to the evolving international system, particularly in relation to global polarity and AI geopolitics. Historical analysis is used as a complementary method to trace the transformation of the international order from unipolarity toward potential non-polarity or multipolarity and to assess how technological change, especially in artificial intelligence, has influenced global power shifts. Accordingly, the article charts the evolution of U.S. global leadership from 1991 to the present and identifies key turning points at which the world order has shifted or been fundamentally challenged.

Is the global order shifting from U.S.-led unipolarity to multipolar or nonpolar systems, and what role do China and the BRICS play in shaping this transition? Consider the potential flashpoints: competition with China, confrontation with Russia, rising tensions with India, ideological strife in the Middle East and North Africa, the shadowy world of narcotics smuggling, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, and the imminent hazards of climate change and food insecurity. The challenges do not stop there; we also grapple with rampant inequality, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the emergence and assertiveness of middle powers, and the growing influence of non-state actors. In this tumultuous landscape, a significant shift in global power dynamics is unfolding, with the balance tipping decisively toward the Pacific, particularly Asia.

1.1 CONCEPTUALIZATION

Essentially, the concept of polarity in international relations refers to the presence of one or more major powers that dominate the international system. Powers with great potential are divided according to their era, geographical position, economic, and military capabilities. As "Prof. Goedele De Keersmaecker" defined, polarity was related to the number of major powers or polar powers. Here, the international system can be seen to have a desire for anarchy, where rules do not exist to control state behavior. When the nature of the system was "chaotic", it thus encouraged the state as an actor to act freely to increase its ability to become a great power. Then, the poles appear and are drawn according to their different positions [5].

The standard definition of polarity in previous and current literature is the distribution of capabilities among primary states with productive structures. Therefore, structural change can be considered in terms of the distribution of capabilities across the system units. However, it noted that the attempts to redefine polarization in the 21st century are controversial, as B. Zala [6] attempted to redefine polarization as "the number of states perceived as holding great social status/superpower at any given time". Whether or not we measure a power by material capabilities, it emphasizes the socio-cultural capabilities of great power, which can be shared with others outside itself [6].

In general, polarity manifests itself in three forms: unipolar (where one state is significantly stronger than others), bipolar (where two states have roughly equal power), and multipolar (where power is distributed among several actors). It is clearly seen that some scholars have a different definition of the concept of polarization, although the latter explanation is unclear as to how much equal position in bipolar and multipolar conditions [4].

In general, Scholars and policymakers have consistently expressed diverse and often contradictory views on polarization, resulting in little consensus within the IR literature on its definition or measurement. For that purpose, the only requirement is that the pole requires first-class latent potential such as; a strong economy, capacity for innovation,

favorable geography, relatively wealthy population, etc., in order to be able to expand and sustain its potential in terms of military power [7].

By this means, polarization is easy to describe but difficult to measure: military might and economic gigantism? Is it a metric of military expenditures and technological capabilities? Is it consolidating a culture of democracy or scientific innovation?

At any rate, considering the distribution of power among states, the discipline of international relations identifies three international systems: unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar. The core of the matter here is the “relative power of states”: the amount of power and ability required to influence the behavior of others determines the ranking of states in the international arena. The existence of a single power indicates a unipolar system, whereas rivalry between two powers indicates a bipolar system. In addition, the presence of many major powers represents a multipolar system. Despite the ongoing debate over the durability and stability of these systems, this article suggests that it is more appropriate to analyze these systems as an iterative cycle.

Further, and perhaps most importantly, the concept of polarity is frequently used by professionals in their public announcements. This applies equally to non-major powers because it applies to states that have the most to gain from depicting a hierarchical order that sits at the top. For example, Stephen Harper, who would later become Prime Minister of Canada, wrote in 2003 that “the world is now unipolar with only one superpower: Canada shares a continent with that superpower”, followed by Russia’s then president, Dmitry Medvedev, in 2008: “World it must be multipolar. Single polarity is unacceptable” [6].

Hence, we must also recognize the concept of “Global Order” as one of the most widespread in international relations, which is often used to characterize the balance of power, hierarchy, and “rules of the game” that pillar world politics. The global system is sometimes described in terms of its power and hegemony because some centers of power are more talented and wield more power and influence than others. In addition, there is a constant struggle between states for the position at the top of the pyramid. However, there is a “balance of power” that structures the world order and prevents this war and conflict from happening and turning it into complete chaos. “World order” can, therefore, sometimes also be described as the “public good,” in which stability and shared norms make the world safer and more predictable. Normally, all international units within this international system have the right to strive to increase the level of security and expand the extent of their interests because, as realists point out, the situation itself is inherently an “anarchic” space [8].

1.2 NEOREALISM IN THE AGE OF EMERGING POWERS

Neorealism, often referred to as structural realism, is a key theory in international relations that defines states’ behavior within an anarchic international system where no central authority exists. According to Kenneth Waltz, the founder of neorealism, states’ primary concern is their survival, and the distribution of power within the system determines state behavior.

As the world transitions from unipolarity to multipolarity or non-polarity, neorealism becomes particularly useful for analyzing strategic interactions between major and emerging powers:

Neorealists argue that states are rational actors, always resisting the maximization of their relative power to ensure their survival in a competitive environment. M. Poulshock [9] suggested that neorealism is well-suited to understanding how large and middle powers adapt to the uncertainties of a shifting global system. For example, the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia challenge the current unipolar order dominated by the United States, leading to new forms of competition and strategic maneuvering [9].

This constant power struggle, as described by neorealists, means that cooperation between states is usually temporary and driven by mutual opposition to a third-party threat. This is evident in the shifting alliances and partnerships, such as the United States and its Indo-Pacific allies’ response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. According to L. Borges and R. Lucena [7], China’s BRI is perceived to extend influence, prompting counter-strategies like the Indo-Pacific Framework aimed at balancing against Chinese power. Therefore, one of neorealism’s key concepts is the “security dilemma,” which refers to the idea that actions taken by a state to enhance its security, such as increasing military capabilities, can be perceived as threatening by other states [7].

This perception often leads to arms races or strategic countermeasures, which only heighten tensions and insecurity. For instance, China’s expanding influence in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East has led to increased collaboration among the United States, Japan, and India to counterbalance Chinese power. In addition, neorealism also highlights the importance of **relative gains**, which means that states are more concerned with how much power they gain compared to others rather than with absolute gains. This focus on relative gains often results in long-term conflict and rivalry, as states strive to prevent others from becoming too powerful.

Moreover, as the world shifts from a unipolar order dominated by the United States to a multipolar or even non-polar system, neorealism suggests that we will likely see increased instability. Emerging powers, such as China, India, and Russia, are vying for greater influence, while regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Brazil, are expanding their roles on the global stage. In this scenario, alliances will be fluid, and states will seek to balance against any actor that threatens to dominate.

Neorealists believe that **multipolarity** inherently carries a higher risk of conflict because of the greater number of major powers and shifting alliances. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War marked a transition from bipolarity to unipolarity, but the growing economic and military influence of China, combined with Russia's resurgence, signals a move toward a more multipolar system. This new global order is likely to be characterized by heightened competition, regional conflicts, and an ongoing struggle to establish a stable balance of power [10].

Finally, neorealism provides a compelling framework for comprehending the contemporary global power shifts, particularly as emerging powers like China challenge the dominance of designated powers like the United States. The theory highlights the structural constraints that shape state behavior and emphasizes the centrality of power dynamics in determining international relations. As we move toward a more multipolar world, neorealism's insights into the competitive and anarchic nature of global politics will remain essential for analyzing the challenges of maintaining stability in a rapidly changing international system.

1.3 POWER TRANSITION THEORY

Abramo Fimo Kenneth Organski (1923–1998), a prominent political science professor at the University of Michigan, is best known for formulating "Power Transition Theory," which he introduced in his creative 1958 work, *World Politics*. In Chapter 12 of the book, Organski pointed out the core principles of his theory, identifying population size, political competence, and the level of industrialization as the key factors that determine a nation's power, factors that, he notes, can evolve rapidly in the modern age. Among these, he emphasizes industrialization as particularly critical, asserting that it is not coincidental that leading global powers are typically industrialized nations. Nonetheless, he argues that industrialization alone is insufficient; a large population and an effective central government are also essential for a state to rise to great-power status.

Organski outlines three phases of power transition. The first, termed "Potential Power," characterizes nations with limited technical knowledge, low productivity, relatively stable populations, inefficient governance, and strong local allegiances. He cites India under British colonial rule and China during the "Century of Humiliation" as illustrative examples. The second phase, "Transitional Growth," involves rapid industrialization, rising productivity, urbanization, improved living standards, growing nationalism, and shifts in family structures, religion, and ideology. The final stage, "Power Maturity," describes a state that has reached advanced industrialization, high economic efficiency, and widespread recognition of its global status [11].

In this regard, Power transition theory seeks to clarify how international orders are falling apart through recourse to war. It assumes that whereas the powerful and satisfied states prefer to maintain the leadership of the international order, the weak and dissatisfied states prefer to challenge the dominant power as they become stronger against it. Therefore, the clash between the dominant and emerging powers would manifest, as the capabilities of the two powers are nearing parity [12].

In short, power transition theory (Organski's theory) focuses on the internal capacity of states to analyze their hierarchical status in the international system. Moreover, in Organski's theory, the power struggle between states is not a static dynamic because states' power and capacity could change over time. Accordingly, countries in the international system can be classified into dominant powers; great powers; middle powers; and weak states/colonies. According to this theory, the indicator points of the start of a power transition period between an already existing dominant power and a rising great power is the rising power's ability to reach 80% of the capacity of the dominant power [11].

As will be analyzed in the following sections, Power Transition Theory is useful for understanding moments of change within regional systems, the potential for conflict between dominant regional powers and their emerging counterparts, as well as the effects of shifts in global and regional power imbalances and changes in military and economic capabilities.

1. Unipolarity: U.S. Hegemonic Strategy in Fragmenting World Order

Unipolarity is the position in which one state is superior to others in terms of power and is dominant because it possesses a significant share of the power resources. In a unipolar system, the existence of multiple states is possible, and hegemony is unrivaled in the international arena. This is because hegemony has a power level that other states cannot match. Even when several states are together, they cannot compete with a single dominant power [5]. The position of the United States in the post-Cold War period is an example of unipolarity. With the collapse of the USSR in (1991), the bipolar system was disrupted by the disappearance of competition between the United States and the USSR. As a result, the United States became the dominant power with the greatest economic, political, military, and technological resources.

Noticeably, the debate and questioning of the “unipolar” moment emerged after the end of the Cold War and began systematically after 9/11, gradually other global and regional events such as the global financial crisis (2008), the rise of Chinese hegemony, the shadow of continuity Russia's dominance of Eastern Europe, exhaustion from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the increase in the number of Middle-Power forces, and many other factors such as the coronavirus and the war in Ukraine have made it a common topic of debate among international analysts.

According to some scholars, especially proponents of hegemonic stability theory, a unipolar system is the most stable and sustainable system that can withstand peace because openness and international economic stability occur more when there is one dominant state. After the Cold War, the advantage of absolute US power means no significant source of tension and conflict. When the United States dominates and leads the international system, no other major power is in a position to pursue any policy to rely on over the United States in a war or protracted rivalry. This automatically makes the unipolar system appear more stable [13]. This indicates that in such a case, other forces do not want to challenge hegemony because hegemonic power can direct any conflict between them, so a unipolar system appears more sustainable and peaceful.

On the other hand, the concept of unipolarity encompasses much more than that there is only one great power that is stronger than any other; Rather, as B. Hansen [14] lays out, this refers to a series of international dynamics that are specifically tied to unipolarity for power regulation, including specific effects on patterns of conflict and cooperation. The argument here is that: “Unipolarity” encourages “kicking” and hard work; it is a relatively strong global order, but there is no guarantee that it will continue. Unipolarity is uniquely positioned to disseminate its political model and set the international agenda [14].

At the end of the post-Cold War, US international policy has embodied free market capitalism and liberal democracy until the last moments of its decline. However, other states may benefit from the unipolar direction of world affairs; they may liberally or grudgingly try to exhaust the unipolar for the sake of their political position or to entrap it.

An illustration of this is, that the U.S. seeks to remain hegemony and maintain its role in the global jigsaw for the 21st century. As well as the U.S resists having influence on the pattern of events and international outcomes, the road for the USA is not paved with flowers. Perhaps the United States' efforts to remain unipolar are so late that the world is going through a distorted multipolarity and we find the United States within the United States because of its internal problems!

It is important to note that in the unipolar world system, the health of the global system is largely determined by the actions of the unipolar:

When the United States invested in the international system and acted as a flexible and enthusiastic single pole, high cooperation and economic prosperity occurred. When ignorance of certain human security issues occurred in the U.S., they became vulnerable to terrorism, and the resulting unilateral action contributed to the decline of the United States and, to some extent, made the international system more unstable. Additionally, Nuclear proliferation, the rise of China, ideologically armed groups in the Middle East, energy market instability, global warming, and environmental threats are also problems that the United States has struggled to deal with throughout the first quarter of the 21st century. All these problems just came at the wrong time. but it is important to note that sudden changes in US military action have not contributed to solving these problems. By spending hundreds of billions of dollars on an “unnecessary war” in the Middle East, US actions exacerbated its own security issues and diminished its ability to manage the global system in other areas.

However, despite these disadvantages, as P. Russell [15] pointed out; Unipolarity at its peak is the most effective system for reducing sources of conflict between states and providing a “better” world. Some problems arise when the unipolar is threatened by non-state actors, but the hope is that the unipolar has created an international community strong enough to hold its own. Even so, in a bipolar or multipolar world that begins with a relative shift in global hegemony and the possibility of ideological divisions, still great powers like China and Russia are hardly equipped to deal with the human security issues that lead to violence by non-state actors. Although a shift from unipolarity is guaranteed in the future, US unipolarity has laid the foundation for a more cooperative and collaborative international community that can hopefully stabilize future bipolar or multipolar relations [15].

In 2008, Fareed Zakaria wrote the book “The Post America's World,” which, as he stated, is not about the decline of the United States but about the rise of everyone else, which will lead to a shift in global dynamics. Thus, Farid's important work begins in the era we have now reached. Following the success of his best-selling book “The Future of Freedom”, he describes with equal prescient a world in which America no longer dominates the global economy, regulates geopolitics, or suppresses cultures. Therefore, Farid "sees the rise of growth in countries like China, India, Brazil, Russia, and many others as a great story of our time and one that will reshape the world." This economic growth produces a combination of political confidence, national pride, and the possibility of international trouble [16]. How can the United States understand and thrive in this rapidly changing international climate?

Furthermore, one of the less frequently discussed issues is the distribution of power to other actors, or more precisely, “power erosion.” This power diffusion may present a greater challenge for the United States than for China. As Professor

Joseph Nye explained, power in the information age is akin to a complex three-dimensional chess game: at the top level is unipolar military power, where the United States is likely to maintain a long-term lead. However, the middle level concerns interstate relations, and the bottom level involves transnational forces beyond government control. At this base level, power has dispersed to such an extent that we can no longer speak in terms of unipolarity, multipolarity, or hegemony. Most contemporary issues cannot be resolved militarily but require the cooperation of networks. While these powerful networks and individuals pose challenges for all governments, the American culture of openness and innovation continues to sustain the United States as a central power in the world.

Nye [17] does not deny the relative collapse in US power, but the American era is not over, and we have not entered the post-American world. Calling the 21st century the century of American decline may be inaccurate and misleading. Therefore, any attempt to assess US strength in the next few decades should not be exaggerated because there are several futures, not just one. Substitutes are pregnant with many accidents, misjudgments, and human options [17].

2. Assumption Testing: Do Bipolarity Promote Global Stability More Than Other Systems?

One of the great debates in the study of international conflict; It is the link between the polarization of an international system and the outbreak of war. This debate centers on whether bipolarity or multipolarity is more likely to lead to war.

Various scholars of international relations and experts of great power politics often point out that the competition between the United States and China is a key issue that will shape the 21st-century world order. Harsh competition between the two greatest economies of the world has already begun and escalated in recent years:

A bipolar system is a power polarization in which capabilities are so distributed that the two dominant hostile powers are stronger than the other actors, to the extent that it gives the dominant powers autonomy in defending themselves. In bipolarity, most or all states in the system are tightly clustered into two political categories, with high levels of mutual hostility, and very few or no states play a moderate or cross-cutting role. In the perfect form of an extreme bipolar split into two opposing clusters or blocks, the members of each block are all closer to each other, and they are all further away from any member of the other cluster [5].

Bipolarity usually refers to a situation in which there are two dominant powers in the international system, each with a relatively weak coalition support bloc. while "multipolarity" refers to an opposite situation in which more than two powers play dominant roles in the international system. Additionally, there are arguments and counter-arguments, for example, some scholars believe that a multipolar world is freer and more peaceful than a bipolar system:

First, in a bipolar world, all conflicts involve the peoples of one side against those of the other, such that each side appears to be the enemy of the other. In a multipolar world, interaction patterns increase in complexity and variety. An enemy on one issue may become an ally on another. Therefore, cross-cutting and underlying pressures reduce the likelihood of escalating unrelenting hostilities.

Second, as the number of poles increases, each actor (state) will have to divide its attention among more because there will be more poles. This divide in attention makes the escalation of an arms race less likely [18].

According to Keenth Waltz, the pioneer of the theory of neorealism (structural realism), the key factor in international relations is the polarization of the system in order to dominate the system. Is it unipolar, bipolar, or several great power? Waltz counters the argument that multipolarity is a more stable system than bipolarity. In fact, the main idea about war proposed by structural realism is that bipolar war is better than multipolar war. Therefore, their argument is that by noting the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union as an era of a bipolar system, he says that the ability to strike both poles and the military dominance of the two powers prevented any possible attack to control extremists in their camps, for example, what the United States did against Britain and France when they seized the Suez Canal in 1956.

Therefore, the result of this two- restraint; It was a relatively peaceful period of the Cold War despite high tensions. Waltz also addresses the issue of divided attention, but says that as the number of poles increases, divided attention leads to miscalculations and therefore increases the likelihood of war, because states may believe they have the ability to coerce or occupy another state. They have thoughts [6]. Consequently, the military balance established during the period (1945-1989) based on conflicting ideologies was able to protect the world from a world war between the great powers, instead some conflict and alternative wars in separate regions that the poles used to serve their interests.

Thus, a bipolar system has several characteristics:

First, there is an ideological conflict between the two poles, one representing Western capitalist thought advocated by the United States and communist and socialist thought led by the Soviet Union, which divides the world into two ideas.

Second, it created two different systems, two different poles, and two military alliances; The first was the Western bloc led by the United States and Western Europe, which was called NATO, and the Eastern bloc was led by the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which became known as the Warsaw Pact. The arms race between the two poles was a prominent

feature, and their possession of devastating nuclear power contributed to preventing the outbreak of direct war between them.

Third, the wide geographical distance and lack of direct proximity between the two poles helped to prevent a direct war between them, but proxy wars emerged in other areas where the poles indirectly worked on [19].

Accordingly, the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989. The so-called “New International System” is the American order in place. However, the US experience in the first quarter of the 21st century appears to be a kind of “anxiety about the world” or a decline in the US role, especially in the Middle East. On the other hand, the desire of the United States to maintain its universal hegemony is not hidden, which wants to run the world system in the 21st century.

When the United States declared victory in 1990, it said, "The Cold War is over. We have won." In essence, this US-led unipolar international system is based on a massive technological revolution based on intensive knowledge and Western capitalist centers. It has its own culture, and the political and social face of such a system changes global finance.

A decade later, the United States exploited the events of September 11, 2001. George W. Bush Jr.'s administration promoted the discourse that American wars in the region were aimed at promoting democracy and defending human rights. President Bush began his famous speech, "Anyone who is not with us is against us," a statement that clearly expressed Washington's intention to extend its influence in the world, especially in the Arab region, under the slogan of confronting dictatorship and terrorism, and it showed the reason for its existence [13].

The events of September 11, 2001, the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, and the conflict in Gaza in 2023 compelled us to revisit some of the ideas proposed by Samuel Huntington in his seminal work, *The Clash of Civilizations*. Huntington posits that the world's most significant post-Cold War conflicts were not driven by ideology or economics but were instead rooted in cultural differences. He argued that nations express their identities through language, art, religion, and other cultural markers.

According to Huntington, the forces of globalization and integration are paradoxically creating counterforces that resist Western cultural dominance. He makes a critical distinction between modernization and Westernization, asserting that the adoption of Western goods does not necessarily equate with the acceptance of Western values. Thus, the democratic wave that was celebrated at the end of the Cold War did not promote universal (specifically American) values. Instead, it provided a platform for diverse cultures to assert themselves, often through electoral processes, as seen in numerous democratization efforts in the Global South, where strong anti-Western nationalist movements emerged.

Huntington suggests that for global security to be achieved, a multicultural global society must be embraced rather than one based on Western imperialism. While he acknowledges that the Western world has gained from the East, he contends that it is the Islamic and Eastern worlds that have shown reluctance to adopt the core principles of Western democracy [20].

Consequently, the result of the differences between the two civilizations was the collapse of the World Trade Center towers in New York on 9/11, which signals an attack on Western economic and financial values. In addition, during the Ukraine war, the collapse of Ukraine and the spending of trillions of dollars by the United States and Europe occurred. In the Gaza war, Palestinians in Gaza and Israeli Jews have fought over the sanctity of the land and cultural and religious differences, resulting in a multi-front war in the Middle East.

In light of this tension in the international arena and the new rise of global powers wishing to change the current form of the world order, war zone expansion is expected. This dynamic will not be limited to Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, and Arab countries include the south-east of Asia, i.e., China, Taiwan, and the two Koreas, and this in turn moves allied powers such as the United States and Britain to shift their agenda from the European powers, raising the possibility of another major war on the European stage.

We have all witnessed nearly three years of the Ukrainian war. When the war broke out in February 2022, the United States and Europe supported it, followed by other countries such as Canada, France, and Greece. Other countries, such as Turkey and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, also adopted a pragmatic and utilitarian stance that sought gains on both sides. Noticeably, the war between Russia and the West in Ukraine is not an ordinary war between two states; it is a war between two different continents, two different worldviews with completely different views on the directing of the world system:

In the fifty years after World War II, it became fairly easy to understand the world. At first, there were two great powers or factions, one collapsed from within, and the other, the United States, claimed victory. The success of the United States produced several theories of its own, the best known being two theorists, Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama. Indeed, Fukuyama preceded Huntington in publishing his understanding, which predicted the end of history in 1992. Although Fukuyama did not claim that humanity would reach a moment of heights and prosperity, but rather that the world would be settled in a single political model, the model of liberal democracy, he also claimed that with the victory of America, the wars and ideological conflicts would end. Did it happen later? According to everyone, “No”.

As Kupchan [21] analyzed, bipolar is no longer coming back—it's here, and it's here to stay for the foreseeable future. Today's news is dominated by U.S.-China relations, indicating recognition of today's bipolar system and China continuing to fill in the gaps in the economic sphere. The effects of this bipolarity have deepened exponentially as elites in Washington and Beijing have become aware of the new global structure and are acting accordingly. Structures and beliefs amplify each other. Because the world can be split into two poles. That prediction is strengthened for the current situation of increased Chinese hegemony, as the balance or competition between China and the United States in the economic arena occurs much more than in the more dangerous military arena. The term "cold peace" best captures such a system; The situation will typically be calm, but there will be no warm solidarity or togetherness at all. Nationalist views in both the United States and China present the possibility of a threat to stability expected by the bipolar states, primarily through the specter of military conflict over Taiwan. However, this threat is vastly over-hyped, and nuclear predictability and deterrence would likely stop an invasion and maintain cold peace.

In a bipolar status between the United States and China, competition will be much greater in the economic arena, which is more dangerous than in the military. However, bipolarity will spur a Chinese review of key economic arenas, with direct implications for geopolitics and corporations. According to Charless Kupchan's perspective, bipolarism, nuclear weapons, and elite beliefs are the main drivers of state policies [21]. In fact, nuclear weapons and the influence of the views of prominent elites are the engines of geopolitical games.

3. The Rise of Multipolarity

An obscure academic term is suddenly back as fashion in international affairs: multipolarity, that is, the idea that there are many prominent global powers, not just one or a few. This is being touted as the future by leaders, CEOs, and pundits. At such a moment, the middle powers are gaining more importance and are being questioned according to their economic production, cultural, and geopolitical positions, such as South Korea, India, Malaysia, Russia, Singapore, Brazil, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Egypt, and many other countries that are relatively indifferent to what the U.S. thinks and says. On the one hand, they are allies of the U.S., but on the other hand, they sign major strategic alliances with China. On Saturday, they will support Europe, but the next Saturday, they will shake hands with Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping!

Is the world becoming more multipolar? If so, how can U.S. policymakers best address the characteristics of the emerging international environment to advance U.S. interests? Some believe that we now live in a multipolar world while asserting that multipolarity does not render the United States powerless, but as S. G Brooks & W. C. Wohlforth [22] mentioned that this can be a blessing to U.S. policymakers. By using multipolarity to its advantage, the administration can advance U.S. security and preserve America's global role. Americans should not be afraid of multipolarity; It should be embraced.

In a multipolar world system, or balance of power, several political entities coexist, none of which is strong enough to dominate the others. These entities often have conflicting domestic philosophies and practices, yet they seek neutral rules to govern their interactions and minimize conflict. Unlike a world dominated by one or two superpowers, in which a single entity or a pair of entities wield decisive influence, a multipolar system operates through a balance of power among multiple centers. This balance helps prevent armed conflicts by deterring any country from expanding its military and weapons capabilities to a point that would disrupt this equilibrium and threaten global stability. This is achieved through the formation of alliances with weaker states that might otherwise disrupt the global balance or through the signing of international treaties that bind all parties to rules that preserve international order.

For example, Europe experienced stability under the balance of power system from the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) until 1889. This period represents a rare era of relative peace in human history, which can be attributed to the balance of power among nations. However, when one or more countries began to amass unchecked power within the multipolar system, the threat of war emerged. The outbreak of two world wars further disrupted this balance and led to the collapse of the global system [19].

In contrast to those who advocate a stable world in a unipolar era, another view, the exact opposite, argues that the liberal world order is unstable and on the verge of crisis it is based solely on the hegemony of the U.S. and its allies. According to this view, the unipolar model does not seem to have any historical chance, so the unipolar system will be undermined by emerging power centers such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the increasing role of non-state actors. Advocates of multipolarity are also skeptical of the efficiency of the rules of the game implied by the liberal model. As an alternative, they see a multipolar (multi-centric) world, providing an equal partnership global society, with the United Nations and other international institutions ensuring its democratic nature [8].

The debates over the interpretation of the small poles and the middle powers seemed pointless from the beginning, but the stakes increased, and the middle poles and international firms dominated the game. US President Joe Biden's strategy of containing China may well be possible in a bipolar world where Washington and its allies control the lion's share of economic and military power. However, in a multipolar world, the U.S. risks becoming increasingly isolated from the middle powers. The Biden administration's strategy, which relied on U.S.-Chinese competition- is deeply out of step with the emerging realities of global politics.

The signs of saying "Welcome to a multipolar world" at dawn are many: the share of the global economy controlled by the two blocs of Washington and Moscow, which formed separate alliances, was 88 percent of global GDP in 1950; However, by 2023, these countries will account for only 57 percent of global GDP [4]. This means that power has spread elsewhere, away from the superpowers, toward several capable and dynamic middle powers that will help shape the international environment in the coming decades.

Since the Biden administration, the U.S. has been attempting to replicate Cold War strategies, focusing on containing China's rise while relying on the strength of its allies and partners to offset America's diminishing power. This approach was effective during the bipolar era, when the U.S. and its allies successfully countered Soviet hegemony. However, in today's multipolar world, this strategy is risky. The Biden administration has formed fragile partnerships based on the lowest common interests among U.S. allies, who also maintain significant economic, diplomatic, and cultural ties with Beijing and Moscow. Consequently, U.S. efforts to mobilize countries against China are unlikely to succeed.

The war in Ukraine illustrates this issue: countries willing to cooperate with the U.S. against China have often been less inclined to support the U.S. stance on Ukraine. For instance, India, a key component of the U.S. strategy in the Indian Ocean, continues to import energy and arms from Russia, trade with Iran, and support the Myanmar military, all actions contrary to U.S. policies [23]. In Europe, Germany remains a significant trading partner of Beijing while collaborating closely with the U.S. on Ukraine.

Because the U.S. has robust influence over the global economy, it can use the economic card to punish other countries without worrying too much about what they might do in response. If China tries to invade Taiwan and the US imposes sanctions on China from that distance, Beijing will surely seek economic retaliation. But the strongest economic arrow in the quiver would not have caused much damage. China could, as many have feared, sell some or all of its large holdings in U.S. Treasury securities in an attempt to raise borrowing costs from the United States. However, the Fed can only buy securities if it buys all of them. As economist Brad Setser puts it, "Ultimately the United States holds the high cards here: The Fed is the only actor in the world that can buy and sell more than China" [22].

Humanity has witnessed the destruction of the bipolar system, followed by the so-called unipolar system, and now the global system is becoming multipolar. In fact, the global system features at least three major poles of equilibrium: The United States, the European Union, and the China-dominated Pacific Rim. Additionally, countries and groups such as Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa, which are part of BRICS, aspire to play a central and deceive role in global politics. Today, Russia and China share similar views on international politics, and their respective strengths and political they do not align with the Pax NATO plan in which the Americans propose to remain unipolar.

According to M. B. Sarsenov and D. S. Raev [24], the fundamental flaws of the unipolar (pyramidal) model of the modern world system are evident; Many states around the world would not accept a role as subordinate entities, and unipolar strategists often underestimate these countries based on key parameters of national strength, such as nuclear capability, territory, economic capacity, and population. Despite the United States' unique position, no country, including the U.S., has sufficient resources to act as a "global policeman" in a unipolar world. Furthermore, the unipolar model contradicts many significant, long-term trends in global development that are not influenced by short-term political situations. The major changes in the modern world since the early 21st century, including the rise of democracy and globalization, were originally expected to foster a global culture under a unipolar framework.

The global system holds a significant position in world politics, underpinned by the indisputable fact that it is in a constant state of flux. The emergence of this system is fundamentally linked to the influence of great powers. As the system evolves, these powers, along with other actors, leverage their institutions to assert greater dominance and shape the changes within the system.

In general, there are many signs that the world is moving toward a new order. Here are five of them:

The first indicator is the current disrupted scene of global dynamics .The first quarter of the 21st century is over, and China has not yet said, "I have come to replace the United States," but it has surpassed the West in economic, trade, and diplomatic relations in the Middle East, North Africa, and elsewhere. In addition, amid new global developments such as the Russia-Ukraine war, the global financial crisis, geopolitical changes in the region, the U.S. economic global sanctions, and the decline of the role of the U.S., African puzzles against Western colonialism, the dominance of thousands of international companies and organizations, the consequences of artificial intelligence on human fate, the spread of inequality, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the ongoing Middle East tragicomedy tensions. All of this points to the inevitable arrival of a new world order, and these developments point to the real beginning of the formation of the new world order, and the current order that Washington is working on, and fighting for its survival at the top of the pyramid, no longer exists. The political map of the world has seen changes with the emergence of new countries that did not exist.

Second, the dynamics of political geography are shifting due to the distribution of human and natural resources across countries. This shift results in geographical expansion at the expense of some nations, moving toward political and

economic relations that align more closely with national interests. In this context, regional powers find greater opportunities to exert influence, whereas traditional powers see their roles diminished. An example of this is Iran's increasing influence in the Middle East, where it supports armed ideological groups in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Third, our world is witnessing the emergence of various alliances, blocs, and groupings of countries during the Ukraine war, which will eventually determine the characteristics of the new world order. In contrast, current alliances such as NATO have reduced their role in direct conflict and war. The United Nations has also reduced its role to mere condemnation.

Fourth, the emergence of understanding between new actors on the new world map, after the world witnessed a unipolar state that was about to be left alone in leading the world. This is due to the decisions of the United States, as well as the imposition of sanctions and the darkening of cultural boundaries both in the Americas and between Asia and the United States.

Fifth, as C. Faraj Allah [25] emphasized, the global economic system based on the great hegemony of one currency (Dollar) is slowly moving toward a local currency and a new basket of currencies; Some of the newly formed groups, blocs, and coalitions do not deal in dollars among themselves.

As a result, the U.S. can no longer maintain its position as the only global power, and its core interests in all regions are threatened. In particular, in the Middle East, US hegemony is declining. Contrary to US diplomatic wishes; China and Russia are using their powerful BRICS grouping, regional alliances such as Iran, Turkey, and armed-ideological groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to strengthen Russia's plans and undermine U.S. and NATO hegemony in the world. Although the end of this unipolar world order does not equal the end of the U.S. in all spheres, it only demands Russia and China to destroy the unipolar world order and replace it with a multipolar system globally and peacefully.

4. Order in Disorder: Discussing a Non-Polar World as a New Global Paradigm

Professor Joseph Nye, in his book "Is the American Century Over?", believes that there have been two major shifts in power in the 21st century: the erosion of power and shift in power from West to East, the flow of power from governments to non-state actors, as a result of the global information revolution, is not likely to end US centralization of the global balance of power in the next thirty years it is deeper, exposing East and West to several cross-border issues, while weakening the ability of governments to address several major problems such as drugs, climate change, terrorism, and so on. J. Nye [17] pointed out that the idea of "erosion of power" can be viewed as reflecting the decline or weakening of traditional forms of power (especially hard power) and the shift toward more complex and multi-dimensional power structures. This erosion can occur due to various factors, such as Globalization, Technological Change, Economic Shifts, and Domestic Challenges.

The rise of troubling phenomena, including the growing Chinese hegemony, the ascendance of middle powers, the increasing influence of non-state actors, and the rapid spread of artificial intelligence, coupled with the evolving geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East as strategic crossroads for great powers, has led to significant shifts in global order. A century has passed, yet the world has failed to resolve the Kurdish issue in the Middle East, has made no tangible progress on the Palestinian problem, and has not succeeded in fostering even a handful of stable democracies in the region. Consequently, the concept of a world free from polarity or a post-polar world has become a central topic of discussion. This world aligns neither with a unipolar system, nor a bipolar system, nor a multipolar system, nor even any combination of these:

Significantly, an increasing number of researchers and strategists claim that we are moving toward a "non-polar world." We must not forget that Richard Haass first introduced this concept in 2008. Haass, an American diplomat, served as Chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations from 2003 to 2023, a prominent independent and nonpartisan organization in the United States dedicated to the study of U.S. foreign policy. He was previously director of Policy Planning for the U.S. State Department and a close adviser to Secretary of State Colin Powell during George W. Bush administration.

In an article entitled "Living in a Non-Polar World" published in 2008, Haass argued that today's world is not dominated by one, two, or even several powers but by dozens of state and non-state actors exercising various forms of power. He warned that such a non-polar world would become increasingly dangerous unless important steps were taken to shape it. According to Haass, there are three key reasons for this shift:

- Some states have gained power alongside their increasing economic influence.
- Globalization has weakened the role of all states by enabling other parties to mobilize substantial power.
- U.S. foreign policy has accelerated America's relative decline compared to others.

More than a decade before the U.S. administration faced significant failures in the Middle East, R. Haass [26] warned U.S. decision-makers in 2008 that more efforts were needed to prevent state failure and deal with its consequences. He argued that the U.S. and other developed nations should enhance their military capabilities to address the types of threats

they faced in Iraq and Afghanistan and recruit a pool of civilian talent to assist with primary nation-building tasks. Greater economic and military cooperation is also essential to increase states' capacity to fulfill their responsibilities to their citizens and neighbors [26].

Therefore, the emergence of a non-polar world could have more negative consequences, making it more difficult to build collective responses to pressing regional and global challenges. More decision-makers make it harder to make decisions. Non-polar world or depolarization also increases both the number and potential severity of threats, whether they originate from rogue states, terrorist groups, or militias.

Furthermore, the prediction of a non-polar world does not return to the Biden administration. Rather, more than a decade ago; As evidence of this, the U.S. President Barack Obama presented his political agenda at the beginning of his term as a means of "making this 21st century a new American century," but later said during a six-day trip to Europe in May 2011, "Western leadership must adapt it to the reality of the new world"[27]. In this way, Obama has joined what appears to be a consensus among politicians and academics, in different parts of the world, that the transfer of wealth and power from Western countries to Eastern and Southern countries has reached an irreversible level.

On the economic front, Ben S. Bernanke, the former Chairman of the Federal Reserve (2006-2014), announced in a landmark speech in November 2010 that the GDP of emerging economies had surged by 41% in the second quarter of 2010 compared to previous levels. Notably, China experienced a 70% increase, while India saw a rise of approximately 55%. In contrast, GDP growth in advanced economies is limited to only 5%. Emerging economies weathered the economic crisis with relative ease, whereas the effects on developed countries were disastrous [28].

This indicates that as the world enters the 21st century, the financial crisis in Western countries has become an undeniable issue. Western countries were forced, under pressure from debt problems, to reduce the size of their militaries and arms spending, while developing countries, especially in Asia and the Middle East, tended to use their economic power to bolster military capacity, especially through huge arms contracts.

Frankly, the fact is that the "World Order" is changing; however, what does the system undergo? First, "Order" refers to an organized arrangement or a set of principles and norms that govern interactions within a particular context. In international relations, it often describes the structured and stable arrangement of power, norms, rules, and institutions that guide state behavior and global interactions. At the same time, "World order" refers to the overall structure and principles that govern global relations and the distribution of power among states and other global actors. By this means, the world order encompasses the norms, rules, institutions, and values that shape international conduct [19].

Nevertheless, the concept of the international system was previously proposed when states were the only actors in the system. However, later, when the international environment expanded, the role of middle powers emerged and non-state actors increased. Thus, the name changed to the global system. However, what about a time when the world has become backward, permanent alliances have disappeared, and human and technological phenomena have permeated every corner of the planet?

Antonio Guterres's special speech at the 2024 Davos was very poignant. The UN Secretary-General has warned that the world must now act in the face of the serious and even existential dangers posed by climate change and the development of artificial intelligence without guardrails. Perhaps one sign of the so-called non-polar world is Guterres's inconclusive cries, as he said "We have no effective global strategy to deal with climate change and the consequences of artificial intelligence." Geopolitical divisions prevent us from rallying around global solutions" [29].

It is clearer that the classical economic powers and rivals of Western hegemony, China and Russia, are the ones who require a "multipolar world", but beyond there is the Middle East, which accurately shows us the non-polar world in which each actor expands its range of power, "no matter what America want!":

In just the period (2014 to 2024), Qatar has become the world's largest exporter of natural gas and is in a position to replace the United States in many areas. Qatar is considered an alternative to Russia as a gas supplier to Europe. The country that seems to hold most of the cards and has the ability to secure releases and ceasefires in the Gaza war is not the U.S., but Qatar. What was supposed to be the last U.S. act to domesticate the Middle East and isolate Iran through the Abrahamic agreements now seems short-sighted! The UAE has expanded its economic power by supplying gold and maneuvers from Red Sea ports to the African coast, building stronger ties on the continent, providing weapons and money to militia forces in Sudan and establishing supply routes in Chad. As a provider of financial services to the world, it serves as a valuable weak link in the chain of sanctions against Russia.

Saudi Arabia, under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, is also repositioning its role as the religious and paternalistic sponsor of the Muslim world for something more glamorous and lucrative, moving toward influence through popular culture; After the World Cup in Qatar in 2022, it has attracted big football names to its domestic tournaments, and is investing heavily in tourism and luxury living abroad [30]. History marches on, and the nature of what constitutes (another) the new world order will be determined far beyond Washington, DC, London, and Geneva. The middle powers can choose and fold their horses as they wish.

Again, Richard Haas rewrites an article in Foreign Affairs in 2022 warning the United States against dealing carefully with the many threats that will define this decade (2020-2030). Boldly, it will become more prevalent in economics. So far, there has been no major replacement for the dollar as the world's de facto reserve currency, but that day may come, especially if Washington continues to weaponize the dollar through the imposition of ongoing sanctions, especially those targeting central banks.

According to R. Haas [31], if a rival currency emerges, the U.S. would lose its ability to borrow at low rates and inflate its way out of its massive debt, currently over \$30 trillion. This debt threatens to crowd out productive government spending as the cost of servicing it rises with interest rates. However, financial prudence should be combined with a more assertive approach to trade, which ideally means joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and guaranteeing newly announced frameworks in India, the Pacific and the US so as to lower barriers to trade in goods and services, set standards for data and deal with climate change in a meaningful way.

Ultimately, however, the greatest threat to U.S. security in the next decade is to be found in America itself. A country divided against itself cannot stand; Nor can it be effective in the world because a divided America is not seen as a reliable or predictable partner or leader. Nor can it face domestic challenges. Bridging the divides in the country will require sustained efforts by politicians, educators, religious leaders, and parents.

This suggests that the U.S. is experiencing a deep domestic crisis. In 2008, the global financial crisis, triggered by the collapse of Lehman Brothers and other issues, was eventually absorbed and overcome by the West. However, today's challenges are mounting on multiple fronts, and the failure to effectively address these dangers could lead to severe consequences. As Richard Haas describes, America may soon find itself grappling not only with a new world order but also with internal divisions that threaten its stability. In such scenarios, traditional norms and behaviors may become difficult to enforce, leaving it up to voters to hold politicians accountable for their actions. Some necessary changes, such as expanding civic education and national service opportunities, could be institutionalized to address these challenges.

What would Henry Kissinger have said about such a situation? With his century of life behind him, few individuals have left as significant an impact on world history as Kissinger did. Even in 2023, at the age of 100, he made a notable visit to China. Kissinger's insights on international relations and U.S. foreign policy, particularly his views on the Middle East during the 1970s, continue to resonate today.

Kissinger takes a different view of China's rise, arguing that China should not be seen as a nation-state like the European countries that emerged in the last century. Because China is considered a civilized entity and a comprehensive continental power, it embodies the continent.

Therefore, Kissinger believes that the relationship between China and the United States is essential for achieving world peace and stability. Leaders must realize that neither country can impose its control and hegemony on the other and that conflict between them will only cause great exhaustion of their societies, in addition to undermining the chances of world peace [27].

To mitigate extreme global chaos and restore balance in the international system, political leaders must assume the critical responsibility of shielding the world from the dangers inherent in historic transitions. Humanity must unite around collective solutions, especially as we face the challenges of the AI era. In a world overflowing with goods and technologies, we must ask: What is the fate of humanity? The answers to these pressing questions will be explored in the next chapter, which delves into the dynamics of power confrontations and the rise of Chinese hegemony in the 21st century.

1.4 THE RISE OF MIDDLE POWERS: RECALIBRATING GLOBAL HEGEMONY IN A POST-UNIPOLAR ERA

The lack of universally standard definitions for middle and great powers is a common issue in international relations theory, as invariably outlined by the relevant literature. This is because there is little in-depth research on emerging middle powers. It is often common to define great powers as countries with permanent seats on the UN Security Council, such as China, France, Russia, Britain, and the United States. These countries impose economic, political, and military hegemony on the world. The middle powers are the influential states that sit below the great powers. They can be instrumental in forming new multilateralism to help address global challenges. Middle powers, which have long played a critical role in international innovation and mediation, can be key to realizing global solutions, just as they can play the opposite role.

E. Jordan [32] believes that the middle powers are those states that are neither large nor small in terms of international power, ability, and influence, showing their desire for unity and stability in the world system. Despite these classification problems, a consensus has been reached that states such as Australia, Canada, Norway, and Sweden are middle powers. However, this consensus on the identification of middle power is undermined by the recent inclusion of states such as Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Malaysia, South Africa, and Turkey in the middle-power category. However, these groupings

of states, like Brazil and Canada or South Africa and Sweden, together raise the issue of the importance of recognizing the concept of central power and force and complicate the analysis of the concept of central forces.

At the Davos 2024 summit, a panel entitled "Middle Powers in a Multipolar World." Among the panelists, Dino Pati Djalal, founder and president of the Indonesian Foreign Policy Society, was a speaker. He said:

" I think in the 21st century, the world order will be shaped not by superpowers or great powers but by the proliferation of middle powers, middle powers across all regions of the world more than ever, each with their size, ambition, and resources to play a bigger role. This is a significant geopolitical development. I think the less the middle powers are attached to the big powers, the better the structure of world affairs in my view" [29].

Thus far, in the middle-power literature, much attention has been paid to the "institutional" middle powers such as the BRICS, which generally face economic, military, cultural, religious, and political challenges to the world order. Since the events of the Arab Spring (2011), Iran and Turkey have taken advantage of the situation in the region to rebel and defy the current unipolar order itself. Taking advantage of the new reorganization of local authority. In particular, it focuses on Iran's and Turkey's struggles to gain regional hegemony.

A new model has emerged in the Middle East; Very small countries in terms of population and geographical area but very influential regionally and globally, such as Qatar and the UAE, as well as middle powers that actively participate in shaping regional security and the global market, such as Saudi Arabia. According to the United Nations Database on International Trade, China's imports from Saudi Arabia in 2023 totaled US\$64.36 billion [33]. Saudi Arabia's daily oil production will exceed 10 million barrels per day by 2024 (OPEC's largest oil producer), while it is in active talks with Beijing to sell part of its oil sales to China in yuan. In 2024, BRICS News wrote: "Saudi Arabia now sells oil in multiple currencies, including Euro, Yen, and Yuan, instead of only in US dollars" [34].

This move would undermine the dominance of the U.S. dollar in the global oil market, a seismic that would shift the direction of the world's highest crude oil levels toward Asia. Although Saudi Arabia began negotiations with China on oil contracts to deal in yuan before the outbreak of the coronavirus, the decision to sell oil in its local currency or yuan is official. The Saudis were dissatisfied with decades of US security commitments to defend the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Conflicts in Yemen, the Syrian quagmire, and Iranian dominance in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. Energy security and the growing hegemony of China and Russia in Iraq. Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) for the West's handling of Iran's nuclear weapons issue. Turkey and Iran's agenda on regional issues and their alliance with Russia. All this brings with it a geopolitical shift, a division of power and a new era in international relations in the Middle East.

Evidently, under the Biden administration, the U.S. had plans to reenact the Cold War, trying to contain the rise of China and hoping that the strength of its allies and partners would compensate for the decline in U.S. power. The simple fact must not be forgotten at the beginning; China is not the Soviet Union, and the Middle East (2024 and 2025) is not the same as it was after World War II. E. Ashford [4] argued that this approach is fraught with danger in a multipolar world. The Biden administration has created a weak partnership at the lowest level of common interest by trying to organize as many countries as possible against China. Much of what has gone wrong with the Biden administration's approach to the world order is that it has tried too much with too little. In a multipolar world, as opposed to the unipolar world of the past three decades, the decline in relative power suggests that the U.S. government cannot enforce its will in all regions of the world, especially simultaneously.

Is a group of middle powers likely to form a united global bloc? This seems somewhat unlikely, as each regional player has its own agenda. Additionally, the US administration maintains a significant military, intelligence, and diplomatic presence in the region.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Middle East has a dynamic and unstructured regional system in which power relations are irregular. The clutter of power and the absence of a hegemonic regional power invite external intervention. Moreover, structurally, the region's dynamics have not only exacerbated the fragmentation of the subsystem into sub-regions but have also provided opportunities for smaller Arab states to pursue their interests within the larger framework of regional politics and power. However, from a long-term perspective, it is clear that only a few states have directly influenced regional power relations. Currently, only four; Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel—act as more than middle powers in the MENA region. Each sees its security in interfering in the affairs of others and competes for more power on the regional chessboard, each with a different agenda.

The convergence of U.S. and Chinese strategic interests in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf region, provides a compelling illustration of the region's growing geopolitical significance. Following the return of Donald Trump to the White House, Saudi Arabia announced plans to engage in trade with the United States for \$1 trillion over four years. Shortly thereafter, the United Arab Emirates committed to trade and investment agreements with the U.S. amounting to US\$1.4 trillion [35]. At the same time, in February 2025, Elon Musk's Boring Company signed a contract with UAE authorities to develop a Las Vegas-style underground transportation network in Dubai. As will be discussed in subsequent

sections, these Gulf states are simultaneously deepening their infrastructure development and expanding high-level trade partnerships with China.

As Ehteshami [36] explains, the lack of an effective and binding institutional framework in the Middle East has directly brought us to the heart of the problems. Although many informal networks pepper the Middle East with more turmoil, they are not incentives to regularize the region and further complicate and confuse the communication path rather than clarify it. States are expected to be strong actors in the regional structure, but it would be a mistake to assume that they have control over the entire action. States may want to be the only source of power in the region, but the plurality of identities and nature of their trans boundaries show the outside world that they are competing for the legitimacy of the power they should have, depriving state actors of the tools they need to have indisputable leadership. The behavior of state actors, the intervention of powers, the presence of non-state actors, and the lack of strong institutions and unity in the Middle East have led to the future of this strategically sensitive region into uncertainty [36].

In such a complex world, many middle powers are diversifying their partnerships; they do not want to align completely with either side, knowing that their ability to rearrange the current split world order is limited. At the same time, the economic inequality gap among the G-7 is widening. The middle powers have leaned toward smaller groupings and cooperation in security, technology, trade, and economics. The logic is simple to achieve their national interests. These middle powers have adopted the characteristic that they do not decide on a particular front, "choosing, not choosing."

Therefore, Alliances often bring together countries that might otherwise not cooperate. The formation of the BRICS countries was initially driven by Goldman Sachs' analysis of the rapid growth of developing countries. Since then, much has changed. As of early 2024, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, Argentina, and the UAE have joined the BRICS [37], although most of these countries are not experiencing rapid economic growth. However, given such diverse membership, it is difficult to imagine that the BRICS grouping is a transient phenomenon. Moreover, it is essential to consider that BRICS includes China, the world's second-largest economy and largest creditor, as well as China and Russia, the two largest nuclear powers.

1.5 TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM THEORY

Clearly, the dominance of technology giants and the pervasive integration of technology across all sectors provide further evidence of global power shifts and the ongoing transformation of regional power dynamics:

Technological determinism is crucial for understanding the role of AI and emerging technologies in shaping global politics because it illustrates how technological advancements impact power dynamics, state behavior, and international relations. At its core, technological determinism (TD) asserts that technology significantly influences human life. This concept is widely accepted in popular culture and political rhetoric, such as the belief that the internet is revolutionizing the economy and society. TD has sparked debate across social sciences and research areas due to its far-reaching implications:

The term "technological determinism" was first introduced by Thorstein Veblen, emphasizing that technology shapes any society. According to this theory, technology is a driving force in shaping culture and dictating the course of history. Soft TDs assert that technology is a crucial factor in shaping social, economic, and military processes, while hard TDs claim that technology is the primary, or even the sole, force driving societal change. On the contrary, technological anti-inevitability suggests that technology is neutral, and its impact is largely dependent on the surrounding social context.

Karl Marx highlighted how technological progress leads to new modes of production, which, in turn, influence cultural, political, and economic aspects of society, thus reshaping the social structure. For instance, Marx's analogy demonstrates how feudal societies, reliant on hand mills, evolved into industrial capitalist societies with the advent of steam mills [38].

In the context of global politics, technological determinism is highly relevant, particularly with geopolitical events like the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, China's growing influence, and its rivalry with the United States. The spread of multinational corporations and international organizations further underscores how TD and AI are reshaping global governance and international relations. The theory of technological determinism suggests that advancements in AI are driving social change at such a rapid pace that governments are compelled to harness their power to manage these transformations.

In many developing and underdeveloped societies, the following question arises: "Do we control our mobile phones and apps, or do they control us?" In global politics, AI will have decisive impacts, especially in areas such as cybersecurity, economic planning, military strategy, and automated decision-making. This is one of the reasons why we emphasize the global turning point throughout this study, but how?

AI revolutionizes economies by automating industries, reshaping labor markets, and fostering innovation. Countries at the forefront of AI development, such as the United States and China, are gaining geopolitical leverage. AI influences global power dynamics and becomes a strategic acquisition that affects economic competitiveness, military capabilities, and cybersecurity, thereby shifting the international landscape a new manifestation of technological determinism.

Moreover, the rise of AI presents significant ethical dilemmas, driving policy changes in areas such as privacy, data security, and human rights. Global organizations like the United Nations are now grappling with how to regulate AI to prevent misuse while encouraging innovation [39].

Technological innovations and artificial intelligence (AI) have revolutionized modern warfare, making autonomous weapons systems, surveillance technologies, and electronic defense mechanisms integral components of military strategy. AI-guided drones, data analysis for intelligence, and cybersecurity measures powered by AI are all shaping the military policies of global powers. Notably, AI has also empowered non-state actors to engage in conflict, complicating traditional state-centric security approaches.

A prime example of the profound impact of AI on warfare in the 21st century is the targeted assassination of Hamas Political Bureau Chairman Ismail Haniyeh at his residence on the outskirts of Tehran on July 31, 2024, by Israeli forces [40]. This event underscores the unprecedented role of technological innovation in contemporary conflict.

For years, Hezbollah, a key player in the region, relied on advanced security measures to avoid infiltration by Israeli and American intelligence agents. However, recent events have illustrated the vulnerabilities of even the most guarded organizations. On September 17, 2024, pagers used by Hezbollah forces in Lebanon and Syria exploded within minutes of use, killing at least nine people and injuring 2,800, according to local reports. The following day, walkie-talkies exploded across Lebanon, killing 20 more and injuring over 400. These attacks, widely attributed to Israeli forces, appear to be part of an ongoing effort to resolve tensions along the northern border. Over 60,000 people fled their homes, fearing further Hezbollah missile strikes [41].

These events reinforce the theory of technological determinism, which proposes that technology is the primary driver of social, cultural, political, and military change. Technological advancements—whether intentional or not, shape human behavior, social structures, and historical development, often beyond human control. Nations that possess advanced technologies, such as AI, cybersecurity, and military innovations, gain significant geopolitical leverage, reshaping global hierarchies and intensifying competition among global powers.

CONCLUSION

Apparently, the world will no longer be so simple, and the scene will no longer clearly show “who is with me and who is my enemy”, in other words, the era of permanent alliances is coming to an end. The debate over whether the world is unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar, as countries in the Global South, including Russia and China, insist, largely misses the point. Social science creates categories to classify phenomena, but the current world order is fragmented and in transition, characterized by soft and complex transitions. The erosion of traditional power structures has begun both in Asia and globally. The United States must come to terms with this evolving world order and avoid responding with apprehension, particularly in a context in which China has established a significant global presence. Middle powers have gained considerable importance in investment, economic influence, and geopolitical relevance. In addition, global corporations play an increasingly decisive role in shaping the new international landscape. As C. Kurban [1] notes, it is becoming increasingly clear that the 21st century will not be defined solely by the actions of traditional superpowers. Instead, it will be characterized by the rising influence of middle powers and non-state actors, particularly multinational corporations. Technology giants such as Amazon, Alibaba Group Holdings Ltd., Tencent Holdings Ltd., Meta Platforms (especially Facebook and X), Microsoft, Oracle, Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi Corporation, Alphabet, Uber, Zoom, Dell, SpaceX, and IBM are poised to reach their peak influence in the age of artificial intelligence.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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