

Gulliver's Shackles

Functional networks and multilateral groupings will define the 21st century



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Michèle and Henrik Schmiegelow | **Every pundit seemed to have a description for the world at the dawn of the 21st century: American, Pacific, Asian, unipolar, bipolar, multipolar. But the extraordinary past decade has defied such categorizations. Not singular or even plural poles will define the new world order, but rather wide-ranging cooperation among diverse partners.**

The decade between 1997 and 2008 saw financial crises in Asia, Russia, and on Wall Street; US military interventions, with and without UN Security Council mandates; the rise of BRIC economies and relative decline of the G7; challenges to US power by terrorism and insurgency; functioning nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan; the growth of Middle Eastern and Asian sovereign funds; climate change; skyrocketing energy and food costs; and, finally, a global economic meltdown not seen since the Great Depression.

In light of these events, the ways of thinking about foreign policy in the Western world need revisiting. Idealism appeared to have been discredited after the Iraq war, while realism gained new followers. But this reaction did not do justice to either philosophy. The neoconservative war to spread democ-

racy was the expression of a third approach, an aggressive and utopian combination of idealism and realism (See table on p. 55). We argue that the best new world order would pragmatically combine the still-applicable virtues of traditional idealism and political realism without relapsing into the dogmatic contention that has gone on since the days of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. It should dispense with all polarities, all “rise and decline” scenarios, and all power hierarchies in the international community. The events from 1997 to 2008 make one thing clear: the powerlessness of even the mightiest of the nation states in solving the world’s biggest problems.

The End of Polarity

A series of essays by US Council on Foreign Relations President Richard



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Foreign Policy Philosophies				IP-GE 4 08
	Idealism	Realism	Agressive Fusion	
Philosophers	John Locke Immanuel Kant	Thomas Hobbes	Machiavelli Leo Strauss	
Leading Political Figures	Thomas Jefferson Woodrow Wilson Jean Monnet Willy Brandt	Alexander Hamilton Lord Palmerston Otto von Bismarck Henry Kissinger	Robespierre Karl Marx Paul Wolfowitz Robert Kagan	
World Order Paradigms	Free Trade, "Democratic Peace Paradigm," Functional Integration, Interdependence, Multilateralism, Ecological imperative of responsibility, Prevention of new types of security risks	Westphalian system of nation-states, International relations as choice between diplomacy or war, "Balance of power," "Realpolitik," Multipolarity	Global expansion of national, ideological, cultural patterns of society, even democracy by all means, including use of force and cunning	

Source: Henrik Schmiegelow and Michèle Schmiegelow

Haass reflects a breathtaking change in the analysis of America's national interests. His approach evolves in three stages. Beginning in 2005 with a plea for global integration based on America's self-assessment as anchor of a unipolar world,¹ Haass sees a chance in February 2008 for Washington to use a "Palmerstonian moment" in a multipolar world.² By April 2008, however, he concludes that a non-polar world is ultimately in America's own best interest.³ Indeed, it is readily apparent that a multipolar system can easily be used against Washington by other world powers. That risk is enhanced by neoconservative calls for a "league of democracies" challenging Chinese and Russian "autocracies" to enter a new bipolar competition of systems. Russian and Chinese political scientists have already scrambled to counter the universalist dissemination

of Western values by asserting Confucian values or those of the Russian Orthodox Church. Also, such a league will have to get by without India, the world's largest democracy. Despite territorial conflicts, an influential segment of the Indian political establishment feels greater cultural connection to China than to the neoconservative West.⁴

An apparently unintended consequence of Robert Kagan's 2003 book *Of Paradise and Power* was that many inhabitants of the European "paradise" suddenly saw political realism as more harmless and conducive to peace than idealism. French President Jacques Chirac had no difficulty legitimizing his opposition to the Iraq War in 2003 by reviving the old Gaullist doctrine of a multipolar world in antithesis to

The Westphalian system ensured order within the states but not between them.

1) "The Case for Integration," *National Interest online*, January 9, 2005.

2) "The Palmerstonian Moment," *National Interest online*, February 1, 2008.

3) "What follows American Dominion?" *Financial Times*, April 16, 2008.

4) Radha Kumar, "What Prospects for Normative Foreign Policy?," Center for European Policy Studies, ESF Working Paper n. 29, May 26, 2008.

“Anglo-Saxon” hegemony. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder had a more difficult time. As chancellor, he could hardly abandon the traditional American idealism to which postwar Germany owed so much. Instead, he rejected multipolarity on philosophical grounds: “There is only one pole, and that is the pole of freedom.” These remarks, reminiscent of John Locke and Immanuel Kant, were clearly intended as an appeal for the “dangerous nation” (Kagan, in 2006) to return to traditional American idealism.

Both realists and idealists expressed their dismay at how the neoconservative rhetoric of a conflict between democracy and autocracy misled Georgia into military action in South Ossetia in August 2008. The act resulted in massive Russian intervention and certain Georgian defeat. Since the United States was unable to come to the rescue of Georgia, the final effect of the bellicose rhetoric was to evidence the powerlessness of its authors. Richard Haass’s words remained unheard.

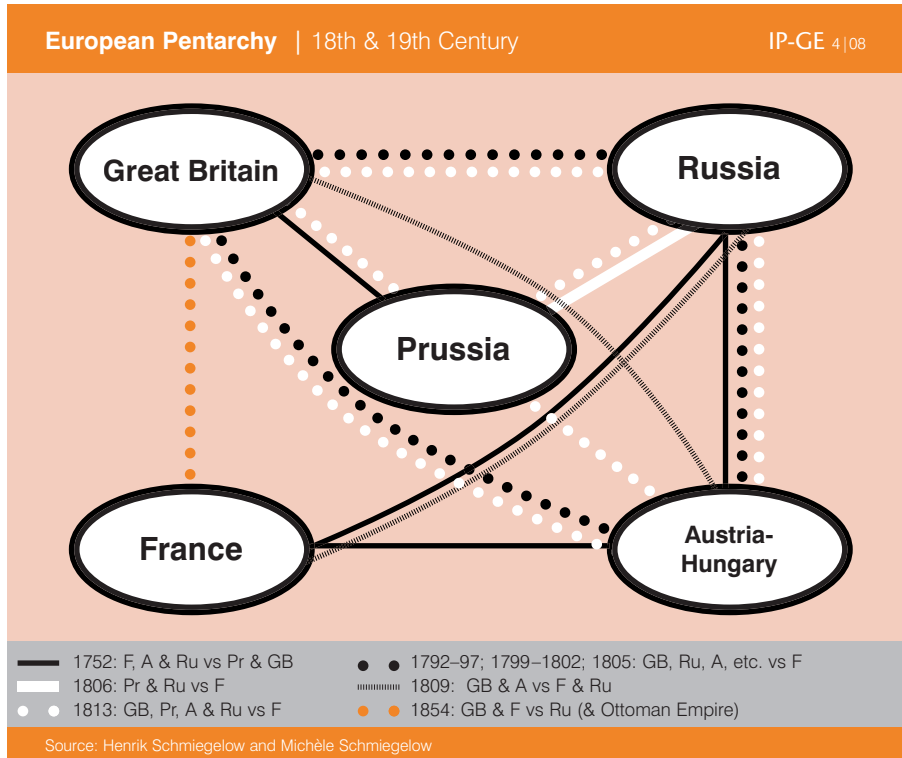
The problem with multipolarity is that it only gains attention as the opposite of unipolarity. It is viewed simply as resistance to an existing empire or hegemonic state. This was the case with the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the universal claim of the Holy Roman Empire and established the international system of sovereign nation states. It was once again the case with French President Charles de Gaulle’s sensational recognition of China in 1964, a move that de Gaulle saw as negating the bipolar system and its Anglo-Saxon hegemony.

The Westphalian system is the only historical example of a multipolar model being successfully established as

an international system. But this says nothing about its suitability for preserving the peace between states. While the European states in the system endeavored to bring about domestic peace, economic developments, and social coexistence, they regarded the international system as an area where they had a free hand to choose between diplomacy and war. They used this freedom with gusto, and most often with the aim of expanding their own power, territory, and access to economic resources. This practice was rooted in a Hobbesian system that ensured order within the states but not between them.

Respected realists like Haass and former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger have praised the European pentarchy (Great Britain, Russia, France, Prussia, and Austria) as an exemplary world order. Yet in the 18th and 19th centuries, there were no fewer than 52 wars among the five members, not to mention numerous wars with states and territories outside Europe. It appears doubtful that the willingness to switch alliances at any time, which Lord Palmerston saw as in Great Britain’s national interest, actually contributed to preserving peace and the balance of power.

In order to avoid wars at least part of the time, balance of power requires extraordinary statesmen, such as Otto von Bismarck, Palmerston, and Kissinger. As soon as these statesmen abandon ship, the system threatens to collapse. This is why the rest of the world could not really find comfort in Haass’s plea for a “Palmerstonian moment” on the part of the United States as a substitute for the unipolarity it had abandoned after the Iraq war.



This is also true of the European Union, which has no foreign policy-making authority of its own. Without the approval of its member states, the EU cannot make decisions concerning war or peace. Germany will always remain a particular limitation since it must have parliamentary consent for military missions. The European Union therefore cannot keep up with China, India, Russia, and other centers of power organized as nation states. As a consequence, Haass believed that NATO was losing its value for the United States, and that Palmerston-style changing alliances were preferable.⁵ The European Union is not included on most lists of the 21st century global pentarchy, least of all

Kissinger's. The real change implied by a "Palmerstonian Moment" of today's United States is that the pentarchy has moved from Europe to the Pacific region, with the majority of the power in China, India, and Japan.

Multilateralism and Functionalism

A multipolar world order along the lines of a globalized Westphalian system has not been triumphant, however. The three new Asian powers are also the driving force behind a renaissance of multilateralism, and are pursuing a forward-looking strategy of functional integration in Asia. The increasing unilateralism of the Bush administration resulted in an equal drive toward multilateralism by China. The North

⁵) See also Richard Haass.

Korean nuclear crisis marked the first time China voted in favor of sanctions in the UN Security Council—targeting a neighbor that has long been considered its friend. In the six-way negotiations on North Korean nuclear nonproliferation, Washington began relying on China to work out a solution. Haass highlights the North Korea talks as strong evidence in favor of a nonpolar world.⁶

The leading East Asian powers closely observed Europe's functional integration. They drew their own conclusions from both the strengths and weaknesses of the European model and adapted it to Asia. As in Europe, the functional integration of Asia produces such attractive advantages that there is no justification for further wars. The Asian and European examples best exemplify a modern world order surmounting the risks of the Westphalian system.

Asia's adoption of European systems cannot be viewed as eurocentrism or as an aggressive expansion of

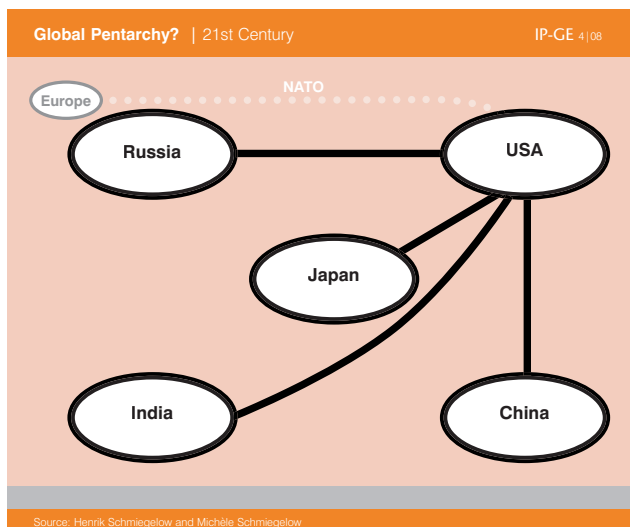
Western values. In integrating their economy with the world, the Chinese apparently see no contradiction with traditional Confucian norms, for example. Russia, which thus far has profited mainly from rich natural resources and is much less integrated into the world economy, is already feeling challenged to learn from its Asian neighbors. Russia's renewed power after 2006 fed former President Vladimir Putin's aggressive foreign policy. But his successor Dmitri Medvedev was supposed to convey a softer image. The new president was quoted as saying that, in the end, Russia will earn the world's respect not "through strength but through responsible action."⁶ Unfortunately, this sentiment was abruptly suspended with the "bipolar" derailment of Georgia's South Ossetian adventure. But despite the nationalist tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church, cultural relativism will eventually give way to a functional calculation of interests in Russia as well. Much depends on the West's recovery of its own capacity for functional calculation of interests in relation to Russia.

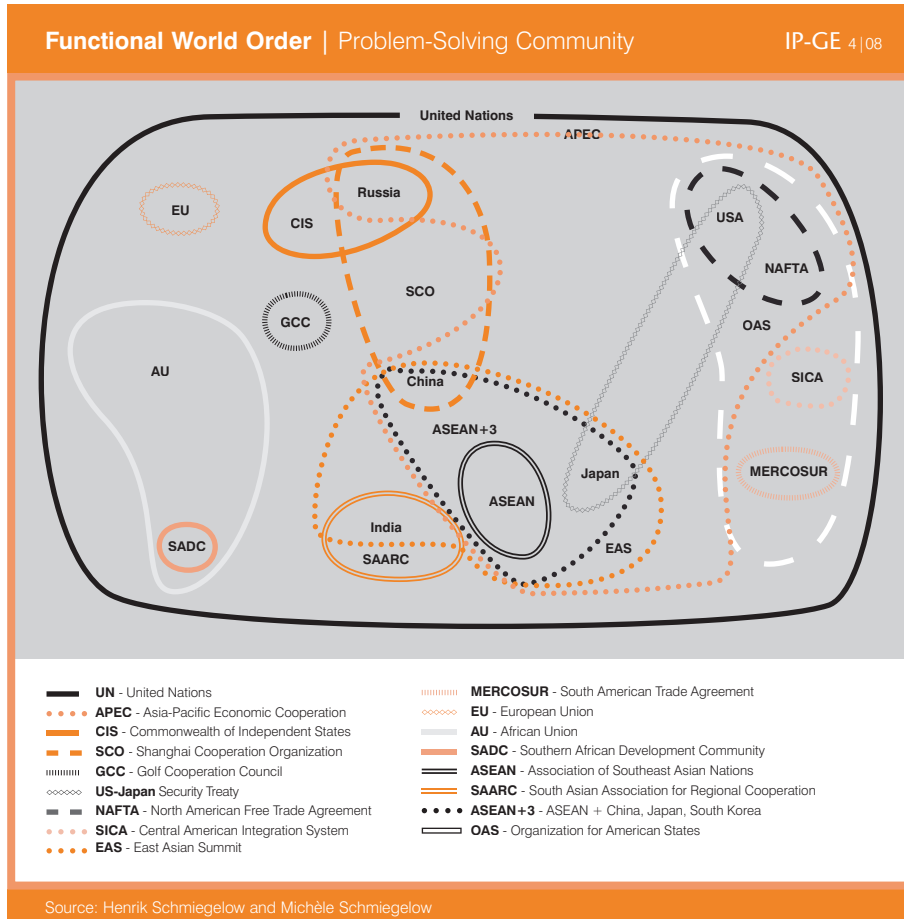
The new centers of power are not alone in calling for integration. Networks of cooperation have sprung up across the globe: in Africa (AU, SADC), America (OAS, Mercosur, NAFTA, SICA), Asia (ASEAN, ASEAN + 3, East Asian Summits), Eurasia (SCO), the Gulf region (GCC) and the Pacific Rim (APEC, US-Japanese Treaty on Security and Cooperation).

These functional networks may be suspect to traditional powers since

⁶) See Haass, "What follows American Dominion?"

The new Asian powers are the driving force behind a renaissance of multilateralism.





they appear to tie them down. For instance, Washington observed with amazement how the ties between ASEAN, China, Japan, and Korea (ASEAN+3) led to an astonishing depth of economic integration without US involvement. And all this happened within the geographical reach of APEC, a US creation. On May 22, 2008, reviving the 1977 Fukuda doctrine of his father, the Japanese prime minister Yasuo Fukuda assuaged US concerns by advocating a long-term transformation of the Pacific into a “inland sea” analogous to the 17th-century Mediterranean. He invited the North and Latin American coun-

tries bordering the Pacific to participate, along with Australia, New Zealand, the ASEAN states, China, and Russia. A student exchange program emulating the European Erasmus system would establish this functional integration in the minds of future generations. It seems Europe has managed to make a contribution to the movement toward a new world order after all.

Today’s interdependent world faces problems that truly demonstrate the powerlessness of “power.” Haass emphasizes this point using the example of American soldiers in Iraq. Though equipped with high-tech

weapons, they are constant victims of “low-tech” ambushes by insurgents. Another example is the reluctance of India and Pakistan to actually use the millions of soldiers and large nuclear arsenals at their disposals in the Kashmir conflict.

The recurring crises in the US financial markets demonstrate the fallacy of “economic power.” For Kissinger, the conservative political realist, the discontent of globalization’s losers is a serious concern. He castigates the “profligate and obscurantist practices” that caused the US subprime crisis (and preceding crises), and advocates the combination of an economic and a political world order.⁷ This takes us

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far from the Westphalian system, of which Kissinger has always been the foremost proponent. Traditional political power cannot slow down or stop the melting of the polar icecaps, global epidemics, or the depletion of finite resources. It is becoming increasingly clear that everyone is in the same boat when it comes to finding solutions to global problems.

When the US subprime crisis grew into the worst economic meltdown since the Great Depression of the 1930s in September/October 2008, globalization surprised the world with a rapid succession of neo-functional-ist spillovers:

Throughout September: International policy coordination of central banks goes into effect, a practice which had

been considered out of fashion in the unipolar 1990s;

October 14: EU member states implement a joint-action to recapitalize their banks and guarantee inter-bank lending, a method that is immediately adopted by the US.

October 21: When the full impact of the financial crisis on the economies of China and the G7 states became apparent, a meltdown of commodity prices including a “reverse oil shock” (Daniel Yergin) changed the perceived power balance between the G7 and “authoritarian” but resource-rich Russia, Venezuela, and Iran.

October 24–25: At the ASEM summit, a basic agreement is reached between EU members and ASEAN + 3 members on the necessity of strengthening regulatory supervision and stabilization of global financial markets.

November 15: At US invitation, a second “Bretton Woods Summit” is held to discuss adapting the IMF and the World Bank to the challenges of the 21st century.

Problem-Solving Community

A more dispassionate approach to foreign policy is needed. Reviving philosophical pragmatism in the spirit of Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey would be a good starting point. Their ideas provide an effective antidote to the violence-prone utopianism of the neoconservatives, which intellectual historian John Gray sees as having much in common with the methodology of Marxist world revolution.⁸ Philosopher Leo Strauss left a

⁷) Nikolai Petro, “Seizing the Medvedev Moment,” *International Herald Tribune*, March 14, 2008.

⁸) Reviewed in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Der Übergang der Utopie zu den Neokons,” April 16, 2008.

similarly disturbing mark on the neo-conservatives. His discourse on a “Platonic elite” that should withhold the truth from the uneducated masses was a startling step backward from both critical rationalism and the political philosophy of the open society.

The advantage of American philosophical pragmatism is that it does not force praxis into the service of a theory that dogmatically seeks self-confirmation—such as neoconservatism in the Iraq War. Inversely, it examines all available theories with respect to their usefulness for problem-solving. Euro-

pean transatlanticists might well take a cue from it. Such a change would be warmly welcomed by America’s partners in Asia. Japanese economic policy-makers have already used this philosophy as the basis for a strategic pragmatism that is recognized and used as a model throughout the region.⁹

A problem-solving world community is urgently needed. Its fundamental transcultural norm should be a simple categorical imperative: act in such a way that the maxim of your action is compatible with the survival of humanity.

⁹) Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton University Press, 1971).