



AN UNPRECEDENTED POWER SHIFT AND THE REVIVAL OF EAST ASIA

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Il est financé par la Direction Générale de l'Armement (DGA) et l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de la Défense Nationale (IHEDN). Il est rattaché au Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (Sciences Po/CERI) et à l'Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire (IRSEM).

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Résumé

Nous sommes les témoins d'un basculement sans précédent du monde. Le centre de gravité mondial se déplace rapidement de l'Atlantique vers le Pacifique conséquence directe de la montée en puissance de l'Asie de l'Est ; l'essor chinois en étant la principale cause. Le monde occidental est pour la première fois, depuis le XV^e siècle, dans une phase de déclin accéléré.

En s'appuyant partiellement sur la théorie néoréaliste des relations internationales, nous argumentons que le monde se décompose désormais en trois régions principales concentrant les principaux attributs de la puissance (économique, militaire et scientifique) ; à savoir l'Amérique du Nord, l'Europe occidentale et l'Asie de l'Est. Le monde devient ainsi multipolaire en termes de pôles de puissances.

Cependant, en termes de distribution de la puissance entre Etats, les Etats-Unis demeurent la seule superpuissance maintenant un monde unipolaire. La Chine vient petit à petit remettre cette situation en question et il est à prévoir que le monde devienne bipolaire avec les Etats-Unis et la Chine au sommet de la hiérarchie mondiale. La multipolarité entre Etats, tant annoncé, n'apparaît ainsi que comme une illusion.

L'Asie de l'Est devrait susciter l'attention et préoccuper les dirigeants politiques non seulement car elle est une région en pleine croissance mais surtout car elle réunit des facteurs majeurs de déstabilisation qui en font une poudrière à l'image de l'Europe du début du XX^e siècle.

Cet article se base exclusivement sur la littérature anglo-saxonne et est rédigé en langue anglaise.

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*“The Mediterranean is the ocean of the past,
the Atlantic is the ocean of the present,
and the Pacific is the ocean of the future”*

John Hay, former US Secretary of State (1898-1905)

The international system is all about change, today more than ever. In the last decade, while many almost exclusively focused on terrorism and the two wars the United States and its allies waged in Afghanistan and Iraq, the world has undergone a deep transformation. Since *“some believe the principal feature of the post-cold-war world [remains] the unchallengeable dominance of American power”*¹, few in the West are fully aware of the great dynamic which has begun and now seems unstoppable. In 1981, Robert Gilpin reminded us *“the history of an international system is that of the rise and decline of [...] dominant states”*²; a statement that has never been so pertinent.

Nowadays, the United States is in an *“unprecedented decline”*³ since its relative power is eroded by the re-emergence of great powers. Severely hit by a financial and economic crisis the country itself created, the US economy is still gloomy, the Pentagon is making huge budget cuts and current allies seem to be not so reliable⁴. The Euro zone is in jeopardy and caught in a debt crisis, its military expenditures are shrinking and the Lisbon strategy which aimed at making the European Union *“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”* clearly failed. Japan was hit by two terrible natural disasters and a nuclear crisis in March 2011, three events which damaged an economy already broken for two decades.

¹ PAPE Robert, “Empire falls”, *The National Interest*, Jan-Feb 2009
(http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2751/is_99/ai_n32148803/)

² GILPIN Robert, *War and Change in World politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 272 pages p 42

³ PAPE Robert, “Empire falls”, *The National Interest*, Jan-Feb 2009
(http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2751/is_99/ai_n32148803/)

⁴ On the progressive deterioration of US-Pakistan relations; SCHMITT Eric, PERLEZ Jane, “U.S. Is Deferring Millions in Pakistani Military Aid”, *The New York Times*, July 9, 2011

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At the end of the 1990's, Bary Buzan argued "*the long period of European and Western power advantage is being steadily eroded by the diffusion of industrial, military, and political capability among an ever wider circle of states and peoples*"⁵. He was correct although ahead of his time. His statement is now perfectly consistent. Former great powers are re-emerging; coming back on stage. Recently, the European debt crisis provided us with important symbols since the New World offered, with compensation, to come to the rescue of "*old countries from an old continent*". Indeed, in order to increase the amount of bailout money available to euro zone states, the idea was put forward to create a new investment vehicle that would seek funds from China and others. This might be the beginning of a new reality, the erosion of Western dominance.

Today, China is the second economic and military power, the first industrial and trade power, it has the largest high speed railway network and will soon make its first indigenous regional airplane (the C919) fly; India is experiencing an 8% average growth, is the fourth economy in PPP and its navy is quickly expanding; South Korea has become the first nation to join the "advance nations' assistance club" after transitioning from an aid recipient to a donor; severely hit by the economic crisis, Russia is coming back for the umpteenth time, is the first oil producer, owns the largest natural gas reserves⁶ and is a nuclear and still substantial military power, etc.

Napoleon once said "*when China wakes, it will shake the world*". China woke up, others are waking up and even though they are still far from becoming as powerful as the USA, we are the witnesses of a major power shift from the West to the East. This global shift has tremendous consequences not only on the international system but mostly on

⁵ BUZAN Barry, WAEVER Ole, DE WILDE Jaap, *Security, a new framework for analysis*, Lynne Rienner publishers, Boulder, 1998, 237 pages, p9

⁶ Russia represents 12.9% of the world oil production and ranks first before Saudi Arabia (12.0%) , the USA (8.7%), Iran (5.2%) and China (5.2%). Russia holds 23.9 % of natural gas proved reserves before Iran (15.8%), Qatar (13.5%), Turkmenistan (4.3%) and Saudi Arabia (4.3%). BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2011, published in June 2011. http://www.bp.com/assets/bp_internet/globalbp/globalbp_uk_english/reports_and_publications/statistical_energy_review_2011/STAGING/local_assets/pdf/statistical_review_of_world_energy_full_report_2011.pdf

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regional subsystems. In 2008, the US National Intelligence Council published a report entitled “Global trend 2025”⁷. It underlined that “*a global multipolar system is emerging with the rise of China, India, and others*” and argued the “*unprecedented shift in relative wealth and economic power roughly from West to East now under way will continue; [...] in terms of size, speed, and directional flow, the transfer of global wealth and economic power now under way [...] is without precedent in modern history*”⁸. Fareed Zakaria is also very perceptive when he argues:

*“There have been three tectonic power shifts over the last five hundred years, fundamental changes in the distribution of power that have reshaped international life. The first was the rise of the Western world. [...] The second shift, which took place in the closing years of the nineteenth century, was the rise of the United States. [...] We are now living through the third great power shift of the modern era. It could be called ‘the rise of the rest’”*⁹.

We should underline this change is not a surprise. In one of his masterpieces, Fernand Braudel clearly showed that the centre of the world economy had progressively moved between the 15th and the 18th centuries, going from Venice, Genoa, Antwerp, Amsterdam to London¹⁰. Once again it moved from London to New York during the 20th century, might well be in Los Angeles today – and why not in Shanghai by 2050? Moreover, the relative decline of the US and Europe had been forecast after the end of the Cold war¹¹. The only point worth debating was how long it would take to establish a multipolar world.

⁷ The report was issued when analysts still expected the European Union and the USA to recover quickly from the crisis

⁸ “Global trend 2025, a transformed world”, National Intelligence Council, Washington DC, November 2008

⁹ ZAKARIA Fareed, *The post American world and the rise of the rest*, 2008, Penguin Books, London, 292 pages, p 1/2

¹⁰ BRAUDEL Fernand, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme (XV^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, Paris, Armand Colin, 3 volumes, 1979

¹¹ The decline of the USA was already forecast in the 1970’s due to the quagmire in Vietnam and the economic crisis the two oil shocks provoked. Nowadays, the main difference is that it is not only the USA but the developed world (USA, EU and Japan) that is declining. Moreover, such changes are not revolutionary contrary to after war periods (WW2 or even the collapse of the USSR) but incremental. GILPIN Robert, *War and Change in World politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 272 pages p45

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Charles Krauthammer, who coined the expression “*unipolar moment*”, acknowledged “*no doubt, multipolarity will come in time. In perhaps another generation or so there will be great powers coequal with the United States, and the world will, in structure, resemble the pre-World War I era. But we are not there yet, nor will we be for decades*”¹². Kenneth Waltz also argued “*for a time we will live with unipolarity*”¹³.

One of the consequences of this power shift is that the material but also moral dominance of Europe and then of the West over the entire globe, which started at the end of the fifteenth century, might know its last decades. The forecast issued by Francis Fukuyama in 1989 about “*the triumph of the West, of the Western idea [...], the end of history as such [...] and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government*”¹⁴ might eventually not come true. As he himself acknowledged in an opinion column published in the Financial Times last January 2011, the rise of China created a counter-model that could be followed by developing countries. “*The first decade of the 21st century has seen a dramatic reversal of fortune in the relative prestige of different political and economic models. Ten years ago, [...] the US held the high ground. Its democracy was widely emulated, if not always loved. [...] The US managed to fritter away that moral capital in remarkably short order. [...] China, by contrast, is on a roll*”¹⁵. Retired Ambassador ‘Chas’ Freeman¹⁶ also focused on this shift of prestige in a recent speech presented at the US Naval War College.

¹² KRAUTHAMMER Charles, “The Unipolar Moment”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, 1990/1991, pp. 23-33

¹³ WALTZ Kenneth, “Structural Realism after the Cold war”, *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5–41, p32

¹⁴ FUKUYAMA Francis, “The End of History?”, *National Interest*, vol. 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 3-18

¹⁵ FUKUYAMA Francis, “US Democracy Has Little To Teach China”, *Financial Times*, January 17 2011

¹⁶ Chas Freeman worked as the main interpreter for Richard Nixon in his 1972 China visit, as the US ambassador in Saudi Arabia (1989-1992) and then as Assistant Secretary of Defense in charge of International Security Affairs from 1993 and 1994. He was named as chair of the National Intelligence Council in February 2009 but withdrew due to internal pressures. He is currently president emeritus of the Middle East Policy Council. He speaks Chinese, French, Spanish and Arabic fluently.

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“The balance of prestige, if not yet the balance of power, between the United States and China has shifted. In international affairs, prestige is the shadow cast by the power of states to shape systems, attitudes, trends, and events. It is generated by the perceived decisiveness of a nation’s political system, its economic strength, and the vision and wisdom of its leadership, as well as its military prowess. Prestige is a major determinant of the ability of a nation to preserve the privileges of the past or frame the freedoms of the future. Current trends in this regard do not favor the United States over China. It is not just that China and others are regaining the regional preeminence they enjoyed before the now defunct era of Western colonialism. Unlike the Soviet Union, China has a highly successful economy that is widely seen as a model combination of industrial policy with market economics. Not everybody likes China, but it has a reputation for coherent strategic vision. China does not operate an empire of captive satellite nations, have a history of global power projection, seek to export an ideology, or propose to expand beyond its traditional frontiers. It has not configured its forces for an attack on our homeland, even if it has made provision for retaliation against us in the event we strike its homeland”¹⁷.

Even though Western countries will keep on dominating the world (be it economically, militarily or institutionally) for a decade or a couple of decades, they have to take the will of these re-emerged great powers more into account and their leeway will progressively reduce. These countries are also becoming more and more confident on their future and more and more culturally powerful. In an essay which was signed by president Hu and based on a speech he gave in October 2010, the Chinese president affirmed *“we must clearly see that international hostile forces are intensifying the strategic plot of Westernizing and dividing China, and ideological and cultural fields are the focal areas of their long-term infiltration, [...] we should deeply understand the seriousness and complexity of the ideological struggle”¹⁸*. In Chinese popular culture, the emphasis is also stressed on the importance to provide an alternative model to the Western one. The recent 2011 super-production movie gathering the most famous Chinese speaking movie

¹⁷ Ambassador FREEMAN Charles W., “Beijing, Washington, and the Shifting Balance of Prestige”, Remarks to the China Maritime Studies Institute, US Naval War College, May 10, 2011, Newport, USA

¹⁸ WONG Edward, “China’s President Lashes Out at Western Culture”, *New York Times*, January 3, 2012

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stars, and focusing on the foundation of the communist party for its 80th anniversary was entitled “Beginning of the Great Revival”. No need to be more explicit. As Kishore Mahbubani, a Singaporean scholar, also points out:

“Few in the West have grasped the full implications of the two most salient features of our historical epoch. First, we have reached the end of the era of Western domination of world history (but not the end of the West, which will remain the single strongest civilization for decades more). Second, we will see an enormous renaissance of Asian societies. [...] The 88 percent of the world’s populations who live outside the West have stopped being the objects of world history and have become its subjects. They believe that the time has come for the West to cease its continuing domination of the globe”¹⁹.

The main aim of this article is to present some basic postulates of structural realism and then analyze the distribution of world power among regions and among states. We argue East Asia is becoming the major pole of world power, mainly due to the rise of China. If the United States remains the only superpower, China is a contender and the world is likely to become bipolar after 2020. East Asian is a rich but dangerous region, a kind of powderkeg, just as Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. It is urgent to focus on East Asia and to be aware of all the consequences its rise implies.

¹⁹ MAHBUBANI, *The new Asian Hemisphere, the irresistible shift of global power to the East*, Public Affairs, New York, 2008, 314 pages, p9/125

Realism, the distribution of world power and its dynamic

“Realism is the soundest starting place for constructing an understanding of international relations and for building grand theory”²⁰”

Barry Buzan

In this paper, we chose to focus on the distribution of world power among both regions and states, and on the dynamic of each system (inter-region and inter-state systems). We decided to adopt a structural realist analysis of the international system. Realism remains *“the primary or alternative theory in virtually every major book and article addressing general theories of world politics”²¹*. It has been *“the dominant theory of world politics since the beginning of academic International Relations”²²*. Realism has been consistent over time because it focuses on continuity in the nature of world politics (*“realism’s assumptions lead to a focus on continuity”²³*) without excluding change in world politics. Kenneth Waltz states *“countries have always competed for wealth and security, and the competition has often led to conflict. Why should the future be different from the past?”²⁴*, while Stephen Walt underlines *“realism emphasizes the enduring propensity for conflict between states”²⁵*.

²⁰ BUZAN Barry, “The timeless wisdom of realism?”, pp. 47-65, p63 in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, SMITH Steve Smith, BOOTH Ken and ZALEWSKI Marysia, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996

²¹ LEGRO Jeffrey, MORAVCSIK Andrew, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?”, *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55, p6

²² DUNNE Tim and SCHMIDT Briann C., “Realism”, pp.161-184 in *The globalization of world politics, an introduction to international relations*, third edition, Oxford University Press, New York, Baylis John and Smith Steve, 2005,811 pages, p165

²³ Ibid, p984

²⁴ WALTZ Kenneth, “The emerging structure of international politics”, *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Autumn 1993, pp. 44-79, p64

²⁵ WALT Stephen, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories”, *Foreign Policy*, No. 110, Special Edition: Frontiers of Knowledge. (Spring, 1998), pp. 29-32/34-46, p31

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Realism appears to be a very efficient and persuasive international relations theory. Barry Busan underlined the three main qualities of realism as “*its continued relevance (1), its flexibility in coming to terms with many ideas from other approaches (2) and its value as a starting point for enquiry (3)*”²⁶. Indeed, realism strives to explain “*the world of international politics as it is, rather than how we might like it to be*”²⁷ with a scientific approach which is not “*a priori and abstract but empirical and pragmatic*”²⁸.

To define realism broadly, we may use John Mearsheimer’s general definition underlying five assumptions: “*states are the principal actors in world politics, and no higher authority sits above them (1). [...] Calculations about power dominate state thinking, and states compete for power among themselves (2). There is a zero-sum quality to that competition, which sometimes makes it intense and unforgiving (3). States cooperate with each other for sure, but at root they have conflicting interests, not a harmony of interests (4). War is a legitimate instrument of statecraft (5)*”²⁹.

Let’s briefly go back to the central notion of any realist theory, power. As Brian Schmidt stresses, “*realists are the theorists of power politics; the role of power has been, and continues to be, central to any theory of realism*”³⁰. Edward Hallett Carr perfectly agreed when he challenged the dominant paradigm of its time, idealism³¹; in the introduction of its masterpiece, *The Twenty years Crisis*, he explained he wrote it “*with the deliberate aim of counteracting the glaring and dangerous defect of nearly all thinking, both academic and popular, about international politics in English-speaking countries from*

²⁶ Ibid, p47

²⁷ BURCHILL Scott, “Realism and neo realism”, pp. 70-102 in *Theories of international relations*, BURCHILL, DEVETAK, LINKLATER, PATERSON, REUS-SMIT, TRUE, second edition, Palgrave, 2001, 322 pages, p70

²⁸ MORGENTHAU Hans J., *Politics among nations*, seventh edition, 2006, Mc Graw Hill, New York, 703 pages, p3

²⁹ MEARSHEIMER John, “Realism, the Real World, and the Academy”, pp. 23-33, p25 in BRECHER Michael and HARVEY Franck, eds., *Realism and Institutionalism in International Studies*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2002

³⁰ SCHMIDT Brian, “Competing Realist Conceptions of Power”, *Journal of International Studies*, Vol.33, No.3, 2005, pp. 523-549, p523

³¹ BATTISTELLA Dario, *Théorie des relations internationales*, Paris, Les Presses de Sciences Po, 3ème édition, 2009, 694 pages

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1919 to 1939 – the almost total neglect of the factor of power³². Power is stressed on in all realist works just like Hans Morgenthau explaining “of all politics, international politics is of necessity power politics”³³ or John Mearsheimer affirming “realists believe that power is the currency of international politics”³⁴.

If they all agree on the central notion of power, it is much more difficult to agree on a common definition of it. Indeed, power can be defined “in terms of the elements of national power approach, which depicts power as resources’ or with “the relational power approach, which depicts power as an actual or potential relationship”³⁵. Moreover, power is an evolving notion since we need to focus on “dynamic, [the] ever changing character of the power relations among nations”³⁶. For the purpose of this paper, we won’t challenge the definition of power and provide a very simple one, using Robert Gilpin’s definition, power being the “military, economic, and technological capabilities of states”³⁷.

Realism is not a “narrow intellectual monolith”³⁸ or a “single theory”³⁹. Realism is “a broad church”⁴⁰ whose proponents share a common set of assumptions and “disagree about many others”⁴¹. Among this “constellation of theories”, we decided to focus on structural realism.

³² CARR E.H, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, New York, Harper and Row, 1964, 291 pages, p vii cited in SCHMIDT Brian, “Competing Realist Conceptions of Power”, *Journal of International Studies*, Vol.33, No.3, 2005, pp. 523-549, p525-526

³³ MORGENTHAU Hans J., *Politics among nations*, seventh edition, 2006, Mc Graw Hill, New York, 703 pages, p35

³⁴ MEARSHEIMER John, “Structural Realism,” in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, eds., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 71-88, p72

³⁵ BALDWIN Daniel, “Power and International Relations” cited in SCHMIDT Brian, “Competing Realist Conceptions of Power”, *Journal of International Studies*, Vol.33, No.3, 2005, pp. 523-549, p529

³⁶ *Ibid*, p169

³⁷ GILPIN Robert, *War and Change in World politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 272 pages, p13

³⁸ WALT Stephen, “The progressive power of realism”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), pp. 931-935, p932-933

³⁹ LEGRO Jeffrey, MORAVCSIK Andrew, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?”, *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5-55, p9

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p62

⁴¹ WALT Stephen, “The progressive power of realism”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), pp. 931-935, p932-933

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Structural realism or neorealism is best embodied by Kenneth Waltz's two masterpieces. In his first book - *Man, the State and War*⁴² - he distinguishes "explanations of international politics" and strives to "locate the causes of war and to define the conditions of peace, according to the level at which causes are located, whether in man, the state or the state system"⁴³. Kenneth Waltz opposes the first two causes (man and state) to the third one (state system), contrasting "theories of international politics that concentrate causes at the individual or national level [which] are reductionist [with] theories that conceive of causes operating at the international level as well [which] are systemic"⁴⁴. Systemic theories are more likely to explain international outcomes since "if changes in international outcomes are linked directly to changes in actors, how can one account for similarities of outcome that persist or recur even as actors vary?"⁴⁵ Indeed, "it is not possible to understand international politics simply by looking inside of states"⁴⁶. As John Mearsheimer sums up, "structural realist theories ignore cultural differences among states as well as differences in regime type, mainly because the international system creates the same basic incentives for all great powers"⁴⁷. He also affirms "structural factors such as anarchy and the distribution of power are what matter most for explaining international politics. The theory pays little attention to individuals or domestic political considerations such as ideology"⁴⁸.

Kenneth Waltz defines the international system with three characteristics: an ordering principle, the character of the units and the distribution of capabilities. Compared to domestic systems, "the parts of international-political systems stand in relations of

⁴² WALTZ Kenneth N. *Man, The State and War, a theoretical analysis*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1959, 263 pages

⁴³ WALTZ Kenneth N., *Theory of International Politics*, McGraw Hill, Boston, 1979, 251 pages, p18

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p18

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p65

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p65

⁴⁷ MEARSHEIMER John, "Structural Realism," in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, eds., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 71-88, p72

⁴⁸ MEARSHEIMER John J., *The tragedy of great power politics*, New York, Norton and Company, 2001, 555 pages, p10-

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coordination. Formally, each is the equal of all the others. None is entitled to command; none is required to obey. International systems are decentralized and anarchic⁴⁹. Second, states - the main actors of international relations - are same-like units. Indeed, *“the states that are the units of international-political systems are not formally differentiated by the functions they perform. Anarchy entails relations of coordination among a system’s units, and that implies their sameness”*⁵⁰. Third, distribution of capabilities among states matters. Indeed, *“international politics is mostly about inequalities”*⁵¹ because *“the units of such an order are distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser capabilities for performing similar tasks”*⁵².

Eventually, the distribution of power among states needs to be combined with a dynamic analysis of it. Indeed, according to Organski and Kugler, *“the sources of strength and power are not constants. They vary in slow, intricate, and in the long run, largely predictable ways”*⁵³. They also stressed on the importance of the differential of economic growth explaining that *“critical to any understanding of the way the system of international power works is the realization that the developmental process is not uniform across countries”*⁵⁴. Robert Gilpin also insists that the way a state behaves will be influenced by both its position in the system and the dynamic of its own power: *“according the law of demand, as the power of a state increases, so does the probability of its willingness to seek a change in the system. In summary, the structure of the international system and shifts in that structure are critically important determinants of state behavior”*⁵⁵.

⁴⁹ WALTZ Kenneth N., *Theory of International Politics*, McGraw Hill, Boston, 1979, 251 pages, p88

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p93

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p94

⁵² *Ibid*, p97

⁵³ ORGANSKI A. F. K., KUGLER Jacek, *The War Ledger*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1980, 292 pages, p8

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p8

⁵⁵ GILPIN Robert, *War and Change in World politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 272 pages, p95

A multipolar inter-region system and the coming Asian Century

“For the first time in the modern era, Asia is emerging as a distinct regional state system - a cluster of strong, prosperous, independent nations dealing intensively and continuously with one another in diplomatic, strategic and economic matters. Prior to the nineteenth century, geography and technology combined to keep these Asian interactions at a comparatively low level. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the region was largely dominated by outside imperial powers, then divided by the Cold War. As the twenty-first century begins, Asia will take its place alongside Europe and North America as a leading centre of wealth and power⁵⁶”

Aaron Friedberg, Former US deputy assistant for national-security affairs

In terms of regions, the world is multipolar (distribution) and is becoming unipolar (dynamic). Three main regions, respectively North America (Canada, the United States and Mexico); Western Europe (mainly the European Union) and East Asia (China, Japan, the two Koreas, Taiwan and the ASEAN member states) gather the world power in quite an equal distribution.

We can highlight the growing importance of East Asia as a pole of power in three steps. A global shift of power in the last 10 years has increased the power of East Asia, the rise of China being its main cause (1). East Asia has become the leading region in terms of GDP in PPP and R&D spending in PPP whereas North America still tops military expenditures due to the US heavy investments (2). This shift of power will keep on reinforcing in the next decades for structural reasons (3).

First, East Asia grew faster than any other regions in the last decade. We will use three key indicators each referring to some kind of power, whether economic, military or scientific. The nominal GDP of East Asia doubled whereas the GDP of North America grew by 50%. Its military expenditures increased from 122 to 222 billion dollars when they

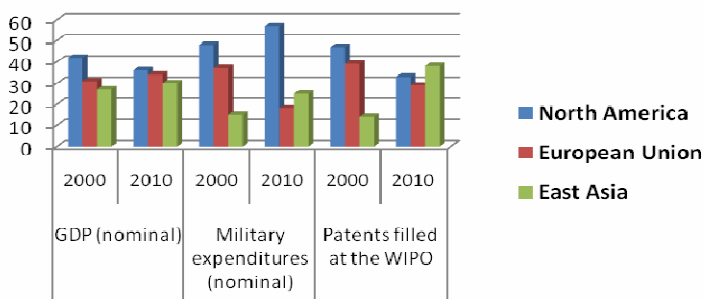
⁵⁶ FRIEDBERG Aaron, “Will Europe's past be Asia's future?”, *Survival*, Volume 42, Issue 3, 2000, pp 147-160, abstract

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stayed flat in the European Union. Patents filled at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) also skyrocketed (+458%) unlike a 20% increase in North America. The ‘China miracle’ is the main explanation for such fast expansion. Its economy quadrupled, its defense spending went up from 32.1 \$b in 2000 to 119.4 \$b in 2010 and the number of patents filled at the World Intellectual Property Organization increased sixteen-fold...

Table/graph 1: Comparing concentrations of power in 2000 and 2010, between East Asia, North America and the European Union; distribution of population, GDP (nominal), military expenditures (nominal), and patents PTC filled at the World Intellectual Property Organization.

	GDP (nominal, b\$)			Military expenditures (nominal, b\$)			Patents PTC filled at the WIPO		
	2000	2010	% of change	2000	2010	% of change	2000	2010	% of change
North America	11 348	17 181	+51%	389	707	+82%	40 000	48 000	+20%
EU 27	8 510	16 282 ⁵⁷	+91%	306	317	+4%	33 500	44 000	+31%
East Asia	7 307	14 353	+96%	122	222	+82%	12 000	55 200	+458%
China	1 367	6 103	+446%	32	119	+372%	780	12 300	+1577%
World	31 492	62 909	+100%	1 017	1 620	+59%	93 239	164 170	+76%



Sources: IMF, SIPRI, WIPO⁵⁸

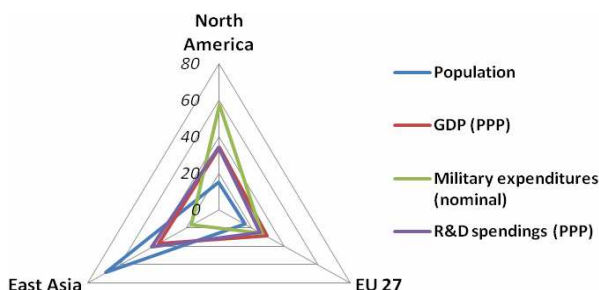
⁵⁷ We should remember that between 2000 and 2010, twelve new countries were accepted in the EU

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As a direct consequence of this major power shift, East Asia has become one of the three major poles of the world in terms of economic, military and scientific power. We will not hold forth but simply provide very striking graphs. East Asia is already the first region in terms of GDP in power purchase parity (PPP) and in terms of research and development spending. However, North America remains the top region for military expenditures due to the overwhelming US spending reaching almost 700 billion dollars (698 \$b).

Table/graph 2: Comparing concentrations of power, in 2010, between East Asia, North America and the European Union; distribution of population, GDP (PPP), military expenditures (nominal), and R&D spending (PPP).

	Population (million)	GDP (PPP, b\$)	Military expenditures (nominal, b\$)	R&D spendings (PPP, b\$)
North America	459 (15%)	17 600 (34%)	715 (57%)	350 (34%)
EU 27	502 (16%)	15 200 (29%)	320 (26%)	260 (25%)
East Asia	2169 (69%)	19 600 (37%)	220 (17%)	430 (41%)



Sources: National censuses, IMF, SIPRI, Battelle

⁵⁸ All our graphs and tables gather data from the International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook, April 2011; the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2011; the World Intellectual Property Organization, International Property Statistics, 2011 and the Battelle, 2011 Global R&D Funding Forecast, December 2010

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Third, this shift of power towards East Asia will keep on becoming more profound. China's economic growth that led the region is not likely to stop yet. If many analysts often underline Chinese structural flaws like inflation, real estate bubble, hyper investment, etc., they also agree that the average growth should stay over 9% for at least a decade, in spite of the recent double-dip-shape economic crisis. If we analyze the economic growth predictions made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) last April, we can see the euro zone and the USA will experience a moderate economic growth between 2.7 and 1.7% in the best scenario⁵⁹. China and developing Asia should grow at a stronger pace, between 8.6 and 9.5%. The recent revision of these forecasts might not be so important since all economies would slow down in 2012, not only Asian ones, keeping the growth differential intact.

Table 3. Economic growth in 2003-2010 and forecasts for 2016

	2003-2010	2016
USA	2,0%	2,7%
Euro Zone	1,1%	1,7%
China	10,9%	9,5%
Developing Asia	9,0%	8,6%

Sources: IMF

The military expenditures in Northeast Asia (mainly in China) will also keep on growing for two reasons. First, the economic growth will automatically increase the nation's budget and as a consequence the military expenditures (so as R&D spending). This is all the more important because nation's budget increases faster than the GDP⁶⁰. Then, Northeast Asian countries still have free hands to boost their military budget because it represents only few points of GDP compared to Western countries'.

⁵⁹ The data we have used come from the IMF, World economic outlook, April 2011, i.e. the forecasts were revised in July and lightly reduced for developed countries

⁶⁰ In China for example, from 1998 to 2007, China's annual increase in government expenditure topped at 18.4 percent with defense expenditures averaging 15.9 percent, outpacing GDP growth at 12.5 percent. ERICKSON Andrew, Chinese Defense Expenditures: Implications for Naval Modernization, *China Brief*, Volume 10, No 8, April 2010, pp. 11-15, p12

Table 4. Military expenditures as part of GDP in 2009

USA	Russia	UK	France	China	Japan	ROK	Indonesia
4,7%	4,3%	2,7%	2,5%	2,2%	1%	2,9%	0,9%

Sources: SIPRI

As a direct consequence, we can expect East Asia to become the main region of world power in the coming decades, first in terms of economic and scientific power, then in terms of military power but on a longer period. In August 2011, the Asia Development Bank released an official report entitled “*Asia 2050, Realizing the Asian Century*”⁶¹. In it, it was written “*Asia is in the middle of a historic transformation [...] By nearly doubling its share of global gross domestic product (GDP) to 52 percent by 2050, Asia would regain the dominant economic position it held some 300 years ago, before the industrial revolution*”. We can then wonder whether after the European century and the American century, the 21st century would be the Asian one, the coming back of Asia and East Asia to its former position in the world system, a dominant one. We now have to focus on the inter-state system and its dynamic.

⁶¹ “Asia 2050, Realizing the Asian Century”, Asian Development Bank, Manila, August 2011

A unipolar inter-state system and the coming of bipolarity

“The era of American hegemony is drawing to a close right before our eyes. The rise of China is the biggest reason for this”⁶²

Christopher Layne, Robert M. Gates Chair in Intelligence and National Security

In terms of states, we argue the world is unipolar (distribution) - not hegemonic - and it is becoming bipolar (dynamic). The collapse of the USSR put an end to the Cold war and suddenly changed the distribution of capabilities in the system, not the system in itself. As Waltz said, *“the world has not been transformed; the structure of international politics has simply been remade by the disappearance of the Soviet Union”⁶³*. The USA remained the only superpower and according to many commentators, the system shifted from bipolarity to unipolarity. As summed up by William Wohlforth, *“two states measured up in 1990; one is gone. No new pole has appeared; 2 - 1 = 1. The system is unipolar”⁶⁴*. Thus would have started, in 1991, what Krauthammer called the *“unipolar moment”⁶⁵*.

However, we need to briefly underline the USA was already the dominant state, even during the Cold war. According to John Mearsheimer, the USSR never reached more than 59% of the American GDP⁶⁶; its military expenditures were equivalent to the US one but its R&D spending were much more inferior as the incapacity for the USSR to follow the arm race launched by Donald Reagan showed it.

⁶² LAYNE Christopher,, *“China’s Challenge to US Hegemony”*, *Current history*, January 2008, p13-18, p13

⁶³ WALTZ Kenneth, *“Structural Realism after the Cold war”*, *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5-41, p32

⁶⁴ WOHLFORTH William, *The Stability of a Unipolar World*, *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-41, p10

⁶⁵ KRAUTHAMMER Charles, *“The Unipolar Moment”*, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, 1990/1991, pp. 23-33

⁶⁶ MEARSHEIMER John J., *The tragedy of great power politics*, New York, Norton and Company, 2001, 555 pages, p74

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Today, there is no doubt that the United States is the strongest power in the world, in proportions never reached before by any country (except by the US itself after the end of WW2). All the following statements agree on this concentration of power between the hands of the USA. Whether John Ikenberry's statement that "*since the end of the cold war, the USA has emerged as an unrivaled and unprecedented global superpower. At no other time in modern history has a single state loomed so large over the rest of the world*"⁶⁷, Henry Kissinger's "*the US is enjoying a preeminence unrivaled by even the greatest empire of the past; America exercises an unparalleled ascendancy around the globe*"⁶⁸, Robert Jervis' "*measured in any conceivable way, the US has a greater share of world power than any other country in history*"⁶⁹ or Brooks and Wohlforth's "*today, the United States has no rival in any critical dimension of power; there has never been a system of sovereign states that contained one state with this degree of dominance*"⁷⁰, all those statements remain pertinent even twenty years after Krauthammer's article.

No country can today boast that it can compete directly with the United States. As underlined by Barrack Obama during his last State of the Union address in 2011, "*no one rival superpower is aligned against us*"⁷¹. The United States is the most powerful state "*in all the underlying components of power: economic, military, technological, and geopolitical*"⁷².

⁶⁷ IKENBERRY John, "Is American Multilateralism in Decline?" *Perspectives on Politics*, vol3, 2003, p533

⁶⁸ KISSINGER Henry, *Does America need a Foreign Policy? Toward a diplomacy for the 21st century*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2001

⁶⁹ JERVIS Robert, "The remaking of a unipolar world", *The Washington Quarterly* 29:3, (2006), p7-19

⁷⁰ BROOKS Stephen and WOLHFORTH William, American Primacy in Perspective, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2002, Volume 81, Number 4, pp 20-33, p 23

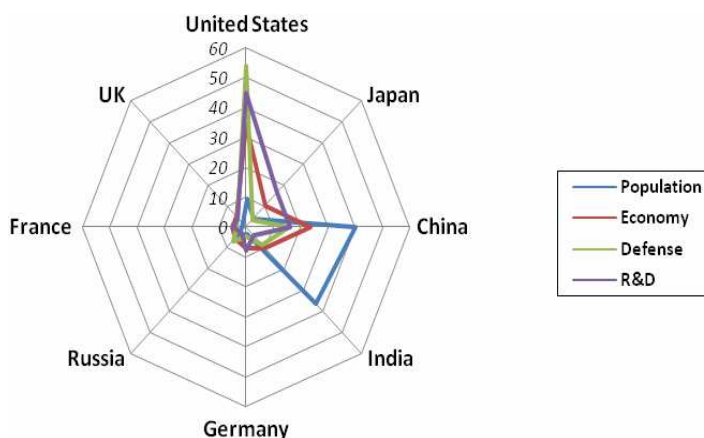
⁷¹ OBAMA Barrack, State of Union speech, 2011

⁷² WOHLFORTH William, The Stability of a Unipolar World, *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-41, p6

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Graph 3/table 5. Comparing concentrations of power in 2010 between great powers; distribution of population, GDP (PPP), military expenditures (nominal), R&D spending (PPP) and patents PTC filled at the WIPO.

	Population (million)	GDP (PPP in \$b)	Military ex (PPP in \$b)	Share of GDP	R&D (PPP in \$b)	Patents filled
USA	312 9%	14 658 34%	698 54%	4,8%	396 45%	44 855 38%
Japan	128 4%	4 309 10%	43 3%	1,0%	142 16%	32 156 27%
China	1340 40%	10 402 24%	204 16%	2,0%	141 16%	12 337 11%
India	1210 36%	4 060 10%	108 8%	2,7%	33 4%	n.c.
Germany	82 3%	2 940 7%	40 3%	1,4%	68 8%	17 171 14%
Russia	143 4%	2 223 5%	90 7%	4,0%	22 3%	n.c.
France	66 2%	2 145 5%	49 4%	2,2%	42 5%	7 193 6%
UK	62 2%	2 173 5%	58 5%	2,7%	38 3%	4 857 4%



Sources: National censuses, IMF, SIPRI, Battelle

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Some scholars disagree on the unipolarity of the international system arguing the system is either multipolar or hegemonic. Samuel Huntington first affirms *“there is now only one superpower. But that does not mean that the world is unipolar. A unipolar system would have one superpower, no significant major powers, and many minor powers”* and adds *“contemporary international politics does not fit any of these three models (unipolar, bipolar, multipolar). It is instead a strange hybrid, a uni-multipolar system with one superpower and several major powers”⁷³*. However, he says so because he does not make any difference between a unipolar and a hegemonic system as some scholars do. In their collective book published in 2007, Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth differentiates unipolar from hegemonic system. A unipolar system is a system with a dominant state that nonetheless does not have the capabilities to master all others or to be perfectly secured, i.e. that is not a hegemon⁷⁴.

The world is then unipolar but not hegemonic since *“a true global hegemon [would be] more powerful still—stronger than all second-ranked powers acting as members of a counterbalancing coalition seeking to contain the unipolar leader”⁷⁵*. A superpower exists but major powers do too. Chinese scholars, trying to determine the distribution of power in the international system, use the classical Chinese character *“shi”* that refers to the *“overall configuration of power and the direction or tendency of the process of change in which an actor acts and interacts”⁷⁶*. According to them, the international system is also composed of *“yichao duoqiang”* that literally means *“one superpower, several great powers”*. The US is not a global hegemon. It represents barely 5% of the world population, 20% of the global economy, 43% of the world military expenditures and 34% of global R&D spending. The US fails to reach the threshold of 50% of world power.

⁷³ HUNTINGTON Samuel, “The Lonely Superpower”, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1999

⁷⁴ KAUFMAN Stuart, LITTLE Richard and WOHLFORTH William, *The balance of power in world history*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, 279 pages

⁷⁵ PAPE Robert, “Empire falls”, *The National Interest*, Jan-Feb 2009

(http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2751/is_99/ai_n32148803/)

⁷⁶ ZHU Liqun, China’s foreign policy debates, *Chaillot papers*, September 2010, 80 pages, p17

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However, some scholars still argue that the US is a global hegemon and that a kind of American Empire could form. We argue this is an erroneous idea. According to Brooks and Wohlforth, the USA has enough power to revise unilaterally the international system just as it did at the end of WW2 during the Bretton Woods Conference⁷⁷. However, can the USA reform the IMF or the World Bank the way they did after WW2 while China and emerging countries are gaining some vote shares in those institutions? How can the USA force China to reevaluate its currency, the renminbi, when China is its moneylender? Isn't the European Union a powerful competitor when it comes to settle a case in the Dispute Settlement Body of the WTO? The US cannot compel other great powers to behave against their national interest. As Robert Gilpin noted thirty years ago, it still stands that "*although the United States continues to be the dominant and most prestigious state in the system, it no longer has the power to "govern" the system as it did in the past*"⁷⁸.

Then, the war in Iraq has sometimes been presented as a hegemonic war because no other great powers really balanced or use their veto power. This is fallacious. Because no country prevented Russia from attacking Georgia in 2008, does it mean Russia is an unstoppable superpower? We can argue it was simply not in their national interest to prevent the US from invading Iraq. The same argument goes with Libya. NATO intervened in Libya and toppled Gaddafi's government while China or Russia did not veto the resolution 1973. However, if the US was a hegemonic power, how could we explain that it did not attack North Korea in the 90s or even today with a growing nuclear and missile threat? The US never did because they know China or Russia would strongly oppose them and could even wage a war on such a sensitive issue. The international system is then unipolar but neither hegemonic nor multipolar. However, it is edging towards bipolarity, not multipolarity.

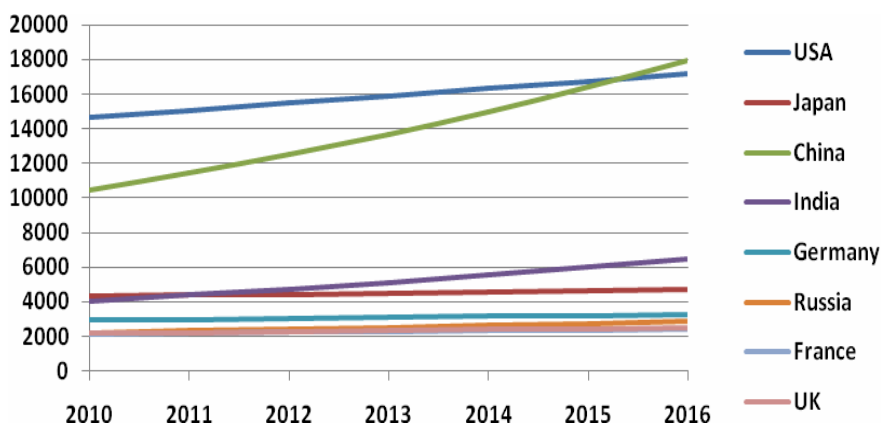
⁷⁷ BROOKS (Stephen) and WOHLFORTH (William), *World Out of Balance, International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2008, p213

⁷⁸ GILPIN Robert, *War and Change in World politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 272 pages, p232

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If we focus on economic growth forecasts, China will become the first economic power in power purchase parity as soon as 2016 (a few years later in nominal terms). It would be a huge symbol and a huge blow to US predominance since it has been the strongest economy power for more than a century. China's overtaking could even occur sooner than expected since economic forecasts concerning developed countries are constantly reviewed downwards and a double dip which would entail a recession is not excluded anymore⁷⁹.

Graph 4. Trends in GDP (PPP) of great powers from 2010 to 2016⁸⁰



Sources: IMF

⁷⁹ OECD report published in September 2011.

http://www.oecd.org/document/27/0,3746,en_21571361_44315115_48633433_1_1_1_1,00.html

⁸⁰ Expected economic growths for developed countries and for fiscal years 2011-2012 have been revised downwards in August since its April forecasts. US economic growth in 2011 would be around 2.5% (not 2.8%) and 2.7% for 2012 (not 2.9%). For the euro zone, growth in 2011 would be 2.0% (not 1.6%) and 1.7% (not 1.8%) in 2012 and for Japan - 0.7% (not 1.4%) and 2.9% (not 2.1%) in 2012 <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/update/02/index.htm>

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Table 6. Average economic growth (constant prices) in 2000-2010 and forecasts

	USA	Japan	China	India	Germany	Russia	France	UK
2000-2010	2,0%	0,9%	10,2%	7,2%	1,1%	5,4%	1,7%	1,8%
2011-2016	2,7%	1,5%	9,5%	8,1%	1,8%	4,3%	2,0%	2,4%

Sources: calculations realized with IMF data

It is clear the world is not going towards multipolarity but bipolarity. After 2016, the world will be comprised of two economic giants and a distant ‘competitor’, India, which will represent only one third of China’s economic power.

Nowadays, the international system is also becoming bipolar in terms of military expenditures. US military expenditures topped 700 billion dollars in 2010, figures that should be merely maintained until 2016 according to the last US Department of Defense Green Book. We should also note these estimates had been done before the signature of the Republican/Democrat agreement meant to reduce federal spending which will mainly concern the DoD. China military expenditures topped 200 billion dollars (PPP) in 2010 and are increasing at an average 13%, doubling every five years. Moreover, it represents only 2% of China’s GDP unlike 4.7% for the USA. It could easily reach \$400 billion in 2016. India and Russia’s military expenditures would keep on increasing and could possibly reach \$180 billion (PPP) and \$120 billion in 2016. Eventually, Japan, France, the UK and Germany are not likely to increase their military spending due to the economic turbulences they are suffering from. The UK, for instance, has already reduced its military expenditures and downsized its army⁸¹. Japan just went through a recession and should stick to its Constitution, not spending more than 1% of its GDP for its Self Defense forces...

⁸¹ PENNY Thomas, “Cameron Says U.K. Defense Spending to Be Cut by 8% Real Terms”, *Bloomberg*, October 19, 2010. “The difficult legacy we have inherited has necessitated tough decisions to get our economy back on track. Our national security depends on our economic security and vice versa. So bringing the defence budget back to balance is

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Once again, we clearly see two countries standing out, the USA and China. Two countries are distant competitors, India and Russia, and former military powers such as Japan, France, the UK or Germany are far behind. We can then argue that if the US is still the dominant power in the international system what makes it unipolar, dynamic differentials are mostly unfavourable to the superpower. Since that *“shift away [...] towards a more polycentric power structure at the system level cannot but have profound consequences for regional security”*⁸², we now need to focus on East Asia.

a vital part of how we tackle the deficit and protect this country's national security”. “Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review”, HM government, October 2010, London, 75 pages

⁸² BUZAN Barry, *People, states and fear, an agenda for international security studies in the post cold-war era*, European consortium for political research, 2007, 311 pages, p172

East Asia may well be the new international powderkeg

“Asia is rich in people, rich in culture and rich in resources. It is also rich in trouble”

Hubert Humphrey, 38th US vice president of the USA (1965-1969)

Contrary to what the former US president Bill Clinton argued in 1992 that *“in a world where freedom, not tyranny, is on the march, the cynical calculus of pure power politics simply does not compute. It is ill-suited to a new era”⁸³*; the world remains insecure and the competition between great powers never faded. The USSR collapsed but still, *“the United States has been at war for a startling two out of every three years since 1989, and there is no end in sight”⁸⁴*. The *“moment of miracles”⁸⁵* we should have entered is in reality a moment of great incertitude. International politics remains *“of necessity power politics”⁸⁶* and East Asia might even be the focus point of power politics. Indeed, contrary to Europe and North America, that region is facing a great security challenge.

As we argued, East Asia is now a major pole of power due to the rise of China. The forecast made by Kenneth Waltz is being realized, *“throughout modern history, international politics centered on Europe. Two world wars ended Europe’s dominance. Whether Europe will somehow, someday emerge as a great power is a matter for speculation. In the meantime, the all-but-inevitable movement from unipolarity to multipolarity is taking place not in Europe but in Asia”⁸⁷*. However, that region is not only powerful but dangerous. We can clearly argue the East Asia of today is the Europe of yesterday: an economically rich region concentrating security issues.

⁸³ Speech made by Bill Clinton in Milwaukee during the 1992 presidential campaign in Milwaukee

⁸⁴ MEARSHEIMER John, “Imperial by design”, *The National Interest*, Jan/Feb 2011, number 111, pp16-34, p19

⁸⁵ President Bill Clinton during the UN General Assembly in September 1993

⁸⁶ MORGENTHAU Hans J., *Politics among nations*, seventh edition, 2006, Mc Graw Hill, New York, 703 pages, p35

⁸⁷ WALTZ Kenneth, “Structural Realism after the Cold war”, *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5–41, p32

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Europe has long been the high church regarding security studies. Europe was the wealthiest but also the most insecure region in the world. The 20th century has been a century of desolation in Europe: territorial claims and the rise of nationalism led to two World wars during the first half of the century; the Cold war split the continent into two opposite alliances/blocks during the second half. The collapse of the USSR brought peace back to Europe even if it didn't prevent the Yugoslavian crisis. The worst scenario predicted and labelled "*Hobbesian pessimism*" has not been fulfilled⁸⁸. Nationalism and multipolar instability did not make their comeback and three main interpretations are given.

The first one can be called the "*liberal 'end of history' optimism*"⁸⁹. The collapse of the communist illegitimate regimes in East Europe brought liberal, market-oriented, democratic regimes unified under the European Union banner. It is the perfect union between the democratic peace theory, economic interdependence and the role of institutions⁹⁰, thereby gathering the three main liberal stances.

The second interpretation relies on the role played by the United States as an offshore balancer, thus creating an overlay. As John Mearsheimer explains, "*first, America has continued to serve as Europe's pacifier by maintaining a significant military presence on the continent and keeping NATO intact. Second, most Europeans have not only welcomed America's continued presence in their midst, but they have largely accepted the idea that the United States has a moral and strategic responsibility to run the world*"⁹¹. The US expanded NATO eastwards so that it could include former Warsaw Pact members such as Poland or Slovakia..

⁸⁸ SNYDER Jack, "Averting Anarchy in the New Europe", *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Spring, 1990), pp. 5-41, MEARSHEIMER John, "Why we will soon miss the Cold war", *The Atlantic Monthly*, Volume 266, No. 2 (August 1990), pp. 35-50

⁸⁹ SNYDER Jack, "Averting Anarchy in the New Europe", *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Spring, 1990), pp. 5-41, p5

⁹⁰ WALTZ Kenneth, "Structural Realism after the Cold war", *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5-41

⁹¹ MEARSHEIMER John, "Why is Europe peaceful today?", *European political science*, Vol 9, 2010, p387-397, p388

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The third interpretation is that no state is powerful enough and no state has such a dynamic that it could be encouraged to seek regional hegemony without being efficiently balanced. Economically, Germany is the most powerful state of the EU but it tops only 20% of the regional share while France and the UK reach 15%. Militarily, the UK, France and Russia, three nuclear powers, top in terms of military expenditures with respectively 16% of the European total while Germany represents only 12%. Moreover, European great powers are growing rather at the same pace, which does not favor any state over the others.

The first factor does not really apply to East Asia. It is a heterogeneous system⁹² (using Raymond Aron's definition); i.e. democracies (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan...) coexist with authoritarian regimes (China and Vietnam). There is neither regional political institution, except ASEAN which does not have any coercive power, nor single market or economic union. The second factor is less and less accurate since the growth of China makes it more and more difficult for the US to have free hands in the region. The third factor is inapplicable since the perfect opposite is happening. The already major country – China - keeps on growing whereas the former number one –Japan - is stuck and so is the offshore balancer – the USA.

Not only *“China is the key to understanding the future distribution of power in Northeast Asia. [...]”*⁹³ and some potential turbulences it may entail, but some pre-existing factors of tension are also inherent to Northeast Asia. These factors which are unresolved post-WW2 issues make this region a powderkeg. Whereas Europe has been successful in erasing its scars, nothing has changed in Northeast Asia. As the White paper on Defence published by Japan in 2010 notes, East Asia *“is considerably rich in political, economic,*

⁹² Term coined by Raymond Aron. ARON Raymond, *Paix et guerre entre les nations*, Calmann-Levy, Paris, 2004, 794 pages

⁹³ WALTZ Kenneth, “Structural Realism after the Cold war”, *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5–41, p33

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*ethnic and religious diversity, and conflicts between countries/regions remain, even after the end of the Cold War, unlike Europe*⁹⁴. Here are presented the three main East Asian issues:

- **The Korean peninsula issue.** Following the Korean War that led to a de jure division of Korea, the situation never really improved despite the hopes put into the Sunshine Policy (presidents Kim and Roh) at the beginning of the 2000s. Nowadays, the peninsula is back to a high level of tensions with the nuclearization of the DPRK in 2006, the sinking of the Cheonan corvette in March 2010 and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010 defined by the UN as “*the most serious incident since the Korean war*”. The recent death of Kim Jong-il and the accelerated political succession to its youngest son has to be followed with scrutiny.
- **The Taiwan issue.** No major incident has happened since 1996, when the USA sent two aircraft carriers into the Strait in response to Chinese missile tests in the Taiwan Strait. Even if the Kuomintang, which wins the latest presidential election in January 2012, is not pro-independence compared to its predecessor, tensions remain high. The Chinese anti-secession law, authorizing China to use “*non peaceful means*” to prevent independence⁹⁵, was voted in 2005 and the arm deal done by Washington in 2010 dealt a huge blow to US-China relations.
- **The territorial claims issue.** They concern almost all East Asian countries: Kuriles Islands between Russia and Japan, Dokdo/Takeshima Islands between South Korea and Japan, Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands between China and Japan, Paracels Islands between China, Vietnam and Taiwan, Spratley Islands between South China Sea countries... Already strained relations were damaged in 2010-2011 because of more assertive behaviors that are not likely to cool down.

⁹⁴ “White Paper, Defense of Japan”, Ministry of National Defense, Tokyo, 2010, p3

⁹⁵ Ful text: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200503/14/eng20050314_176746.html

An unprecedented power shift and the revival of East Asia

Eventually, we cannot provide a general assessment of the tense situation in East Asia without briefly mentioning global issues such as pollution, natural disasters, maritime security and of course nuclear proliferation which is bound to worsen an already dark picture.

East Asia is then a major pole of world power and gathers security issues that make it be a potential powderkeg. The study of the region should become a top priority not only for American scholars and leaders but also European ones, French included. More than a century ago, John Hay affirmed the Pacific would be the ocean of the future. No need to say, time went by; the Pacific has become the ocean of the present.

The Obama administration seems to have perfectly understood that point since Secretary of State Clinton argued *“we know that much of the history of the 21st century will be written in Asia”*⁹⁶. If we combine the last Quadrennial Defense review report published in February 2010 underlining *“America’s interests and role in the world require armed forces with unmatched capabilities [...] U.S. forces must be able to deter, defend against, and defeat aggression by potentially hostile nation-states”*⁹⁷ with the rise of China, the region might well be *“ripe for rivalry”*⁹⁸ and may have entered a zone of turbulences.

Being aware of the consequences the coming Asian Century implies, it is urgent not to turn a blind eye to that region and to adapt our strategies and policies.

⁹⁶ RODHAM CLINTON Hillary, Secretary of State, America's Engagement in the Asia-Pacific, Kahala Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii, October 28, 2010

⁹⁷ Quadrennial Defense Review Report, Department of Defense, United States of America, February 2010, 105 pages, p iv/vii

⁹⁸ FRIEDBERG Aaron L., “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94)

Cartoon by KAL, published in The Economist, October 1, 2009



Cartoon by KAL, published in The Economist, August 13, 2011

