

Unites States: A Declining Hegemon?

The Rise of a Multipolar World

By Maneesha Tripathi*

Abstract

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist allies in Eastern Europe around 1990 spelled the end of bipolarity- a global structure characterized by the competition between the two nuclear superpowers – the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – during the Cold War era. The next century was to be the true “American Century” with the rest of the world moulding itself in the image of the global hegemon. The unipolar world allowed the US to loom largely unchallenged for many years and resulted in a peaceful and stable world order. However, with the recent rise of new powers such as the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China– the world is moving towards a multi-polar international system. Global governance has become on the whole more diverse, more democratic, more complex, and more competitive.

On current trends, in 2020, the US, China and the EU will each have a little fewer than 20 per cent of global GDP, while India will have almost 10 per cent and Japan about 5 per cent. Militarily, the US may still remain the preponderant power, but its relative political influence will be weaker than today. China plans to use its growing economic strength and diplomatic clout to check American power. Russia has already

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returned as a significant geopolitical actor and is likely to remain one. Countries such as Brazil and South Africa wield increasing diplomatic influence.

The paper will attempt to analyse that whether the rise of other powers has undermined the dominance of US as a superpower or does US still retains its supremacy in a multipolar world.

Keywords: Hegemony, Unipolarity, Multipolar world, BRIC Countries, World Order



1. Introduction

1.1 In recent years a number of emerging nations have been challenging the position of dominance of the old powers, which are dropping down the international pecking order. In economic terms, countries from the “South” now account for more than half of global GDP (Gross Domestic Product), are leading world growth –with growth rates above 11% (China) and 9% (India) –and consume more than half of the world’s energy. Emerging powers have increasingly worked together to articulate the interests of the developing world. New groups have emerged, such as the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), the BASICs (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China), and two different G-20s.

1.2 USA’s inventions in other countries and its economic decline has dented its world position has further accelerated the power shift and led to rise of multipolar world.

2. Objective

2.1 In the multipolar world economic power is increasingly diffused across geographical borders. The rise of the emerging markets planted new economic flags, diffusing and rebalancing economic power across ever more countries and region. (Accenture: 2010: 1-2). The traditional concentration of wealth and economic power in the developed economies are now dispersed to multiple centres across the world. Each nation is part of global economy that continues to evolve-whether in growth or in crisis. (Accenture: 2009:3)

2.2 On current trends, in 2020, the US, China and the EU will each have a little fewer than 20 per cent of global GDP, while India will have almost 10 per cent and Japan about 5 per cent. Militarily, the US may still remain the preponderant power, but its

relative political influence will be weaker than today. China plans to use its growing economic strength and diplomatic clout to check American power. Russia has already returned as a significant geopolitical actor and is likely to remain one. Countries such as Brazil and South Africa wield increasing diplomatic influence (Grant and Valasek: 2007:2).

2.3 The paper looks at the role and significance of United States in a multipolar world. It will attempt to analyse that whether the rise of other powers has undermined the dominance of US as a superpower or does US still retains its supremacy in a multipolar world.

3. Methodology

3.1 The study is mainly based on secondary sources. The paper depends upon analytical studies relevant for its study. It is based heavily on the data provided by IMF and on surveys conducted by Pew Research Centre on global attitude. The study draws from articles published in journals like Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy.

4. The Rise of Emerging Powers

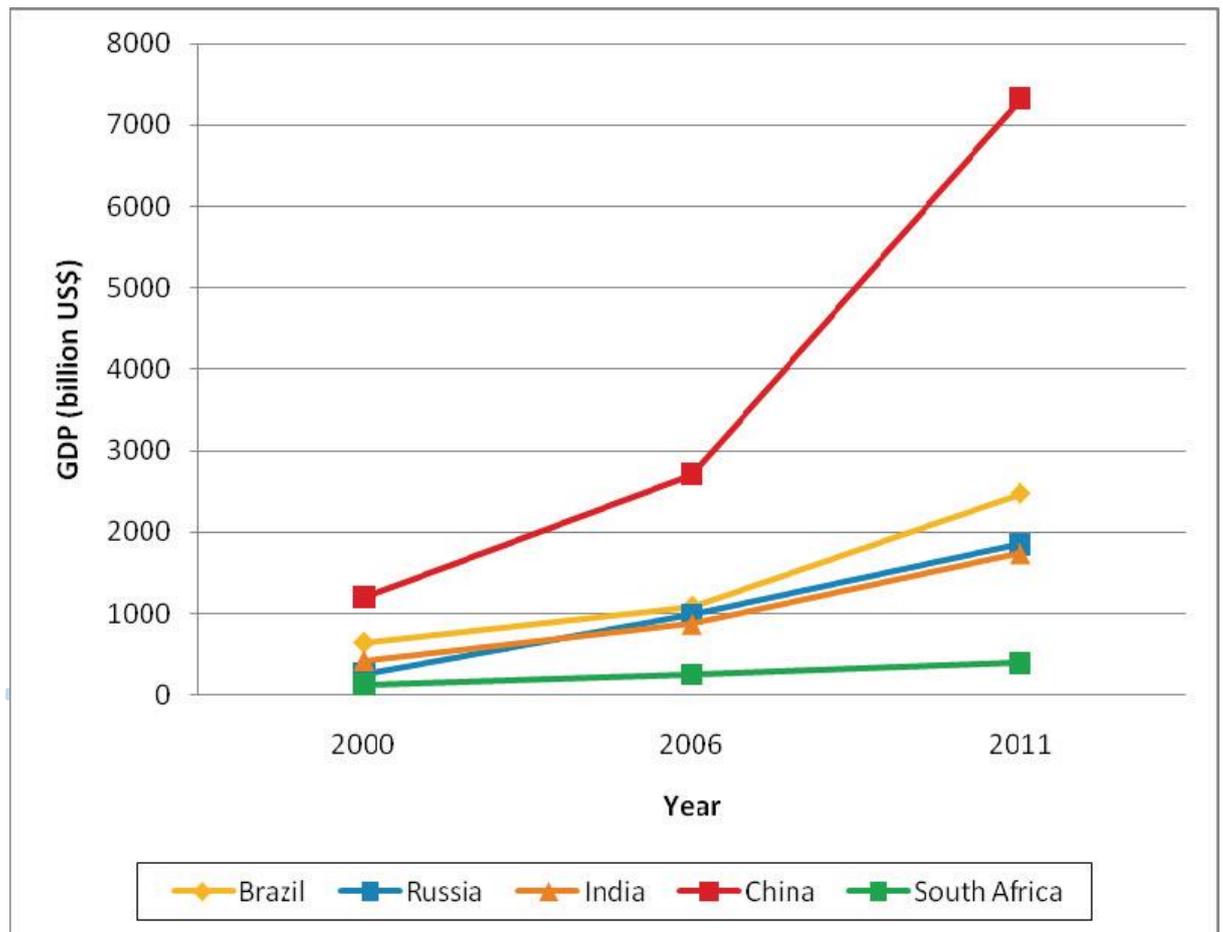
4.1 The dissolution of USSR sent shockwaves through the regional as well as international environment. The forces of contending ideologies that had taken centre stage for half a century gave way to a new, nascent international system. The United States had seemingly arrived at the apex of its global power: U.S. values, such as liberalism and democracy, spread around the globe; U.S. corporations were in the vanguard of building a new global economy; and U.S. military forces were in the forefront of international efforts to provide global stability. The well-defined hierarchy of power of the unipolar world allowed the US to loom largely

unchallenged for many years and resulted in a peaceful and stable world order. However, within a decade the world witnessed the rise of a multi polar challenging different aspects of American supremacy.

4.2 When countries grow relatively fast they gain in economic power through their enlarging production and consumption markets. They are able to exercise that power at international negotiations on economic matters (such as trade barriers and product standards) but also in a wider sense, including participation in climate change and other environmental negotiations. The emerging powers, sometimes known as the BRICS, consist of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Other countries such as Indonesia and Turkey, and those belonging to regional blocs like the European Union or to the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) group, are either trading nations on the rise or countries endowed with abundant natural resources or both. These rising powers are changing the dynamics of power in the international system by seeking a greater voice in international institutions and building political bonds through regional organisations.

The following graph shows the GDP of some major emerging economies:

Graph1



Source: BRICS, Joint Statistical Publication, 2013

4.3 These five countries were acronymed as **BRICS**. Initially the acronym **BRIC for Brazil, Russia, India and China**, was coined by economist Jim O’Niell, of Goldman Sachs in a paper in 2001 (‘O Niell: 2001). Another paper by Goldman Sachs in 2003 by Dominic Wilson in 2003 concretised the earlier findings. It predicted that over the next 50 years, the BRICs economies—could become a much larger force in the world economy. It said that in less than 40 years, the BRICs economies together could be larger than the G6 in US dollar terms; and by 2025 they could account for over half the size of the G6. Of the current G6, only the US and Japan may be among the six largest economies in US dollar terms in 2050 (Wilson: 2003: 2). The four countries-

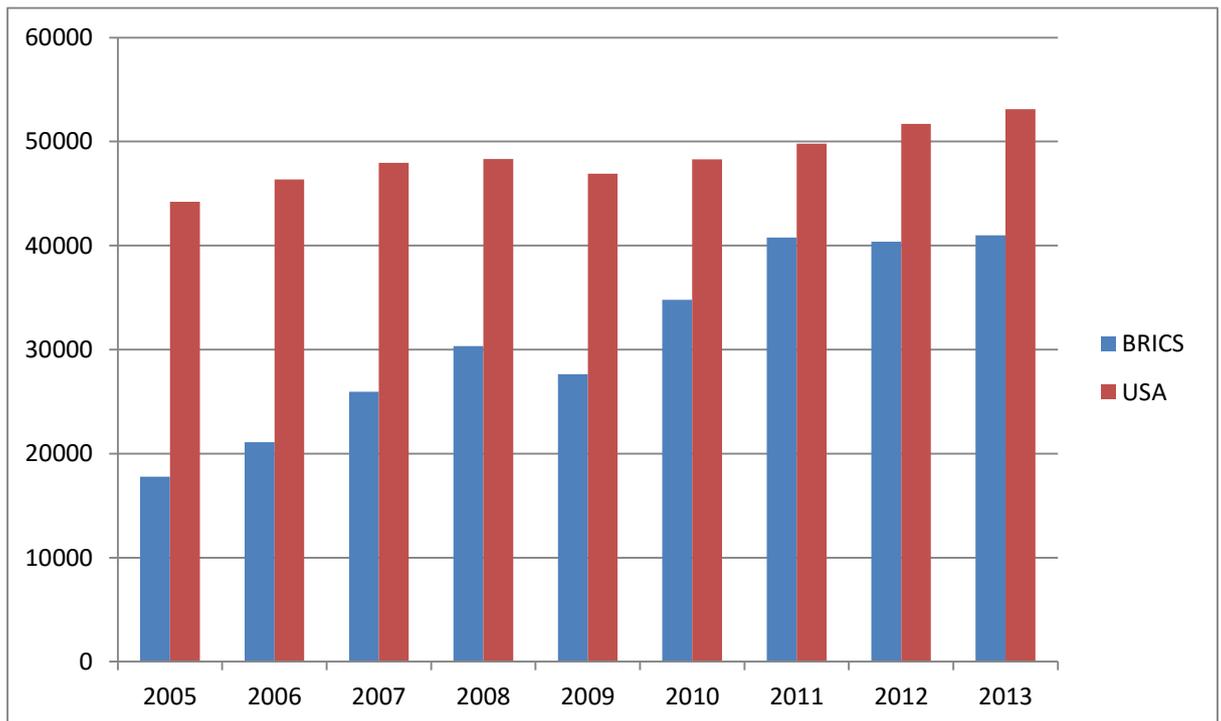
Brazil, Russia, India, and China formed their own economic and political alliance in 2008. South Africa officially joined in 2011 and the acronym was extended to BRICS. These countries' collaboration is aimed at meeting economic needs of this century which include infrastructure development, consumption and increased trade. The BRICS are home to 43 percent of the world's population and make up 21 percent of global GDP. Within the bloc, China has the largest economy and the fastest growing gross domestic product Chinese President, Hu Jintao, claimed that the BRICS nations are the defender and promoter of the interests of developing countries (BRICS is the Defender: 2012)

4.4 BRIC countries' economic aggregates have been gradually catching up with developed countries in recent years.

The following bar graph shows a comparison between the GDP of US and the BRICS economies.



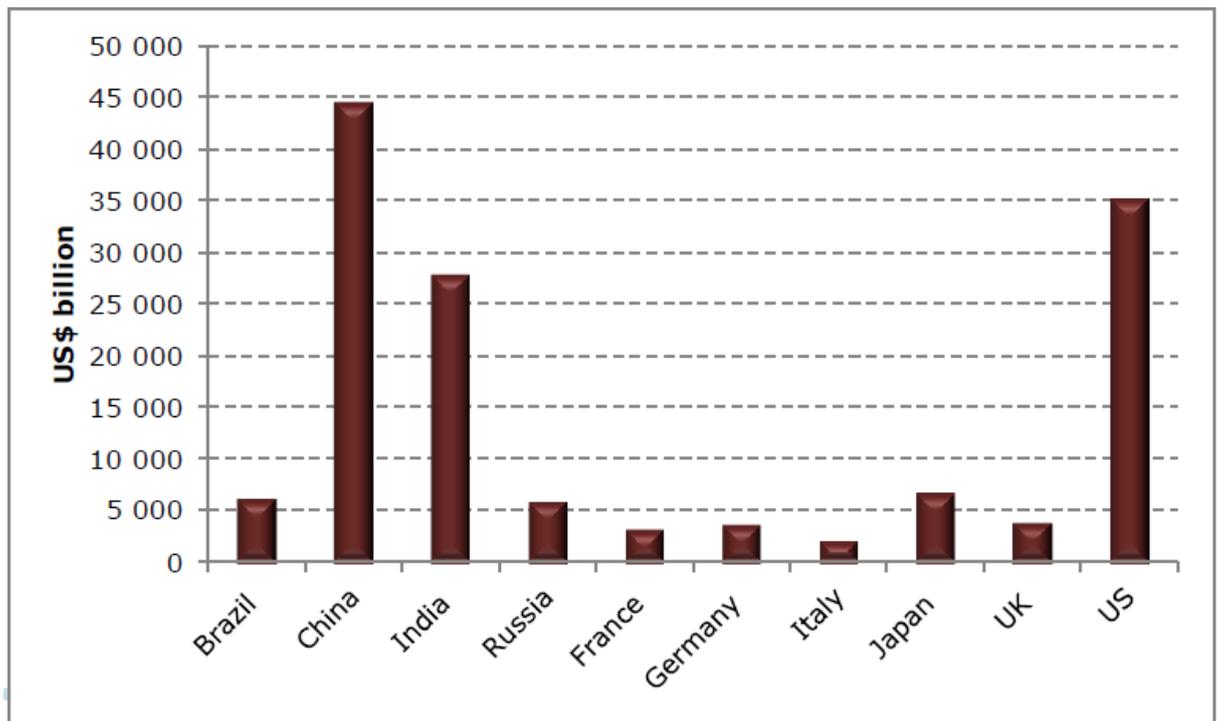
Graph2



Source: World Economic Outlook Database, IMF 2014

The graph below shows the projection that the largest economies in 2050 would be led by China, at US\$44.4 billion, followed by the US, India, Japan, Brazil and Russia.

Graph3



Source: Goldman Sachs, 2003

4.5 BRICS is pressing for reforms of the IMF, World Bank and the Security Council of the United Nations, which BRICS nations say is in need to give emerging nations more voting right. These emerging powers are also willing to raise their international status by taking the lead in new non-western organisations and to gather media attention through summit diplomacy (Renard: 2009: 19). The sixth BRICS summit held at of Heads of State and of Government of BRICS, held in Fortaleza and Brasília adopted the Fortaleza Declaration and action plan, the Agreement on the New Development Bank, the Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and agreements among BRICS Development Banks and Export Credit Insurance Agencies. The CRA is an additional line of defence available to the BRICS countries in scenarios of Balance of Payments' difficulties. It will have initial

size of \$100 billion and will help countries avoid “short term liquidity pressures, promote BRICS cooperation, strengthen the global financial safety net complement existing international arrangements”. The New Development Bank will finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects. It will have an initial subscribed capital of \$50 billion followed by an authorised capital of \$100 billion, equally shared among Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa. The bank and fund are seen as counter-weights to the western dominated World Bank and IMF.

5. Group of 20

5.1 The Group of Twenty (also known as the G-20 or G20) is a forum for the governments and Central bank Governors from twenty major economies. The member countries included 19 individual countries- Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States- and the European Union

5.2 The G20 represent about two-thirds of the world's population, 85 per cent of global gross domestic product and over 75 per cent of global trade. The G20 started in 1999 as a meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis. The G20 is the first attempt at coordinating policies between industrialized and emerging economies by leaders. In 2008, the first G20 Leaders Summit was held. The emergence of the G20 leaders' meeting during the recent global financial crisis as the ‘premier forum for international economic cooperation’ reflects a significant shift of hegemony over global governance towards the emerging economies. It occurred against the background of major geopolitical shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific, resulting from the emergence of new global powers in international affairs (Renard: 2010: 7-21).

5.3 The strength of G- 20 platform can be seen in several ways. The first is the growing breadth of the agenda that G-20 has discussed. It has gone well beyond financial stability to embrace trade, other economic issues, and a wide range of matters extending into the security sphere. The second is the general rise in the number of commitments. The third is the move toward rotating the chair, generally alternating between a G-8 or developed country member and a non G- 8 or developing country member (Cooper, Antkiewicz: 2008:49)

6. The MIST/MINT Economies

6.1 After BRICS, Jim O’Niell came up with another agglomeration MIST referring to Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey. The term MIST has been coined to describe the next tier of large emerging economies. Though the MIST economies lack the solidity of BRICS, all four have in common a number of factors: a large population and market, a big economy at about 1% of global GDP each, and all are members of the G-20. Later South Korea was dropped in favour of Nigeria in October 2013, making the agglomeration MINT from MIST. Average growth of the MINT economies between 2009 and 2012 were recorded at 4.7 percent by the International Monetary Fund’s World Economic Outlook, a figure projected to grow at around 5.2 percent through to 2018.

The following table shows the GDP of the MINT economies:

Table 1

GDP (US \$ Billion)

Country	2005	2008	2012
Mexico	865.847	1,100.698	1,183.507
Indonesia	285.773	510.494	877.801
Nigeria	112.248	209.196	264.196
South Korea	844.866	931.405	1,129.598
Turkey	482.737	730.628	788.042

Source: IMF, 2014

7. CIVTETS Economies

7.1 This acronym is given to the countries Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa, which are predicted by some to be among the next emerging markets to quickly rise in economic prominence over the coming decades.

These nations all have large, young population. They also are all fast-growing, relatively diverse economies.

The table below shows the GDP for three countries (Colombia, Vietnam and Egypt) from CIVTETS as the rest of the countries have been discussed above:

Table 2

GDP (US \$ Billion)

Country	2005	2008	2012
Colombia	146.566	243.982	369.789
Vietnam	57.648	98.269	155.565
Egypt	89.519	162.435	262.263

Source: IMF, 2012

8. US in the multipolar world

8.1 The end of the cold war placed the US at the centre of the world order- both militarily and economically. The power of the US was unchallenged. The world looked at US to lead. But a decade later US position seemed declining. The emerging economic centres discussed above, are contending for the position of superpower. The world is no more unipolar wherein there is only one superpower with no other significant major powers, and many minor powers. As a result, the superpower could effectively resolve important international issues alone, and no combination of other states would have the power to prevent it from doing so (Huntington: 1999). The US does not seem in a position to lead the world without a coalition of major powers. At his West Point speech, in May 2010, Obama declared that “The United States cannot act alone in the world”. He added “The burdens of this century cannot fall on our soldiers alone. It also cannot fall on American shoulders alone and pledged to shape a new "international order".... The United States must renew old alliances and builds new partnerships, and shape stronger international standards and institutions (Text of Obama’s Speech to West Point 2010 Cadets, 2010)

8.2 The role of the ‘global police’ that United States took upon it, intervening in other countries dented America’s global image. The invasion of Iraq by US became the first step in a train of events that did enormous damage to the United States and its position in the world (Walt: 2011) The United States’ decision to launch a preventive attack on Iraq in 2003 resulted in significant international resentment, plummeting approval ratings of the Bush administration and domestic disenchantment which manifested itself with subsequent election results. This was exacerbated by failure to find weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the horrific mistreatment of prisoners in the

Abu Ghraib prison, and the problematic occupation. The Bush administration's obsession with control throughout the occupation and the increasing death toll created serious legitimacy problem with the international community. Having invaded Iraq without UN Security Council authorization or the support of most other democratic publics in the world, the United States was unable to convince many countries to take a meaningful role in the occupation, something that could have blunted suspicions of the coalition (Diamond: 2004).

8.3 With the onset of the Iraq war in 2003, anti-Americanism surged across much of the globe (Pew Research Global Attitude Project: 2011)

8.4 The Afghanistan war became the longest war in the history of United States. The September 11, 2001 attacks on the US, directed by the Al-Qaeda prompted retaliation by US and allied force, which swiftly ousted the Taliban regime for harbouring terrorist group's leadership. The Taliban regrouped in Pakistan and returned as an insurgency targeting Western troops and nascent Afghan State. President Barack Obama announced cut in the US military presence in Afghanistan and completely leave the nation to its own devices by 2017. However, there is no guarantee Afghanistan's soil won't be used for terrorism again. The prolonged war in Afghanistan and now the withdrawal of troops while the situation is still not stable, has led to the questioning of the whole rationale behind the 'war against terrorism'.[†]

8.5 The election of Barrack Obama as President led to dramatically higher ratings for the U.S. in many nations. Obama was seen much more positively than his predecessor

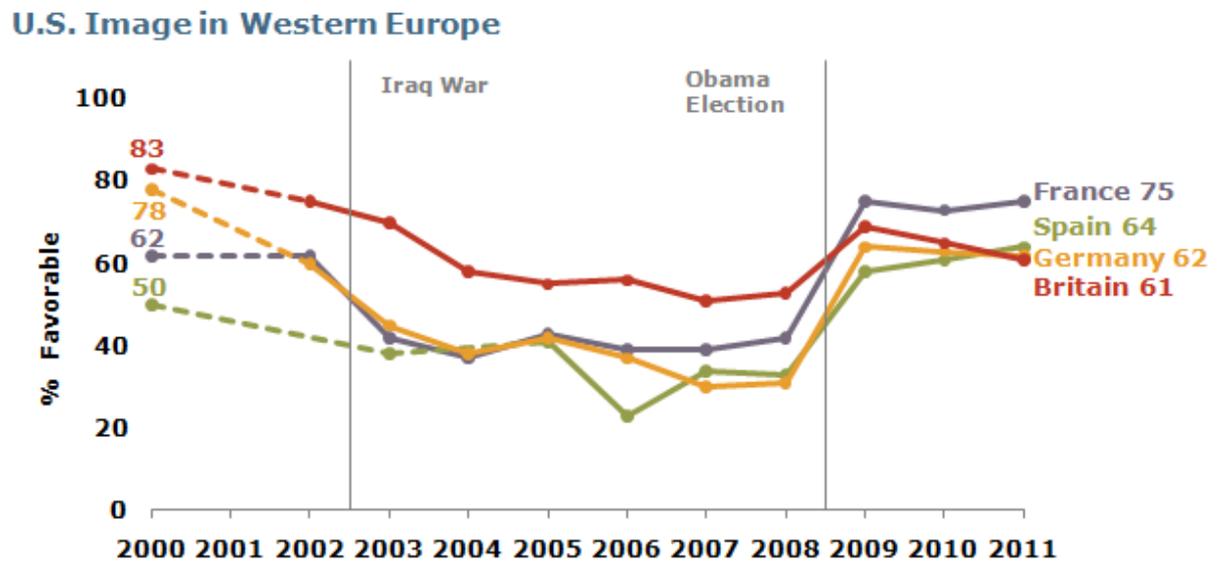
[†] The War on Terror (WOT), also known as the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) is a term which has been applied to an international military campaign that started after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

in the Americas, Africa, and Asia as well, and ratings for the U.S. rose significantly in nations such as Mexico, Argentina, Canada, Nigeria, and Japan (ibid).

8.6 However, the crisis in Iraq and Syria led the Obama Administration to signal towards virtually a new phase in the war on terror- a expression it had disdained- by pledging to go after the ISIS, whether in Iraq or Syria, even if it means putting its campaign against Syrian dictator Bashar-al-Assad on backburner (Rajghatta:2014). In many ways, the rise of ISIS has been aided by addled American policy. Instead of focussing on Afghanistan, the Americans invaded Iraq, destroyed its government which was secular even if despotic, and then got out when Iraq became a quagmire. The US even dismantled the Iraqi army, causing its battle-hardened commanders to cross over to ISIS. The new, inexperienced Iraqi army fled before the ISIS juggernaut, leaving the heavy American weaponry they had been gifted, in ISIS hands. Moreover, the Americans and the West have been supporting anti-Assad forces in Syria's civil war, further strengthening the ISIS (Op Ed.:2014).

8.7 According to Pew Research Global Attitude Project (2002), despite an initial outpouring of public sympathy for America following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, discontent with the United States grew around the world over. Image of the U.S. was tarnished in all types of nations: among long time NATO allies, in developing countries, in Eastern Europe and, most dramatically, in Muslim societies. Since 2000, favourability ratings for the U.S. have fallen in 19 of the 27 countries. The U.S. anti-terrorism efforts increasingly became associated with Iraq, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and other unpopular aspects of American foreign policy, support plummeted. By 2007, only about four-in-ten in France, Germany and Britain favoured U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism, and just 21% held this view in Spain (Pew Research Global Attitude Project: 2011b).

Graph 4



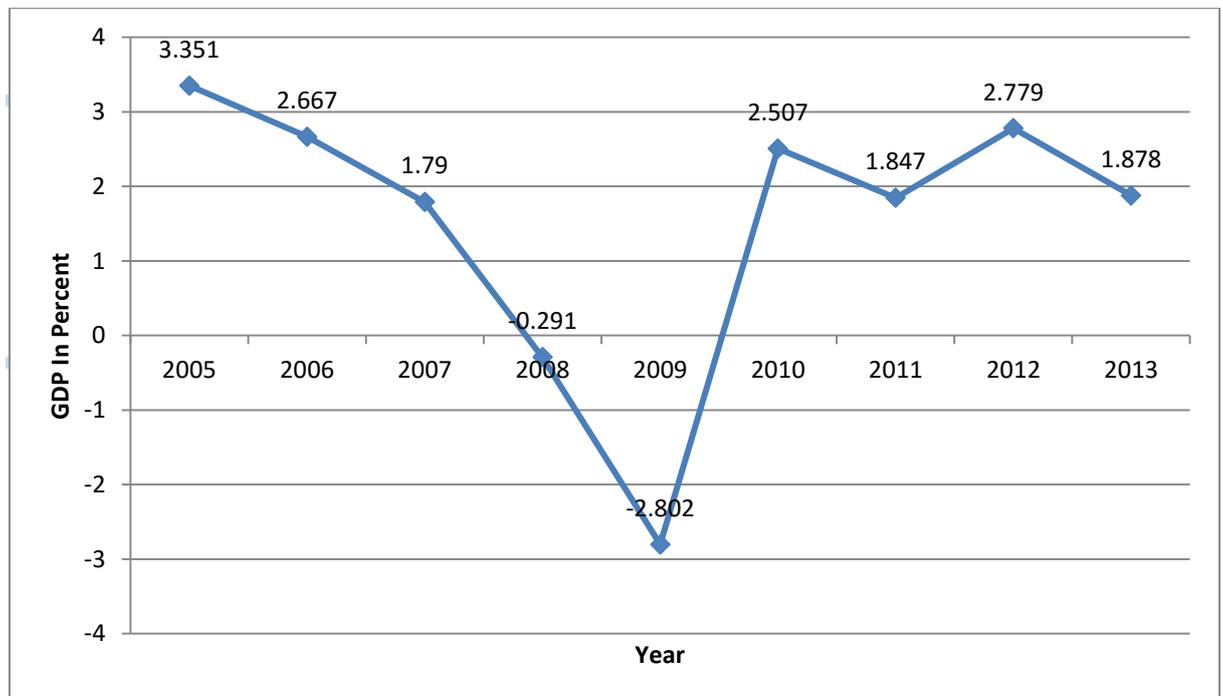
Source: Pew Research Centre

8.8 The onset of the global financial crisis further damaged America's global standing. The subprime mortgage crisis that broke out in the latter half of 2007 constantly escalated and eventually evolved into the gravest international financial crisis and global economic recession since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Between mid-September and late October 2008, Lehman Brothers Holding Inc., the third largest investment bank in the United States, announced its bankruptcy and Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley, the top two American investment banks, were transformed into holding companies of banking corporations. By then all the top five investment banks of the United States had collapsed. The crisis spread from the financial field to real economy, greatly decreasing investment needs. The quarterly adjusted actual investment in the third quarter of 2008 in the United States recorded a growth rate of -5.3% . The figure for the fourth quarter of the year was -22% and that for the first quarter of 2009 -34.0% . The crisis has not only impacted the hard

strength of America's financial sector but also affected its soft strength, and subsequently the comprehensive soft power of the United States. The crisis has deeply shaken the super-strong position of the United States and the dollar in the world economy and financial system as well as people's confidence in the American financial establishments and the dollar, which was established by the United States in several decades after the War[‡] (Dezhao: 2006).

The following graph shows the US GDP in Percent

Graph 5



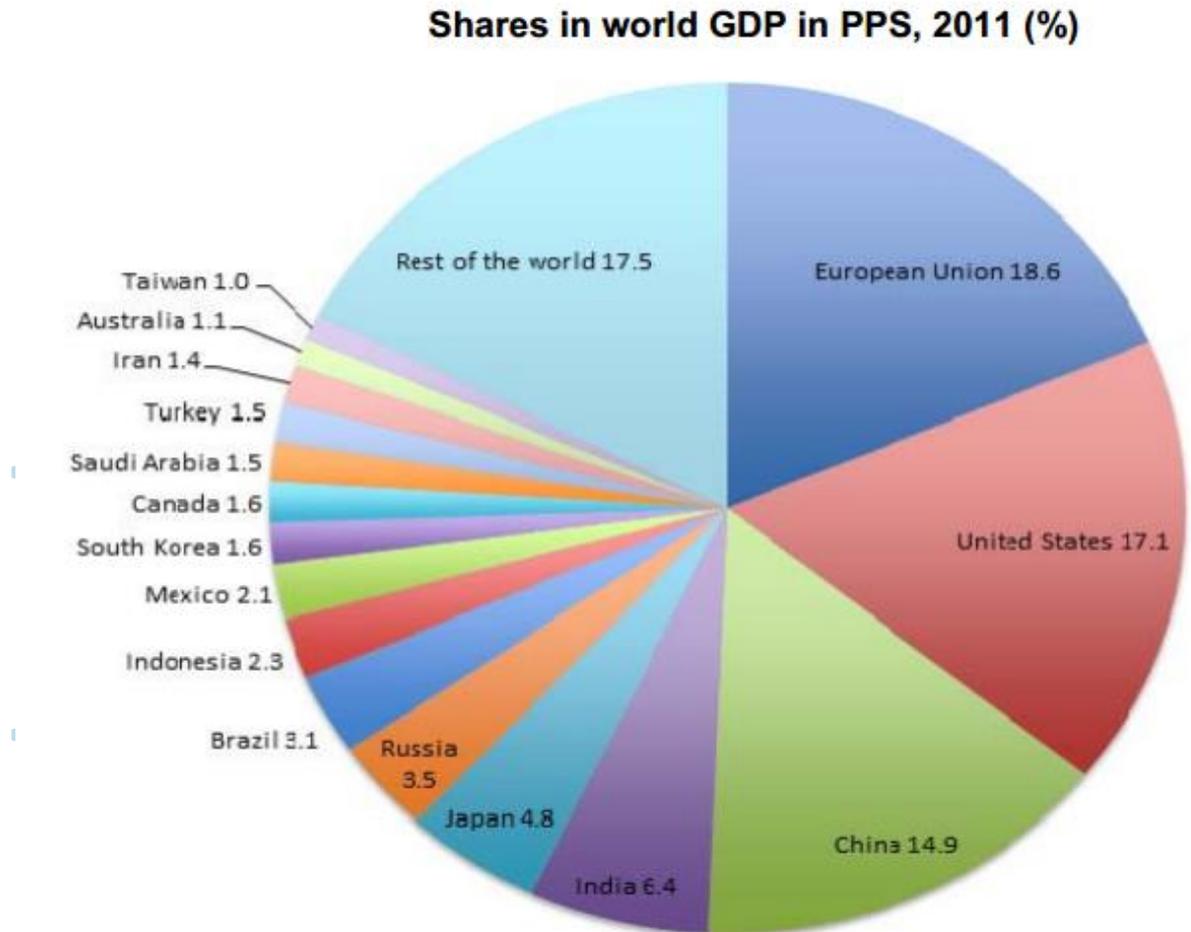
Source: IMF: 2014

8.9 During 1989-1995 the US accounted for 23.4% of the world product, which has gone down to 17.1 by 2011. In 2011, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the EU28 represented 18.6% of the world's GDP, expressed in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS). The United States was the second biggest economy with a share of 17.1% and

[‡] http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2011-11/18/content_4635120.htm

China the third biggest with 14.9%. Other countries (outside EU28) with a share larger than 1% are shown below.

Figure 1

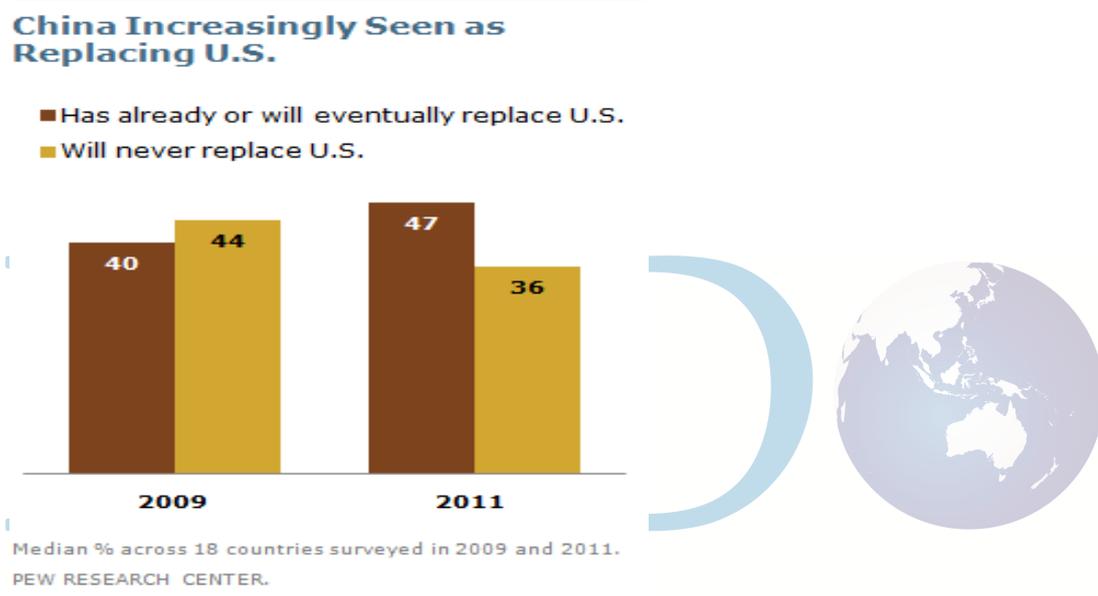


Source: News release 69/2014 - 30 April 2014

8.10 The economic downturn led many to reassess their view of American power – especially American power relative to China's. As the U.S. economy has struggled over the last few years, China has continued its historic growth, and increasingly Beijing has taken a more assertive approach to international affairs. These shifting dynamics are clearly reflected in global public opinion, and there is a widespread perception that China will supplant the U.S. as the dominant global superpower. Across the 18 countries surveyed by Pew in both 2009 and 2011, the median

percentage saying China will replace or already has replaced the U.S. as the world's leading superpower increased from 40% in 2009 to 47% two years later. Meanwhile, the median percentage saying China will never replace the U.S. fell from 44% to 36%. Looking specifically at economic power, many believe China has already assumed the top spot (ibid).

Graph 6



Source: Pew Research Centre

8.11 According to the survey conducted by Pew Research Centre in 2012, there is increased belief that U.S. should play a shared leadership role in the world, while few believe the U.S. should be the single world leader or not play any leadership role at all. About three-quarters (74%) of the public favour a shared leadership role for the U.S.; 9% say the U.S. should be the single world leader, while 12% say it should have no leadership role at all. The following table shows the percentage shows that most want the US should share leadership rather than being a single leader or not leading at all.

Table 3

Most Want the U.S. to Share Leadership					
<i>What kind of leadership role should the U.S. play in the world?</i>					
	Be the single world leader	Play a shared leadership role	Not play any leadership role	DK	N
	%	%	%	%	
General public	9	74	12	5	1004
Experts					
Government	6	93	0	2	54
Retired military	17	83	0	0	52
Business/Trade	9	89	0	1	74
Scholars	9	90	0	1	93
News media	9	91	0	0	32

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q6.

Source: Pew Research Centre

8.12 However, USA is still leads militarily and there is little enthusiasm for China becoming as militarily powerful as the U.S. (Pew Research Global Attitude Project: 2011a). There belief that world will be more stable if U.S. remains the leading superpower. None of the experts surveyed believe the world will be more stable if China replaces the U.S. as the leading superpower (Pew Research Global Attitude Project: 2011).

9. Conclusion

9.1 According to Samuel Huntington (1999) Contemporary international politics does not fit any of the three models (Unipolar, Bipolar, Multipolar). It is instead a strange hybrid, a **uni-multipolar system** with one superpower and several major powers. The settlement of key international issues requires action by the single superpower but always with some combination of other major states; the single superpower can, however, veto action on key issues by combinations of other states. The United States, of course, is the sole state with pre-eminence in every domain of power -- economic, military, diplomatic, ideological, technological, and cultural -- with the reach and

capabilities to promote its interests in virtually every part of the world. At a second level are major regional powers that are preeminent in areas of the world without being able to extend their interests and capabilities as globally as the United States.

9.2 USA remains no more the hyper power it used to be during the immediate post-cold war period. Nations like China are contending for the position of superpower and have effectively challenged American power. America still continues to be the hegemon, but this hegemon has to negotiate with other powers and heed their demands as well.



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