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Global Power Transitions: Kissinger, Brzezinski, Zakaria, And The Future Of Multipolarity

Ivan Ivanov

Abstract

This paper examines the shifting dynamics of global power and international order through the perspectives of key geopolitical thinkers: Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Fareed Zakaria. It explores the decline of the global system dominated by the "Political West," as well as the rise of new geopolitical actors, and the challenges posed by economic globalization, political instability, and the restructuring of power. The paper situates these arguments within the broader debate on transforming from a unipolar to a multipolar world, assessing the implications for international stability and global governance. As traditional Western-led structures weaken, new regional and economic powers are asserting themselves, challenging existing geopolitical norms and alliances. Kissinger emphasizes the necessity of a carefully managed global balance, Brzezinski warns of the potential disorder caused by geopolitical awakenings, while Zakaria highlights the economic undercurrents driving this shift. By analyzing their perspectives, this study provides insight into the potential scenarios for the future of global power distribution and the policy adaptations necessary to manage this transition. It further examines whether the West can recalibrate its strategic approach to retain influence in a more complex and decentralized world order. Understanding these shifts is critical in determining whether multipolarity will lead to greater global cooperation or intensified competition and fragmentation.

Keywords: Unipolarity, multipolarity, geopolitics, western supremacy, global order

Introduction

The global order experienced significant transformations over the past century while transitioning from the dominance of a system mostly led by the "Political West" to the rise of new geopolitical actors. The gradual redistribution of political power among states, economic globalization, and technological advancements are some of the variables that have driven this shift. The international system after World War II, primarily shaped by the winners of the war and institutions such as the United Nations, NATO, and the Bretton Woods framework, initially ensured Western hegemony. However, emerging economies, particularly in Asia and Latin America, have challenged this dynamic while fostering a more multipolar world. These changes have triggered debates among scholars and policymakers regarding their long-term consequences, whether they will lead to a more balanced and cooperative global structure or possible instability and geopolitical fragmentation. The struggle within the unipolar world, characterized by US dominance, has given way to a number of regional power struggles, where nations like China, India, and Russia play increasingly influential roles in global affairs. The growing influence of regional blocs, the disputes of global leadership as well as the challenges posed by emerging conflicts are pointing out the need for adaptive diplomatic strategies. As the world is moving toward a multipolar framework, assessing these dynamics is crucial for forecasting future power structures and their implications for global stability.

Understanding the transition from unipolarity to multipolarity necessitates engagement with foundational theories in international relations. Polarity, defined as the distribution of power among states within the international system, has long been a key concept in explaining patterns of cooperation, conflict, and stability. Kenneth Waltz, in his seminal work *Theory of International Politics* (Waltz, 1979), introduced the notion of polarity as a structural feature of the international system. Waltz emphasized that unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar systems each exhibit distinct dynamics of stability. According to him, bipolar systems, exemplified by the Cold War era, are inherently more stable than multipolar ones due to simpler balance calculations and reduced risk of miscalculation. In contrast, multipolar systems, characterized by multiple great powers, tend to produce shifting alliances and greater uncertainty, increasing the likelihood of conflict. John Mearsheimer, a leading figure in offensive realism, further argued that the anarchic nature of the international system compels states to seek maximal power. In *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (Mearsheimer, 2001), Mearsheimer posits that unipolarity

is inherently unstable because it encourages other states to engage in balancing behavior to counter the dominant power. Thus, the erosion of American primacy and the emergence of new regional powers can be understood as a natural systemic response predicted by realist theory. In contrast, liberal internationalist scholars such as G. John Ikenberry contend that the post–World War II liberal order, rooted in institutions, rules, and norms, provides mechanisms for managing transitions peacefully. Ikenberry argues that the decline of unipolarity need not lead to global instability if emerging powers are incorporated into existing frameworks of cooperation and governance. However, he also warns that the erosion of these frameworks could lead to fragmentation if not carefully managed. Moreover, constructivist perspectives highlight the role of ideas, identities, and norms in shaping the international system. From this view, shifts in polarity are not merely the result of material changes in power capabilities but are also influenced by evolving perceptions of legitimacy, leadership, and order (Ikenberry, 2011).

Taken together, these theoretical frameworks offer a spectrum of interpretations about the ongoing transition. While realist theories emphasize structural inevitabilities and power struggles, liberal theories suggest opportunities for managed adaptation, and constructivist approaches stress the contingent role of norms and identities.

Against this theoretical backdrop, the insights of Kissinger, Brzezinski, and Zakaria offer valuable case-specific interpretations of the broader structural shifts underway. They offer distinct yet interconnected perspectives on the crisis of global power. As leading figures within the realist school of international relations, they emphasize the role of power dynamics, strategic competition, and pragmatic statecraft in shaping the evolving global order.

Kissinger emphasizes the importance of a carefully managed world order based on diplomatic strategy, historical continuity, as well as pragmatic leadership. He argues that geopolitical stability hinges on a balance of power where great powers engage in diplomacy rather than confrontation. His approach draws from historical precedents, particularly the European balance of power system, and underscores the role of strategic statecraft in facing global conflicts.

Brzezinski highlights the consequences of geopolitical awakening where the redistribution of power challenges the existing world order and requires new strategic frameworks. The analysis of Brzezinski are focusing on the importance of Eurasia as the central arena of global influence while stressing that shifts in economic

and military power within this region will determine the future geopolitical alignments. He also warns of the potential instability arising from nationalism, regionalism, and ideological conflicts that could disrupt existing power structures.

On the other hand, Zakaria focuses on the steady decline of unipolarity and the emergence of a multipolar system driven by economic and political shifts. He examines how emerging economies, such as China and India, are reshaping the global governance, and at the same time, are challenging the Western hegemony, and fostering an era where power is distributed among multiple actors. His perspective emphasizes economic influence as a key driver of global power rather than purely military capabilities.

While Kissinger, Brzezinski, and Zakaria all recognize the decline of American dominance, their perspectives diverge significantly on the implications and prescriptions for the future. Kissinger argues that global stability requires a carefully maintained balance of power, cautioning against hasty adjustments to emerging multipolar realities. Brzezinski, in contrast, acknowledges the inevitability of multipolarity but sees American strategic adaptation as critical to preventing global disorder. Zakaria, however, sees multipolarity as a largely economic transformation, downplaying the traditional great-power rivalry emphasized by Kissinger. These differences highlight the need for nuanced policymaking, where economic shifts, military considerations, and diplomatic strategy must align to prevent instability.

By examining their perspectives, it becomes evident that transitioning from a Western-dominated global order to a multipolar system is not a uniform process but a contested and dynamic shift influenced by economic transformations, regional ambitions, and strategic rivalries. This paper explores their interpretations of global power, analyzing how their theories contribute to understanding the evolving international system. While the transition from unipolarity to multipolarity is widely acknowledged, the implications of this shift remain contested. This paper argues that multipolarity is not merely an emerging reality but an inevitable consequence of economic globalization, regional power assertions, and the evolving geopolitical landscape. However, whether this shift fosters global stability or deepens fragmentation depends on the strategic choices made by key actors in the international system.

Henry Kissinger's Realpolitik: Balancing Global Stability and Strategic Adaptation

In his 2014 article published in *The Wall Street Journal*, Henry Kissinger argues that the world is experiencing a deep crisis of order, with the international system facing unprecedented instability. The ideas presented in this article are further elaborated in his book *World Order*, published the same year. According to Kissinger, the pursuit of global stability has historically been led by Western societies, shaped by their core values. Following World War II, the United States emerged as the main global leader as a nation founded on the principles of freedom and democracy.

Kissinger argues that America's postwar development strategy was fundamentally rooted in the expansion of democracy and economic liberalism as the means of ensuring lasting peace. This vision was premised on the belief that human beings, as rational actors, inherently strive for peaceful compromises and pragmatic solutions. Consequently, the global proliferation of democratic governance and open markets was seen as a mechanism to establish a structured and predictable international order. The rise of free markets, according to Kissinger, not only facilitated individual prosperity but also strengthened societal cohesion, while replacing economic protectionism and international rivalry with interdependence and shared economic interests (Kissinger, 2014).

Kissinger claims that the Western attempt to establish a world order proved very successful. Independent sovereign states governed most of the world. Spreading democracy became a common aim. The Internet allowed global communications and financial networks to work in real time. In this time of US dominance, from 1948 until today, the world order functioned based on American idealism and the traditional European concept of statehood and balance of power. According to him, the crisis started because of the increasing pressure on the fundamental unit of international order – the state. The EU does not yet have the attributes of a state that provokes an internal vacuum of power and imbalance at its borders. Parts of the Middle East are falling apart along sectarian and ethnic lines. They are pitted against each other, leading to the phenomenon of failed states that have no control over their territory. Conflicts and armed confrontations are present in Asia and Africa as well. Apart from this, there is also a conflict between the international economy and the political institutions that govern it. This weakens the feeling of a common goal, which is, on the other hand, necessary for the existence of a world order.

The economy is becoming increasingly global, whereas the world's political structure is still based on nation-states. While economic globalization tends to neutralize state borders, foreign policy aims to reaffirm them by emphasizing conflicting national interests or ideals of order. Globalization of the economy contributed to decades marked by economic growth, with sporadic economic crises.[1] That leads to the appearance of winners and losers. Winners will try to preserve the existing system in any way possible. In contrast, losers will try to find a way out of the crisis by denying or interrupting the functioning of the global economic order.

Unlike the globalization of the economy, the international order is facing a paradox. Namely, prosperity depends on the success of globalization, but the process itself provokes political reactions that often usurp the very aims of globalization. Another weakness of the actual international order is the absence of an advisory body of the great powers through which they would cooperate on the most important issues preoccupying the world today. Although there are many international forums, these do not offer long-term strategies but rather undermine the attempts to reach such strategies, reducing their entire activity to debates on tactical issues and declarative commitments. If willing to stay relevant, the modern structure of international rules and standards cannot exist only in the form of declarations. According to Kissinger, that structure must be cherished as something that results from common beliefs. If this does not happen, there will be no great war among countries, but a creation of spheres of influence that are now present in specific internal political structures and types of governance. Each of these spheres of influence will try to prove its power over another sphere of influence, presenting the other as non-legitimate. Conflict between regions in the sphere of influence of great powers might represent a more significant problem than conflict between states.

The striving to move from the international order that we now have towards a world order demands a mutually consistent strategy to shape the concept of internal order in various regions, leading to establishing relations between those regions. However, this might bring about additional problems and crises. This is because a radical attempt to establish law and order in a region might simultaneously provoke turmoil in other regions. When a country has military predominance in one region, apart from establishing internal order, it might provoke a crisis in other parts of the world. This is something that we witnessed happening at that moment.

1 Latin America in the 80s, Asia in 1997, Russia in 1998, the USA in 2001 and 2007, and the EU in 2010.

Kissinger sees the exit from the current system crisis and chaos in the international order in creating a world order that would stimulate individual dignity, participative government, and international cooperation, per agreed-upon rules. However, in order to reach that point, several stages need to be completed. In order for the United States to have a responsible role in the evolution of world order in the 21st century, it must be ready to respond to the following questions:

1. "What do we seek to prevent, no matter how it happens, and if necessary alone? The answer defines the minimum condition for the survival of the society. What do we seek to achieve, even if not supported by any multilateral effort? These goals define the minimum objectives of the national strategy.
2. What do we seek to achieve, or prevent, only if supported by an alliance? This defines the outer limits of the country's strategic aspirations as part of a global system.
3. What should we not engage in, even if urged by a multilateral group or an alliance? This defines the limiting condition of American participation in the world order.
4. Above all, what is the nature of the values that we seek to advance?
5. What applications depend in part on circumstance?

The same questions apply in principle to other societies." (Kissinger, 2014, p. 296).

While Kissinger's vision prioritizes diplomatic engagement and power equilibrium, Brzezinski's perspective shifts the focus toward the role of global political awakening and the challenge of managing a world where mass political participation increasingly shapes international relations. Unlike Kissinger, who views order as a product of state-led diplomacy, Brzezinski sees public mobilization, nationalism, and ideological realignments as the forces that will define the future balance of power.

Zbigniew Brzezinski - Geopolitical Awakening and The Redistribution of Power

According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, we live in a time of crisis of global power, where the traditional structures of international dominance are being disturbed and reshaped. This transformation is led by several interrelated factors: the dynamic shift of the global gravitational center from the West towards the East, the acceleration

of global political awakening, and the shortcomings of American foreign policy since the 1990s when the United States emerged as the world's sole superpower following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Brzezinski, 2012). Brzezinski argues that the economic rise of China, India, and other emerging markets has redefined the geopolitical landscape while gradually eroding the Western-centric world order that had been dominant for centuries. This eastward shift of power is not solely economic but also political, as nations in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America seek more significant influence in global governance. The spread of digital communication, social media, and increased global connectivity has also fueled political consciousness and activism among previously marginalized populations. This "global political awakening," as Brzezinski calls it, has led to more frequent challenges to established power structures, including anti-government protests, populist movements, and demands for a more multipolar world (Brzezinski, 2012).

At the same time, Brzezinski critiques the failures of American foreign policy in managing this transition. He argues that the engagement of USA in prolonged military conflicts, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan, diverted attention from the broader strategic goal to maintain a global leader. Policy miscalculations in economic as well as diplomatic spheres have also contributed to growing resentment against Western interventionism. With that in midn, it is harder for the US to sustain its influence. Instead of adapting to the new realities of global power, Washington has often relied on outdated tactics typical to the Cold War era that no longer align with the multipolar nature of international relations. Brzezinski warns that unless the US adjusts its strategic vision, fostering stronger alliances and embracing diplomatic rather than military dominance, it risks further decline in global standing. He advocates for a more pragmatic and cooperative approach, urging American policymakers to recognize unilateralism's limits and actively shape a stable, multipolar world order rather than resisting its emergence (Brzezinski, 2012).

In his book Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power, he states that the world today is interactive and independent and that, for the first time, this is a world in which problems related to the survival of humanity dominate over traditional international conflicts. Unfortunately, he argues that most global powers have yet to provide global cooperative answers to the new and increasingly complex challenges that the survival of humanity depends on. He mainly refers to environmental, climate, socio-economic, food-related, and demographic challenges here (Brzezinski, 2012).

He states that the unpredictability of modern international relations stems from the changing distribution of global power and the new phenomena of mass political awakening. With the strengthening of China's influence and the fight for resources, security, and economic advantage of newly arisen powers such as Russia, India, or Brazil, the potential for wrong assessments and conflicts also rises. Therefore, the United States must try to build broad geopolitical foundations for constructive cooperation in the global arena while handling the growing tensions of the increasingly restless global population. In the abovementioned book, Brzezinski tries to answer four questions that he identifies as most important:

1. What are the implications of the changing distribution of global power from the West to the East, and how is it being affected by the new reality of a politically awakened humanity?
2. Why is America's global appeal waning, what are the symptoms of America's domestic and international decline, and how did America waste the unique global opportunity offered by the peaceful end of the Cold War? Conversely, what are America's recuperative strengths and what geopolitical reorientation is necessary to revitalize America's world role?
3. What would be the likely geopolitical consequences if America declined from its globally preeminent position, who would be the almost-immediate geopolitical victims of such a decline, what effects would it have on the global-scale problems of the twenty-first century, and could China assume America's central role in world affairs by 2025?
4. Looking beyond 2025, how should a resurgent America define its long-term geopolitical goals, and how could America, with its traditional European allies, seek to engage Turkey and Russia in order to construct an even larger and more vigorous West? Simultaneously, how could America achieve balance in the East between the need for close cooperation with China and the fact that a constructive American role in Asia should be neither exclusively China-centric nor involve dangerous entanglements in Asian conflicts?" (Brzeziński, 2012).

Answering these questions, he is convinced that, in the following period, America's role in the world will remain a key one. However, that would only be possible if America does not succumb to the ignorant mentality of a military state and does not surrender to hypocritical cultural hegemonism. If that happens, America would only add to the gloom of this changing world. According to him, the world needs an economically vital America that is responsible in terms of power, strategically

shaped, internationally respected, and historically enlightened in its global confrontation with the new East. Brzezinski claims that ideas for the historically inevitable fall of American power are fashionable in America. In his view, this is periodic pessimism that is neither new nor always justified. Not even the belief that the 20th century is an "American century," which started after World War II, managed to prevent the occasional stages of upset regarding the long-term future of America. Until 1991, the US remained the only global superpower on the world stage. Not only the 20th but also the 21st century would be American. The victory of liberal democracy was declared not only as decisive but also final. Moreover, since liberal democracy developed originally in the West, it was implied that the West would become a reference for the entire world. However, this hyperoptimism was short-lived. Brzezinski blames this on the culture of self-indulgence and deregulation that began during Clinton and continued during Bush. This led to the bursting of the foreign exchange bubble during the transition between the 20th and the 21st century and a total financial disaster in 2008. The expensive unilateralism of Bush Jr. led to decade-long wars in the Middle East and the sliding of overall American foreign policy. After 2008, a fatal economic depression was avoided by a thread, which suddenly forced America and the majority of Western countries to recognize the system's unsustainability of unregulated greed.

According to Brzezinski, another unpleasant news for the future of the American status as a leading global power is the incredible unification of economic liberalism and state capitalism in China and other Asian states. That unification showed a surprising economic growth and technological innovation capacity in those countries. Brzezinski concludes that the US must renew and look for a comprehensive and long-term geopolitical vision capable of responding to the challenges of an altered historical context. According to him, only a dynamic and strategically oriented America and a united Europe can promote a greater and stronger West, capable of entering into an open dialogue with an increasingly more assertive and confident East. If that fails, Brzezinski is convinced that a geopolitically fragmented, egocentric West might spiral into a historic disaster, similar to China in the 19th century. In contrast, the East might not resist the temptation to repeat the self-destructive rivalries of 19th-century Europe. This represents a serious long-term risk to the survival of some jeopardized countries, the security of global common goods, and global stability in general.

Fareed Zakaria – Post-American World

Out of the multitude of authors who demonstrate, as Brzezinski states, periodic pessimism about the historically inevitable decline of American power in the 21st century, we focus on Fareed Zakaria and his book "Post-American World" which was published in 2008.

At the time of publication of this book, despite the uncertain wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US was a leader of the world created after 1989. The first reaction was suspicion in Zakaria's thesis, as it appeared that neither China, post-Soviet Russia, nor any other country would be able to jeopardize America's position as the leader in the world. The fall of 2008 will mark the eruption of a world economic crisis on Wall Street, expanding to the entire developed world and lasting in various forms until this day. Zakaria's thesis that American leadership and the so-called unipolar world are in crisis will, in the meantime, be accepted by some of the leading US theoreticians (Kagan, 2008; Kupchan, 2012; Ikenberry & Leviathan, 2011). According to Zakaria, we are witnessing a comprehensive transformation and transition towards a new era that is not well understood. It is not about the decline of America but the success and growth of 'all others.' Namely, the success and growth of the West began in the 15th century and accelerated in the 18th century. That process resulted in modernity, science and technology, trade and capitalism, and the agricultural and industrial revolution. This will also lead to the success of 20th-century America, allowing it to become the most powerful nation since Ancient Rome and dominate the global economy, politics, science, and culture. However, this will also form the basis for the 'success of others,' most visible in Asia (China and India), but not only in Asia. The evidence and statistics in his book support this thesis well. We are living in a unipolar world created after the fall of the Berlin Wall, only at the political and military level, Zakaria claims. In every other dimension- industrial, financial, economic, social, and cultural – the power distribution is changing, freeing itself from American domination. This, however, is not an anti-American, but rather a post-American world. Since 2008, the so-called 'post-American world' has been facing permanent crises that the US is no longer able or willing to resolve on its own. Here, we refer to the global economic crisis that is still hovering over the world economy, wars in the Middle East, especially Syria, the war in Ukraine, Iran's nuclear program, North Korea's nuclear arsenal... For these challenges, the US is looking for partners with whom they can act or allies who can share these crises and challenges. Thus, for instance, controlling North Korea's nuclear arsenal requires cooperation with China, whereas addressing Iran's nuclear program involves

collaboration with Syria and Ukraine. However, in both cases, a common geopolitical adversary remains Russia. This suggests that the "post-American" world is increasingly multipolar, a reality acknowledged by leading American theorists. They recognize that the foundations of today's power in China, Russia, India, and Brazil stem from a process initiated in the United States during the 1970s, known as globalization.

According to Zakaria, the research he conducted and published in his book "Post-American World" points out that we are yhe witnesses to the biggest changes in a shift of power in the world only in the past few centuries. Namely, for the first time in at least 300 years, the non-Western actors have been reinforced so that they have started dominating the global scene. However, this does not mean that the West will be destroyed politically and that America will disappear. He believes that America will remain the strongest economic power in the foreseeable future and that the West will continue to be important. However, it will have to share its power with new actors – cultures and civilizations that it traditionally dominated, colonized, and underestimated. The process of establishing a new balance in the world, according to Zakaria, is the 'great narrative of our time.' Economic power is a basis for political, diplomatic, and military power (Zakaria, 2008).

However, in Zakaria's view, the Chinese are not overly interested in becoming a 'world cop.' They are willing to let America take over that role, benefiting from the stability established in such a way. However, America will no longer be free to act, and its army will still be the biggest in the world. However, its financial destiny entirely depends on China's goodwill in continuing to buy its debts. This, of course, does not match the global world hegemon title, says Zakaria. According to him, China, India, Brazil, and many other countries have learned their lessons from capitalism. That is the first story – natives rose above their masters and marked the end of the existing world order. Zakaria claims that the new one will basically be built according to the Western model but will be managed by non-Western countries (Zakaria, 2008).

The transformation of a unipolar world into a multipolar one brings its dangers. Zakaria's concern arises from the fact that we are entering a period of significant transition, and riots and violence usually accompany such periods. The American and German hegemony era is fading out, the existing order is collapsing, and the new order has not stabilized itself yet. Such times are perilous. Zakaria knows that people dislike most of the things America does. However, historically speaking, the three decades of that unipolar world were a period of political stability and

unprecedented peace. If China and the US should enter into conflict in any way, Zakaria states that we should say goodbye to globalization and a stable world order. The irony of the 'success of others', Zakaria believes, is that it is mainly the result of American ideas and actions: the pressure to open markets and introduce democracy, embraced by trade and technology. In such a new multipolar world, America must adapt and become a sort of 'global mediator,' substituting Bush's 'cowboy unilateralism' with the role of a superpower that establishes alliances, sets the behind-the-scenes agenda, defines problems, initiates consultations, and provides compromises..., concludes Zakaria (2008).

Instead of a fast decline of American power, Zakaria foresees that it will remain strong, thanks to its educational system and the arrival of young immigrants, which will allow for a much better demographic image than that of Europe and a large portion of Asia (Japan, South Korea), where a smaller number of workers is supporting an increasing number of the unproductive aging population. According to him, today's economies are distinguished by ideas and energy. A country must be a source of either ideas or energy. The US has been and can be the most significant, endless global source of new ideas – big and small, technical and creative, economic and political, while leaving managerial imperialism.

The growth of others is evident, but this is a slow process. At the same time, this process provides the US with a key role, but a different one. This new role is significantly different from that of a traditional superpower. This role requires consultations, cooperation, and even compromise. The power of such a superpower will stem from setting goals, defining key points, and creating coalitions.

In order to implement any specific or constructive strategy, the US must, to a certain extent, adapt. According to Zakaria, America must stop twitching in fear, creating a climate of panic and paranoia, and has provoked strategically wrong moves. America must first restore its self-confidence. In order to continue progressing in this new era filled with challenges and in order to succeed while others are also on the rise, America must pass the most important exam: to be a beckoning and captivating place for young students, just as it was for a then 18-year-old Fareed Zakaria a generation ago.

Conclusion

The transition from unipolarity to multipolarity represents one of the most significant shifts in the contemporary international system. While the era of American

primacy, characterized by the unipolar moment following the Cold War, is drawing to a close, the emerging multipolar world is not yet fully consolidated. Theoretical frameworks on polarity transitions suggest that multipolar systems historically tend to be less stable than bipolar or unipolar ones, given the complexity of balancing power among multiple actors (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2014). Whether the current transition will reinforce global cooperation or fuel instability remains a critical and unresolved question.

Through the perspectives of Kissinger, Brzezinski, and Zakaria, it becomes evident that the unipolar system's erosion is shaped by economic globalization, the rise of new regional powers, and the internal fragmentation of Western-led institutions. Kissinger emphasizes the necessity of strategic power balancing to manage multipolarity, reflecting classical realist concerns about systemic instability. Brzezinski, meanwhile, underscores the role of political awakenings and regional dynamics in complicating efforts to sustain a coherent world order, adding a sociopolitical dimension to the classical balance-of-power analysis. Zakaria's interpretation, in contrast, portrays multipolarity primarily as an economic phenomenon, suggesting that peaceful coexistence among rising powers remains possible if interdependence continues to deepen. Thus, the theoretical implications of the transition are complex. Realist theories predict heightened instability in a multipolar world, but liberal theories offer hope that institutional frameworks and economic ties might moderate power rivalries.

Whether multipolarity leads to cooperation or conflict will depend on the strategic choices of major powers and the ability of global institutions to adapt to new distributions of influence. In this light, the West, and particularly the United States, faces a critical juncture. Retaining relevance in a multipolar system will require moving beyond Cold War-era paradigms of unilateral dominance toward strategies that emphasize partnership, flexibility, and economic innovation. A nuanced and theoretically informed understanding of polarity transitions can guide policymakers as they navigate this uncertain future. Embracing the realities of multipolarity, rather than resisting them, offers the best chance to foster a stable and cooperative international order.

As the global system decentralizes, the West's ability to maintain a leading role depends on its willingness to embrace necessary reforms. If the policymakers from the West heed the strategic lessons outlined by Kissinger, Brzezinski, and Zakaria, they may still reconfigure their influence to remain central in the evolving multipolar order. However, if the West remains reactionary and mostly focused on

containment rather than constructive adaptation, its relative decline will accelerate, leading to a fragmented, unpredictable international landscape where *interregnum* is inevitable. "There are numerous definitions of the term interregnum and, at the same time, numerous interpretations that have been the product of various historical contexts. Depending on the needs, the term itself and its application offered explanations of current, temporary and irregular events, caused by a variety of symptoms, trends, historical ordeals, personalities, and so on. In general, the interregnum is a time interval indicating the interruption of a certain continuity. This time interval between two periods (what was and what is coming) is most often used in defining the temporal space from the end of the reign of one sovereign ruler until the coming to power of another, that is, its successor." (Ivanov, 2023)

Europe, on the other hand, is facing an existential crisis as it increasingly loses relevance in global geopolitics. The recent communication between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin underscores this shifting dynamic, highlighting how Europe is no longer at the forefront of strategic decision-making. This interaction exemplifies how shifting U.S. priorities and the erosion of Western cohesion are no longer theoretical concerns but active forces driving strategic realignments.

The transatlantic relationship that was once the pillar of Western strength is now being redefined, and under the current U.S. administration, American priorities are likely to shift away from Europe toward more direct engagements with global power centers. This signals that Europe may struggle to assert its influence in shaping the future global order, further deepening the challenges of Western cohesion. Whether the emerging multipolar world leads to constructive cooperation or dangerous fragmentation will ultimately depend on the strategic foresight, restraint, and adaptability demonstrated by today's leading global actors.

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