

## **Regional Security in a Changing World**

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**Kupchan, Charles. 2012. *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest and the Coming Global Turn*. New York: Oxford University Press. 272 pp. \$20 (Hardcover).**

**Mahbubani, Kishore. 2013. *The Great Convergence: Asia, the West and the Logic of One World*. New York: Public Affairs. 315 pp. \$27 (Hardcover).**

In recent years there has been a rich flow of scholarly works on the “waning of the West’s primacy”, and the books reviewed in this essay are no exception. They contribute to ongoing debate between the “declinists” and those who believe in the durability and adaptability of the present Western order in the time of transition of power. The debate has been largely focusing on the decline of the U.S. power relative to the “rising rest” and its implications on the international system. Previous studies have largely focused on the logic of power in world politics and whether power transition can bring about war or peace. On the other hand, there are scholars who argue that the current transition of power from the West to the East is part of a longer historical pattern (cf. Tammen 2008). To them, this coming change in the shape of a Post-American World is something that can be managed and embraced, without employing a Realist logic which perceives such course of developments as a threat to the only viable conception of international order (cf. Mearsheimer 2001, Zakaria 2008).

At least two positions can be identified in this debate. The first one posits that the change in global power distribution may affect the functioning of international institutions and challenge the accepted norms due to the change in the understanding of what the underlying values of the international society are. One could ask how the post-Western order may be different from the one that has been present since the 1500s. The argument is that there are new ways of providing political and economic legitimization of the polities which are different from the Western liberal model (e.g. the so-called Beijing consensus). The second position argues that a change in the global distribution of power may not undermine the Western system because the success of the capitalist way of production and democratic governance is still very vital and provides benefits for the developing countries whose elites are socialized into the liberal international order. This may likely bring about a gradual transformation of the present system to include new members,

which is flexible enough to accommodate their differences without changing the key properties.

The debate about the future of international order is important for the study of international security. For example, Barry Buzan (2011) writes that the concept of superpower cannot be reasonably applied to the present situation in the 21st century, and that the world politics is going to be marked by “decentered globalism.” This is the world in which “there will be no superpowers, only great powers.” In his analysis of the international system, Buzan uses material and social factors to explain why the United States will not remain a superpower, whereas China and the EU will not become superpowers at all. He then goes on to look at why “a world with only great powers is likely to take a more regionalized form” and what the downsides of regional hegemony are (Buzan 2011, 3). The debate about power distribution in the international system and the next world order is linked to the debate about levels of analysis within IR and Security Studies. In the past two decades, considerable attention was paid to the levels of analysis, where the regional level has been particularly theorized in the works of Barry Buzan and his associates. By developing Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), a more balanced, non-great power centered analytical framework for international security dynamics was developed (see Buzan *et al.* 1998, Buzan and Waever 2003). The books by Charles Kupchan and Kishore Mahbubani reviewed in this essay present a timely contribution to the above-mentioned debate. The purpose of this essay, however, is more than just to review them. I argue that the study of regional security can benefit from insights into the power transition that is taking place at the global level, especially in the part dealing with security community development and regional security governance.

Both books cover the issue of ‘power transition in world politics,’ although from different perspectives. Their “birds’ view” perspective of international system can help us draw some conclusions for the study of regional security at the beginning of this century and the coming decades. My focus in this essay is on the regional level of analysis. To understand regional security, I use RSCT which is based on two premises: states are still dominant referent objects of security, and security threats travel more easily over short distance (Buzan *et al.* 1998). It is for this reason that security dynamics is more comprehensively analyzed at a regional level, because “the shared process of constructing security concerns and methods for dealing with them amongst member states, points toward a functioning system that can be systematically identified”, as opposed to the global level (Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll 2010, 733). Security complexes are, basically, security regions that encompass distinctive security dynamics (among and within their units) that is relatively independent from the influence of extra-regional actors. How do, then, the ideas from the two books reviewed in this essay relate to RSCT?

While Kupchan argues that the world will be dominated by no single superpower in a regionalized world, Mahbubani asserts that the East will find its place in what is going to be “One World”. With regards to that, my reading of these books is focusing on identifying the elements which are relevant for understanding how regional orders are situated within

a broader international order. Moreover, I aim to stress how those resulting regional hegemonies would impact the intra-regional and trans-regional security dynamics. The former is best explained by the measure of conflictual security dynamics among the states (conflict formation, security regime, security community). Trans-regional dynamics on the other hand can be best explained as a relationship between the particular regions, or their great powers which can either penetrate or overlay other regional security complexes or sub-complexes. The idea of decreasing or increasing the conflictual potential of security dynamics is reflected in the concepts of security regimes and security communities, and the question I wish to answer in this review article is this: How the change in global distribution of power and transformation of international order in the 21st century can affect the prospects for both inter-regional and intra-regional security? By drawing on the argument made by Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll (2010, 735) that capability is not the only factor that determines regional security orders<sup>1</sup> I claim that the change in global power distribution may not single-handedly determine the course and patterns of regional security orders and dynamics of intra-regional security. Therefore, regional powers or great powers may show different attitudes which are not necessarily determined by structural conditions.

### **Alternatives to the Western Order and Western Managing of the Global Turn**

A professor of International Affairs at Georgetown University, Charles Kupchan has been writing extensively on the effects of change in power distribution on the US-led international order. In *No One's World*, he defines the international environment as such where “power is diversifying, not one in which all countries are converging toward the Western way” (p. 3). Although he recognizes that Asia will likely “assume the mantle of leadership” in this century, it cannot be said that “any country, region or model will dominate the next world”. It is important to note that Kupchan's vision of the international system includes “numerous power centers” and “multiple versions of modernity” (p. 3). The approach Kupchan takes in this book is *long durée*, that is, his reliance on “deeper historical forces and patterns”, which led him to examine the 500 years of Western march towards capitalism and democracy, as systemic factors that shape state behavior. The goal of this book is to explore the causes and consequences of the global turn, and to counsel the West how best to minimize the consequences of the decreasing hegemony (pp. 10–11).

The book is organized in seven chapters. Chapter 1: *The Turn* defines the goals of the book (historical analysis of the Western success and prescriptions for the 21st century US policy). Chapters 2 and 3 explain how Europe became a developed and prosperous region during the period 1500–1800 due to the lack of centralized social and political order (as opposed to Japan, India, China and the Ottoman Empire). He indirectly evokes the idea of

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1 “...regional dynamics may influence the selection of particular security orders. Such patterns shape both the roles that regional powers play as well as their orientations in doing so. Second, these dynamics may illuminate degrees of success or failure in creating regional security such that certain security order are more conducive to conflict or cooperation”, Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll 2010, 736.

regional security complexes, citing Bull and Watson who write that “contacts among these regional international systems were much more limited than contacts within them” (p. 64). Chapters 4 and 5 explain that the rise of the East represents a response to a decreasing appeal of liberal models of governance at the onset of the 21st century leading to the rising attraction of alternative forms of political and economic organization (“more state control is often an advantage in coping with a fast, interdependent and porous world”, p. 89). Chapters 6 and 7 point to internal problems of the Western countries, renationalization of politics and the lack of global leadership at the time when the West “must seek to emerge from its doldrums and help manage that turn” (p. 166). Kupchan takes a normative stand in arguing that the West must restore “centrism and pragmatism” because globalization is weakening a state. The solution he proposes concerns the global level and considerable changes in US elite discourse which shall “begin laying groundwork for a more modest conception of America’s role in the world” (p. 204). From a grand strategic point of view, the US needs to “retrench” in order to “restore solvency and domestic consensus” and “make more room for rising powers” if it wants to “get right the management of the global turn” (p. 203).

According to Kupchan, the sources of Western weakness are less structural and more about internal politics. Dealing with bipartisan politics and opting for “selective engagement” abroad is a way to accommodate the “rising rest” (pp. 180–81). He finally lays out the principles for managing the global turn. Kupchan advocates for establishing the principles of international order which will suit the interests of the United States while striving for a “more inclusive global order” and suggesting a “more pluralist approach to legitimacy”. He also proposes to manage the rise of China, tame globalization and restore US leadership. Here I underline his advice to the United States to facilitate regional devolution, which shall leave room for states to pursue political action in a regional setting through various forms of regionalism (p. 197).

### **Toward a Theory of One World and Security Community**

As opposed to Kupchan’s perspective, Kishore Mahbubani, the dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore, sees the global turn as a big opportunity for the world. While starting off the same mark as Kupchan, claiming that the world has changed significantly under the influence of economic and technological globalization, he seeks to explain this change by using a single idea – “the great convergence”. Mahbubani seems to follow a Liberal tradition in IR, claiming that we live in a global civilization which makes an impact on “human condition” due to globalization and interdependence (p. 2). The author seeks to understand where the world is headed, and he wants to develop a theory which can serve that goal. One of the key goals of the book is to “spark a new discourse about the global condition”, which is the requirement for advancing global convergence. The main argument of his book is that the closeness of the global civilization is achieved through forces of globalization and mediated by transnational elites educated in the West.

The book is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 lays down the context for claims about the “new global civilization” and provides empirical data which show the trend of rising human security, prosperity and education, as well as emerging global norms at the outset of the 21st century. Chapter 2 aims to bridge the gap between the global theory and practice, because lack of such theory “prevents an effective response” to global challenges (p. 51) – whereas the leaders “are making decisions on the basis of some defunct political ideas” (p. 64). In Chapters 3 and 4, the author tackles the issue of multilateralism and the United Nations system as the place for mitigating the risks to global public goods. He lists seven global contradictions (global interests vs. national interests, the West versus the Rest, US-China relations, expanding China versus a shrinking world, Islam vs. the West, global environment vs. global consumers, and governments vs. NGOs). These two chapters bring forth the idea that the leaders are those who fail to understand those contradictions, and that it is up to the states to make significant compromises in their understanding of national and global interests. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the main geopolitical challenges in the East and discuss the miraculous transformation of Southeast Asia toward a security community under the “power of convergence”. Mahbubani, obviously inspired by the works of Amitav Acharya, singles out this region as a success story of a geopolitical hotspot which became a security community and a source of Asian-bred regionalism. Chapter 6 addresses the need for the West to show to other regions of the world that it is ready to cooperate with equal partners and to leave the position of “moral high ground”. Chapter 7 argues for the need of effective global governance reform of the United Nations system. Particular attention is paid to the reform of the Security Council which needs to provide more room for rising regional powers and small states. In the conclusion, Mahbubani calls for “principles of global ethics” which can serve as the Kantian categorical imperative that would drive societies toward greater solidarity in this shrinking, converging world.

### **Relevance for the Study of Regional Security**

How do these two books contribute to the discussion on regional security in the 21st century? Kupchan’s argument, that the world in this century will belong to no one, leaves us with the idea of various regional hegemonies. The scholars mostly agree that China’s economic power and its ambitions will consolidate its hegemony in East Asia, which renders the East Asian Regional Security Complex probably the most important in this century. In his prognosis, Kupchan expects the United States to share the burden with other emerging powers in making a peaceful transition to a new system. On the other hand, Mahbubani is more optimistic in believing that the forces of globalization have increased the likelihood of security community building in Asia. This elite-driven security community building would be possible to replicate in other parts of the world (cf. Kavalski 2007). Similarly to Acharya, Mahbubani points to the example of ASEAN as a success story in security community building and a distinct form of regionalism in Asia. The second issue for both authors is the state. They agree that the Westphalian concept of statehood is somewhat outdated, and that there will be different versions of modernity. For Kupchan, the West needs to recognize that states can attain legitimacy in

a variety of ways, and beyond liberal democracy. Also, contrary to Mahbubani, Kupchan is rather skeptical of the logic of democratic peace. For him, deepening economic ties are not a source but a consequence of peace (p. 187). Like Mahbubani, Kupchan points to the value of regionalism in resolving conflicts and fostering cooperation, because regional countries enjoy specific legitimacy.

In sum, the study of regional security can benefit not only from these two books, but also from the literature on power transitions and international order more generally. Of particular importance here are the views from those scholars who do not belong to the Western IR tradition, which makes Mahbubani's work particularly interesting. Although his book is more concerned with the global level of analysis, transnational elites and multilateralism, the point that he makes about Asian regionalism, building a security community in ASEAN region and the role of small states in the conception of One World feeds back on RSCT as analytical framework. That is particularly true in the part dealing with the patterns of amity and enmity and how they develop under the influence of structural and behavioral factors. On the other hand, Kupchan's work, with its emphasis on the demise of global US hegemony and its focus on specific regional dynamics of the competing models (*autocrats, theocrats, populists, strongmen, and democracies with attitude*) is of relevance for the study of intra-regional security interactions, as well as for the role of external penetration in security complexes. While Mahbubani adopts post-Western and post-Westphalian view of a system dominated by one global idea, Kupchan endorses US and Western-centric perspective of the world of regions. These two argumentations are both complimentary and different, and greatly beneficial for our understanding of possible scenarios for the future of world politics.

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