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Pax Americana and the Rising Powers

RAJAN MENON

Much of what purports to be new American thinking on international politics amounts to a bland repackaging of old shibboleths. Almost everyone, even including those who predict the "rise of the rest," assumes the United States will remain, in the words of former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, "the indispensable nation." Those who dissent from this view are dismissed as declinists or defeatists or (that old chestnut) isolationists.

Underlying the consensus is a conviction that the United States must continue to maintain a worldwide military presence and assume leadership on a plethora of problems, that the alternative is an unpredictable and perilous world, and that non-Americans—whatever they may say publicly—believe all this in their bones. That the United States should do less than it is accustomed to doing, or rethink wholesale what it has done for more than two generations, is generally rejected, by both conservatives and liberals.

History, however, casts doubt on this orthodoxy, and indeed the faith underpinning it is familiar from the past. Every great power has remained sanguine about its position even when, in hindsight, more than just a cluster of Cassandras should have noticed warning signs. Those at the helm of such powers were not necessarily blind to the challenges they faced. But they were convinced that their difficulties were momentary and their intentions were noble, and were seen as noble by others.

Consider Athens, Rome, the Hapsburgs, France under Louis XIV and Napoleon, Britain at the acme of empire, and the Soviet Union—which, even as late as the 1980s, trumpeted what it saw as a favorable "correlation of forces" in the world. Each of these powers was surpassed, and some of them collapsed.

SUCCESS BREEDS

While collapse certainly does not await the United States, the possibility of its being equaled or bypassed by competitors is hardly implausible. Were this to occur, it would, paradoxically, be testament to the magnitude of America's achievement in the world. Dominant powers—by providing security, exporting capital, selling goods and services, and creating new technologies—unwittingly enable the rise of new centers of strength. They also stir envy and the desire to emulate. The United States has done all of these things.

If one day China supplants the United States, much will be said—rightly—about Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, which began an era of 10-percent-a-year economic growth that the country has maintained since. But what also should be noted is how much China's success owes to the force of American example, the inflow of capital from the United States (and other capitalist powerhouses), and the education that legions of Chinese have obtained at leading US universities.

China is not alone in benefiting from US achievements. America's role in the revival of war-shattered Europe, and in Japan and South Korea's rise to the front ranks of economies, has been substantial and remarkable. Likewise, India's economic boom since the early 1990s has been accompanied by an expansion of Indo-US economic ties. The United States is the leading foreign investor in India, and trade between the two nations has nearly quadrupled, making the United States India's biggest trading partner. New Delhi has reassessed its penchant for planning, regulation, and protectionism, instead pursuing privatization and an expansion of

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foreign trade and investment, policies preached by the United States.

The tendency of success to breed new successes constitutes an age-old pattern, and there is no reason to imagine that the United States will maintain its dominance as this process plays out (America's ingrained exceptionalism notwithstanding). The iron logic of diffusion will rearrange the current hierarchy in time.

Moreover, the United States may not succeed in addressing the serious problems it now faces: an addiction to overspending and an aversion to saving, substandard schools, worn infrastructure, a political system so beholden to special interests that reassessing priorities and aligning means and ends seem impossible, rising inequality, and the emergence of a casino capitalism that privileges speculation over production.

Nevertheless, while the United States will forfeit its preeminent position unless it cures what ails it (this includes overextension, short-term calculations, and profligacy), the country still retains impressive advantages. America has an economy that is larger than the next three largest economies combined and that accounts for nearly one-quarter of global production. It has a military with unrivaled global reach and technological prowess, and with a budget larger than the next 25 military budgets combined. It has a peerless capacity for scientific and technological innovation, enabled by the world's finest constellation of universities and research centers. And it has an immigration policy that has resisted the bolt-the-door cries of nativists and has attracted the talented and diligent from across the globe.

Having vast material resources does not guarantee that they will be used wisely or bring favorable or fast results (remember the Vietnam War, and consider the current campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan). But having such resources is surely preferable to playing catch-up. And while even the most dazzling assets can be squandered, it would take extraordinary and prolonged incompetence on the part of the United States to deplete them completely. One can believe in an unstoppable American decline only by embracing determinism and dismissing the possibility of remedial action.

Furthermore, America's would-be challengers themselves face numerous hurdles and could fail to surmount them, or at least stumble. The prophets of multipolarity gloss over this possibility as they move seamlessly from cataloging America's problems to highlighting the promise of Brazil, China, India, Europe, and Russia (and sometimes Japan, the variability in this case accounted for by continuing constitutional and political limits on Japan's armed forces).

While other countries' problems are portrayed as inconsequential, America's are deemed monumental. So, while unipolar triumphalists deny that historic changes are under way, multipolar pessimists exaggerate the pace of these changes and are cocksure about what lies ahead. Both camps are prisoners of linearity. The future, as usual, will be untidy and complicated.

China's Challenge

When talk turns to potential successors to the United States, China heads the list—and for legitimate reasons. The country's population exceeds 1 billion and its landmass is larger than that of the United States. Few if any states have matched the tempo of economic growth that China has maintained for 30 years, and its economy is expected to surpass America's in size by 2025.

Although many of China's exports are goods produced on-site by subsidiaries of Western companies, the country's huge manufacturing volume has kept the economy humming and given Beijing the world's largest stash of foreign exchange reserves: $2.1 trillion in 2009. To keep the economy roaring, Chinese companies are acquiring deposits of energy and raw materials and negotiating long-term trade deals from Asia to Latin America. China's combination of statist authoritarianism, nationalism, and breakneck growth has won admiration, particularly considering that China has weathered the 2008–2009 global recession well, all the while spurning many of the policies that Western economists have touted as essential to success.

The People's Liberation Army, once massive but rudimentary, has become a leaner, more modern force, thanks to China's growing ability to build modern armaments as well as its buying spree of Russian arms. China, as a nuclear power and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, has a voice that is critical on issues ranging from climate change and nuclear proliferation to reform of the Security Council and governance of the global economy. And China has avoided the mistakes of other rising powers, such as Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany. By reassuring others that it is a poor country embarked on a "peaceful rise," it has forestalled the formation of an alarmed countervailing coalition.

So impressive are these attributes and achievements that the foibles of the Chinese colossus often get short shrift—both from those who admire China and from those unsettled by its rise. Nonetheless, China's leaders understand that minefields lie in their path.

One is an increasing misalignment between China's society and its polity. The socioeconomic revolution spawned by Deng's reforms has created an uneasy coexistence between, on the one hand, a literate, increasingly wealthy and entrepreneurial population engaged with the world through trade, travel, and the internet, and on the other hand an ossified and repressive political order.

The Communist Party's reliance on the stale slogans and dysfunctional practices of socialism and its fear of spontaneity make the party-state a hindrance to the most dynamic segments of society; Beijing's dedication to "filtering" the internet is telling in this respect. Myriad curtailments of freedom will not end the discord between people and their polity, nor the stubborn nationalism of minorities. The question is how such tensions will be resolved—and with what consequences for China's stability.

India will eschew any overt anti-China alliance, unless Beijing becomes bellicose.

Perhaps the adjustment will emerge from democratization. But that would effectively end the Communist Party's monopoly on power, which it will not surrender voluntarily. Only a fool would bet on the party's failing to suppress mass movements that challenge it: The means of coercion at its disposal are multiple and formidable, and it has not hesitated to deploy them in the past. Then again, who would have predicted that the Soviet Union would have collapsed when and how it did?

Another resolution to the misalignment might be a slow devolution of power away from the center, with most outlying areas—especially the dynamic eastern seaboard, and perhaps the non-Han areas (China's minorities constitute only 10 percent of the country's population but occupy nearly 60 percent of its territory)—gaining greater freedom, though not independence. While such a transformation might unfold peacefully as local elites amassed influence at Beijing's expense, it would reduce China's capacity to mobilize resources and to devise unified policies.

A third possibility is the party's transmutation as it jettisons socialism as the source of its legitimacy in favor of strident nationalism—a trend already noticeable. But this a risky proposition. Chinese nationalism is strong and getting stronger. If the regime stokes it, citizens will judge the government's fitness to rule based on how assertively they believe it defends China's honor during crises and confrontations with other states. Such scrutiny could make the leadership increasingly belligerent, eventually provoking an anti-Chinese coalition featuring the United States, Japan, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Beijing would be encircled, with its attention and resources spread across widely separated fronts.

WHAT IF GROWTH SLOWS?

Another potential minefield is the likelihood that China's economic development will at some point slow. The party certainly hopes that it will not: Growth enables the leadership to portray itself as the competent custodian of China's future, ensuring prosperity at home and power and prestige abroad. By raising living standards—while also utilizing formidable means of surveillance and intimidation—the party-state has withstood such challenges as the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations; rural protests generated by outrage over poverty, dispossession, environmental degradation, and corruption; and uprisings by Tibetans and Uighurs.

A prolonged economic crisis—it need not be a recession; a deep dip in growth rates could suffice—might fray the social compact ("you toe the line, we'll make you rich"). The post-Deng polity has never experienced an extended internal crisis, but we should not assume that it never will. In China's long and turbulent history, many a government has forfeited the "mandate of heaven."

Then there are problems that already are apparent. Because China's total fertility rate has fallen to 1.75, well below the 2.1 that is required to maintain the country's population, the society is poised to age. An increasing proportion of Chinese will be beyond their most productive years, the number of taxpayers will fall, and care for the retired and sick will consume an increasing share of the national budget. True, Japan and most European countries are also graying, but with one difference: Those countries are wealthy and China is not. Its per capita GDP is $4,654, compared with $17,300 for Poland (among the lowest in the European Union) and $62,600 for Norway (among the highest).

Some problems waiting in the wings will require substantial investments. One is a severe water shortage. According to the World Bank, China—with 20 percent of the world's population—has only 7 percent of its water supplies. More than 600 of its largest cities already face shortages, and the most populous municipalities are not located where the water is. Another huge problem is air and water pollution, a side effect of China's galloping growth, which remains heavily dependent on fossil fuels, especially coal. Still another challenge is a widening in income disparities across class, region, and nationality.

Meanwhile, the demographic problem could reduce the funds available for increasing China's military power. The military is now far more modern than it was 30 years ago, and the risks that the United States would face in the event of a conflict with China over, say, Taiwan have increased in consequence. But China's armed forces are still no match for America's, and that picture will not change any time soon. Although Beijing has increased its military expenditures substantially in recent years, it still spends only $70 billion a year, in comparison to $636 billion for the United States. Even assuming that China's published defense budget understates actual spending substantially, the gap with America is gargantuan.

The iron logic of diffusion will rearrange the current hierarchy in time.

None of these caveats diminishes the magnitude of China's achievements or the seriousness of America's internal problems. But they should place in context the facile projections and the alarmism that often pervade analysis of China.

INDIA RISING

In Washington and New Delhi, the air is thick with talk of India's emergence as a great power. The world's two most populous democracies, estranged through much of the postwar period, have since the 1990s forged an alliance cemented by principle and pragmatism. Their leaders stress the alliance is not directed against any other country, but one does not have to sit long in a conclave of US and Indian strategists to understand that China is among the catalysts for the compact.

American enthusiasm for India, the attention that India receives at global gatherings such as the Davos World Economic Forum, and advocacy for admitting it to the UN Security Council—all these stem first from the country's size and population, problems now translated into assets by the brisk economic growth (a close second to China's) that has been achieved since reforms were launched in the early 1990s. New policies released a torrent of entrepreneurial energy and enabled Indian companies to go global and make a mark in the high-technology sector. Americans of Indian origin, among the wealthiest and best educated ethnic groups in the United States, were once leery of India's labyrinth of official restrictions; now, encouraged by the reforms, they have begun pouring their talents and capital into India, providing an added fillip to the economy.

Then there is India's democratic system. Because it permits a free flow of ideas and people, freedom of expression, and easy access to information, it is, despite its myriad flaws, inherently better suited than authoritarian polities such as China's to economic advancement in the twenty-first century.

All this said, India trails China, to say nothing of the United States, in important areas. The UN Development Program's Human Development Index, a composite of basic quality-of-life indicators (literacy, life expectancy at birth, and per capita GDP), places India 132nd among 179 countries. China ranks 94th (and Democratic Republic of Congo 130th). The statistics illuminate the elemental problems that hold India back. With an average life expectancy of 69 years, India ranks 127th in the world; China places 93rd and its people can expect to live for 73 years. China's literacy rate is 93 percent. India's is 61 percent; it ties Sudan for the 172nd spot. More than 60 years after the country gained independence, 55 percent of India's women cannot read or write.

And poverty still plagues hundreds of millions of Indians. Although India's rapid economic growth has freed millions from poverty and expanded the middle class, gross income per capita is still only $2,960, less than half of China's. Moreover, this statistic does not reveal the economic disparities that continue to divide India's religions, regions, castes, and classes.

Take the last of these categories. While the acceleration of growth has enriched the top quartile of urban dwellers substantially and, to a lesser extent, their rural counterparts, the rest of the urban population has made considerably smaller gains, while the rural poor, who number about 500 million, have seen little improvement.

The World Bank commends India for reducing the proportion of its people subsisting on $1.25 daily from 60 percent in 1981 to 42 percent in 2005, but notes that the raw number of those subsisting on that amount increased during this period to 456 million from 421 million. By contrast, while China's boom has exacerbated economic inequalities, the percentage of people living on $1.25 a day has declined to under 16 percent over the past 25 years. And as bad as China's water shortage is, India's, according to UN data, is even worse: On average Chinese receive 2,259 cubic meters per person, Indians 1,880.

Another element of the India-on-the-march narrative is that the country is becoming a global military power. India indeed entertains ambitions on that scale, but its reach remains regional—and will for years to come. The reason for this is that, while military might has many ingredients, wealth is a sine qua non. This poses a problem for India. China spends but a small fraction of what the United States spends on its armed forces, and India's expenditures are less than half of China's. (They are about equal to Saudi Arabia's.) This disparity will persist: China simply has more to spend and, with its larger economy, can spend without sacrificing other needs. India's nuclear weapons will not change this fact; like other nuclear-armed states, India will discover that these weapons are useful for little more than deterring other nuclear-armed states from launching attacks.

To dwell on numbers alone, however, is to miss some of India's impressive advantages and achievements. Perhaps the greatest of the latter is that the country has survived so far. A sprawling latter-day Austro-Hungarian Empire, with a dizzying array of languages, castes, and religions (Hindus account for 80 percent of the population but every world religion is present), modern India has defied pessimists who were drafting its obituary not long after its birth in 1947.

To be sure, differences of caste, class, language, religion, and political ideology have produced continual violence (the Naxalite Maoist insurgency remains active in one-third of the country, and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh considers it India's "biggest internal security challenge"). The country has experienced a (disastrous) war with China and three with Pakistan. The hopes of millions of Indians still mired in poverty remain unfulfilled. The country's 150 million Muslims lag in higher education, income, and access to political position, and in recent years have faced discrimination in housing and questions about their loyalties. And corruption remains rampant.

Yet, despite all this, India's democracy endures. Power changes hands at multiple levels through elections. Hundreds of millions vote. The press is free and the judiciary (while imperfect) is independent. Civic organizations and trade unions flourish. Not once has the military tried to grab power (Pakistan, by contrast, has been ruled by its army for half of its existence). India confounds conventional theories of democracy, which identify as prerequisites a high level of literacy, a substantial middle class, and the absence of sharp inequalities. Indeed, democracy has ensured India's survival—an authoritarian India would likely have collapsed. Seen thus, it is an open question whether India or China has the more stable political order.

Democracy also helps strengthen—though it can never be the sole basis for—the India-US entente. Consider this: The United States and other Western countries are poised to leap into what has long been a Russian-dominated Indian arms market. Is there likely to be a similar rush to arm China? And did India's democratic nature not ease approval by the US Congress of the India-US nuclear deal of 2008, under which the United States essentially came to terms with India as a nuclear weapons state?

MOSCOW'S AMBITIONS

Vladimir Putin's Russia has overcome the anarchy of the Boris Yeltsin years. Guided by a strong leader who has forged a centralized state, it is again a great power. Or so goes a common refrain, which is not without basis. A country that is nearly as large as the United States and China combined, that has 11 time zones and thousands of nuclear weapons, and that is the world's largest producer of natural gas and its second largest producer of oil—such a country holds strong cards. And the assertive nationalism that now unites Russia's rulers and its ruled generates a drive to amass the influence and prestige befitting a great power.

The clearest recent statement of Russia's worldview and ambitions appeared in then-President Putin's speech to a 2007 Munich conference on security policy. He excoriated American unilateralism, likening it to the conduct of a rogue state (the label Washington reserves for its enemies) that scorns international law, the United Nations, and other states' sovereignty, while propagating supposedly universal, though in fact self-serving, democratic principles.

What enabled this behavior, Putin said, was the unprecedented and dangerous phenomenon of a unipolar world. More specifically, the Russian leadership has condemned as gratuitous acts of hostility NATO's expansion into the former Soviet Union (where Putin and his successor as president, Dmitri Medvedev, claim Russia has a "privileged interest") and the Bush administration's plan, scrapped in September by the current administration, to install missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic.

BUT IS RUSSIA BACK?

The Kremlin's strategy in recent years has entailed calling on likeminded states to work toward a multipolar world that restrains the United States. This is Russia's overarching foreign policy goal and it will not change, even though Medvedev is seen by some as cut from different cloth from Putin. Accordingly, Russia has strengthened its "strategic partnership" with China (selling it energy and arms); preserved its tight and longstanding ties with Iran and India; reestablished itself with such Soviet-era allies as Algeria, Libya, and Syria; bolstered the Collective Security Treaty Organization to preserve its position in the post-Soviet space; joined with China and Central Asia to strengthen the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a mechanism for combating terrorism and separatism and balancing America's post-9/11 presence in Central Asia; rewarded friendly states with economic privileges (mainly access to energy on terms more favorable than those given to states that rankle Moscow); waged a campaign to tie Central Asian and Caspian energy producers to Russian pipelines and markets; manipulated Europe's divisions by offering Germany (but also France and Italy) a special relationship; and trounced Georgia in an August 2008 war, effectively stopping NATO expansion by enabling those European states already reluctant to admit Georgia and Ukraine to argue that doing so would foment crisis, even war. There have also been gambits of a more theatrical nature, such as calls to end the dollar's role as the primary international reserve currency and naval patrols with Venezuela and in the Mediterranean.

Russia, it seems, is back. But is it really?

The country's long-term trajectory is actually much less promising than that of other potential centers of power—China, India, Brazil, and Europe—because of its numerous, variegated, deeply rooted, and chronic problems.

Although Putin and Medvedev have pledged to increase the defense budget (a long-term plan to invest $200 billion was announced in 2007), the Russian military is but a shadow of the Red Army. Its armaments are aging and are not being replaced at the rate needed to achieve modernization; its recruits are unhealthy (many fail to meet the physical and mental standards for the draft) and are mercilessly hazed; abysmal pay and living conditions make for poor retention rates; and some submarines and warships have been mothballed or sold for scrap. In July 2009, the new and much-vaunted Bulava submarine-launched ballistic missile failed a test flight, for the sixth time.

Russia can easily overcome its weak neighbors in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Yet even its war with Georgia revealed the problems plaguing its military: aging equipment, poor intelligence (commanders appeared unsure of the whereabouts of Georgian forces), substandard aerial surveillance (which resulted in the loss of four aircraft, compared to one for Georgia), a dearth of night vision technology, and shoddy communications equipment. The war's outcome was determined not so much by the technical caliber of Russia's 58th Army as by its numerical superiority.

A campaign against weak adversaries at home has not gone well either. The armed resistance in war-battered Chechnya has been weakened, and reconstruction has advanced, but the republic remains volatile under the rule of a brutal Kremlin-backed warlord, and violence is spreading across the rest of the North Caucasus, befuddling Moscow.

Despite the strategic partnership now uniting Beijing and Moscow, China is the ascendant power. Moreover, China knows it, and views Russia with a measure of disdain. For all the hullabaloo about a Moscow-Beijing axis, trade between the two countries was a mere $35 billion in 2007, less than China's trade with Singapore and about equal to its trade with Malaysia and the Netherlands. By contrast, China's trade with the Americans amounted to $400 billion in 2008.

Russia's weakness in relation to China is particularly problematic for the remote and underpopulated but resource-rich Russian Far East. With an area of 6.2 million square kilometers, it contains only 7 million people, and its high rates of death and emigration are expected to cut the population to 4.7 million by 2025. By contrast, the three adjoining Chinese provinces alone have some 160 million people. Although apocalyptic scenarios of Chinese conquest, or even a creeping takeover through migration, are just that, the Russian Far East will nonetheless enter China's orbit. Therefore, why should Beijing be so reckless as to seize it?

Russia suffers serious domestic problems in the economic and social realms. Despite its post-2000 economic boom, Russia's share of global production is only 3 percent. It accounts for less than 2 percent of global trade, and absorbs and exports an equivalent amount of foreign direct investment. Moreover, over two-thirds of Russia's exports consist of energy, other raw materials, and arms. The economy as a result is captive to fluctuations in the prices of raw materials and energy. As oil prices plummeted, the Russian economy contracted by almost 8 percent in 2009, ending the rapid growth that had occurred beginning in 2000, pushing millions back into poverty, and forcing the Kremlin to spend about half of its foreign currency reserves to defend the ruble.

There is scant evidence that Moscow has used the bonanza provided by years of soaring oil prices to diversify the economy, modernize decrepit infrastructure, and reverse a decline in the country's educational and heath care systems. Meanwhile, the malign effects of Russia's oil wealth are evident: Authoritarianism and corruption have waxed while economic reform has waned.

China has avoided the mistakes of other rising powers, such as Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany.

If Russia's economic trajectory is uncertain, its social problems—which have become worse under Putin's strong but inefficient state—are alarming. Because of high infection rates for tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS and a high incidence of alcoholism and cardiovascular disease, Russians are less healthy than they were several decades ago. The average life expectancy, 69 years in 1970, is now 65 for women and 58 for men.

Indeed, the ratio of deaths to births since 1991 has been 3 to 2, and the net population loss per year has been 675,000, reducing the population from 149 million in 1992 to 141 million in 2008. This has resulted not from the slower population growth rates that typically accompany growing affluence, but from the ravages of disease, suicide, poisonings, and accidents. By mid-century, Russia's population will be smaller, older, and less productive—in an age when the caliber of human capital is pivotal to economic potential.

LATE RISERS?

This assessment of China, India, and Russia suggests that those who expect a quick emergence of coequal competitors to the United States are mistaken in their view. But so are those who see a future of unchallenged, open-ended American dominance. Like previous preponderant powers, the United States has (unwittingly) enabled the emergence of challengers. The claim that we are witnessing not America's decline but the rise of others is an amalgam of obfuscation and fence straddling. In fact, challenges to US power stem from America's internal problems as much as from other countries' rise. And it is relative power that is decisive in world politics: Its shifts are what have ended the reigns of dominant states.

To be sure, a truly multipolar world remains a distant prospect, given today's disparity in power between the United States and its rivals. Russia's development is an uncertain prospect. The ascent of China and India could be arrested, or even derailed, by the several constraints that those countries face, as well as by surprises. Brazil has become the world's 10th-largest economy and an industrial power, and it has bounteous natural resources—including big, untapped offshore oil deposits—but its influence will remain mainly regional. Europe will likely be unable to act in unison, and Japan's economic might will not soon be supplemented by commensurate military power and political influence.

Nor will the United States face a unified countervailing coalition. Despite the magnitude of its power, and the animosity generated by its arrogance during George W. Bush's presidency, none of the middle powers, not even Russia, considers America the equivalent of past powers whose aggression provoked opposing alliances and culminated in war. The United States resembles Britain in the nineteenth century. It incites envy, anger, and occasionally alarm. But it is not feared as a persistent, clear, and present danger. Indeed, what worries many states is not US domination but US disengagement.

In addition, the emerging centers of power are too divided to act in concert. India and China will vie for primacy in Asia. They have fought a war and they share a disputed border. Japan will increase its military capacities and become less deferential to Washington, but the impetus for this shift will be Tokyo's growing apprehensions about China's power and its doubts about the reliability of US protection. As for the China-Russia strategic partnership, Beijing—well attuned to the arithmetic of power—does not consider it a credible anti-American alliance, but rather a marriage of convenience with a weak partner. The partnership keeps China's northern flank quiet (in sharp contrast to much of the postwar era) and provides energy and arms. As for Russia, it risks becoming China's vassal if it writes off the United States—something its smartest strategists understand.

THE END OF EMPIRE

And yet, despite all this, America's influence will diminish. Indeed, what gets lost in the debate about unipolarity versus multipolarity, with its arguments about changes in the distribution of global output, is that the United States will find it harder to translate its power into successful outcomes even as it retains an advantage in wealth and know-how. Diffusion will surely reduce America's economic dominance, but even before that occurs, regional powers will try to thwart US influence, especially in their own neighborhoods, and with growing success. This is what once happened to Britain.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had achieved hegemony in the Americas, Russia had annexed Central Asia and become a competitor in Iran and Afghanistan, and Germany had sought mastery in Europe. In the twenty-first century, China and India's influence will grow in Asia; Russia will remain a force to be reckoned with in Central Asia and the Caspian region; and Brazil will be powerful in South America. All this will happen at Washington's expense.

Although predictions of Europe's emergence as an independent, cohesive center of power are fanciful (consider its lackluster record of united action in international affairs since the end of the cold war), its dependence on the United States has declined. In the future it will become even less amenable to US leadership, even as it calls for more. NATO will not prevent this. The alliance no longer has a clear and compelling rationale. Schemes to reinvent it by switching its emphasis to missions beyond the continent will fail—just look at the two most prominent efforts at reinvention, related to the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The first triggered a revolt led by France and Germany and divided the alliance as never before; the second demonstrated that, despite US pleas, few European states are willing to deploy their soldiers for active combat (as opposed to missions for peacekeeping and for providing security for reconstruction and elections).

America's new partners will chart their own course. Take India, for instance. Despite its wariness of China it will maintain a nuanced strategy and eschew any overt anti-China alliance, unless Beijing becomes bellicose. China will remain one of India's largest trading partners, and plentiful political contacts will continue. Indians remain ambivalent about US power and do not want the American military ensconced in South and Central Asia; New Delhi will certainly oppose any US attack on Iran's nuclear complex.

India's position on climate change—that the West bears prime responsibility for the problem and so should carry the main burdens of cutting emissions—comports with the positions of China and Brazil. In global trade negotiations, this trio will, as they have in the acrimonious Doha Round, lead the charge against what developing countries consider historic inequities, notably in agricultural trade.

The United States will also find it harder to get its way within international organizations. Washington's attempts to orchestrate tougher UN sanctions against Iran and North Korea to stop the former's uranium enrichment program and to dismantle the latter's nuclear weapons will be stymied by Beijing and Moscow. Likewise, America's efforts to gain approval for stiff penalties, to say nothing of military intervention, against regimes perpetrating atrocities will be opposed by Russia and China, together with many developing nations, as violations of sovereignty. The World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, monuments to the American era, have not adapted to changes in the global distribution of power, and the United States will either have to cede more control to other countries or watch these institutions decline.

Pax Americana is passing. The pace of change will be slow and we do not know what lies ahead. What is evident is that our existing maps are obsolete and new mapmakers are scarce. ■