

Summaries

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Back to Bipolarity: How China's Rise Transformed the Balance of Power

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China's rise, Russia's military resurgence, and India's economic growth have prompted debates about the end of unipolarity and the future balance of power. Such debates are a staple of international politics; indeed, in the late twentieth century, many observers warned that Japan and the Soviet Union would overtake the United States. Yet scholars and policymakers evince little agreement on how to define power or measure the distribution of power. This article introduces an inductive method for comparing national power. I empirically validate common metrics of national capabilities—economic and military—by assessing their ability to both predict known balances of power across historical systems (1820–1990) and distinguish between great powers and other countries. This method yields three important findings. First, large gaps in national capabilities between great powers and even superpowers have been common throughout history. Great powers need not achieve parity with the leading state to engage in a dangerous security competition. Second, this method shows that China on most dimensions is not only a great power but a superpower. Third, neither Russia nor India is a great power. The system is bipolar. These findings inform debates about the stability of international politics and the future of international order and suggest the likelihood of shifts in U.S. grand strategy and alliances.

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Chinese Views of Strategic Stability: Implications for U.S.-China Relations

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China's nuclear buildup and intensifying U.S.-China strategic competition have raised concerns about the future of nuclear dynamics between China and the United States. As U.S.-China nuclear competition escalates, understanding Chinese views of strategic stability will be important for managing this dimension of the relationship between these two global powers. During the Cold War, different conceptions of strategic stability influenced how the Soviet

Union and the United States constructed their nuclear forces and approached arms control. For the U.S. strategic community, strategic stability consisted of crisis stability and arms race stability. This article analyzes extensive Chinese-language sources and finds that Chinese writings identify four pillars of strategic stability: nuclear mutual vulnerability, the overall state of bilateral relations, the nuclear taboo, and beliefs about the controllability of nuclear escalation. Chinese strategists perceive each of these four pillars as eroding, in part because of U.S. actions. The findings have important implications for understanding China's nuclear force development, nuclear dynamics in East Asia, and U.S.-China relations.

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The Myth of a Bipartisan Golden Age for U.S. Foreign Policy:

The Truman-Eisenhower Consensus Remains

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Scholars and practitioners of U.S. foreign policy commonly describe the early Cold War as a lost golden age of bipartisan consensus. This article uses public opinion data, congressional voting patterns, and party platform statements to refute this conventional wisdom. In fact, the core internationalist principles that enjoyed bipartisan agreement during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations retain widespread approval from Democrats and Republicans today. Enduring support for this Truman-Eisenhower consensus is concealed by the way that recent presidents have enlarged the United States' foreign policy agenda to pursue policies that historically did not generate bipartisanship, such as fighting climate change or conducting decades-long projects in armed nation-building. Rising political divisions in U.S. foreign policy are thus primarily a result of Democrats and Republicans deploying global influence in new ways rather than renouncing traditional international commitments. These findings refute widespread claims that political polarization has undermined traditional conceptions of U.S. global leadership or depleted Washington's usable power.

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Competing Visions of Restraint

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At least since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, a subset of realists, conservatives, and progressives have called for greater restraint in U.S. grand strategy. Given that restraint is a key position in the grand strategy debate, this article explores the variations within restraint's big tent in greater detail. Drawing on writings by and interviews with advocates of restraint, we identify the underlying beliefs that have led these disparate groups to converge on restraint. We find that there are competing visions of restraint. Realists want to prevent the emergence of regional hegemons without provoking great power war; conservatives seek to preserve what they identify as the American way of life; and progressives are motivated by the desire to combat inequality and injustice at home and abroad. Even within each group, there are a range of underlying beliefs and foreign policy preferences, and more divisions have emerged in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and China's rise. We explore how these groups' positions may evolve in the future as the threat environment continues to change and new policy questions emerge.

NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS

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