**A multipolar world**

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In his 1987 book The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, historian Paul Kennedy reassured Americans that the decline the United States was facing after a century of international dominance was “relative and not absolute, and is therefore perfectly natural; and that the only serious threat to the real interests of the United States can come from a failure to adjust sensibly to the newer world order.”

Since Kennedy wrote those words, we have seen the end of the Cold War, the peaceful emergence of China as a leading world power, and the rise of a formidable Global South. But the United States has indeed failed to “adjust sensibly to the newer world order,” using military force and coercion in flagrant violation of the U.N. Charter in a failed quest for longer lasting global hegemony.

Kennedy observed that military power follows economic power. Rising economic powers develop military power to consolidate and protect their expanding economic interests. But once a great power’s economic prowess is waning, the use of military force to try to prolong its day in the sun leads only to unwinnable conflicts, as European colonial powers quickly learned after the Second World War, and as Americans are learning today.

While US leaders have been losing wars and trying to cling to international power, a new multipolar world has been emerging. Despite the recent tragedy of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the agony of yet another endless war, the tectonic plates of history are shifting into new alignments that offer hope for the future of humanity. Here are several developments worth watching.

For decades, the US dollar was the undisputed king of global currencies. But China, Russia, India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, and other nations are taking steps to conduct more trade in their own currencies, or in Chinese yuan.

Illegal, unilateral U.S. sanctions against dozens of countries around the world have raised fears that holding large dollar reserves leaves countries vulnerable to U.S. financial coercion. Many countries have already been gradually diversifying their foreign currency reserves, from 70 per cent globally held in dollars in 1999 to 65 per cent in 2016 to only 58 per cent by 2022.

Since no other country has the benefit of the “ecosystem” that has developed around the dollar over the past century, diversification is a slow process, but the war in Ukraine has helped speed the transition. On April 17, 2023, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned that U.S. sanctions against Russia risk undermining the role of the dollar as the world’s global reserve currency.

And in a Fox News interview, right-wing Republican Senator Marco Rubio lamented that, within five years, the United States may no longer be able to use the dollar to bully other countries because “there will be so many countries transacting in currencies other than the dollar that we won’t have the ability to sanction them.”

When calculated based on Purchasing Power Parity, the GDP of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) is now higher than that of the G7 (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan). The BRICS countries, which account for over 40 per cent of total world population, generate 31.5 per cent of the world’s economic output, compared with 30.7 per cent for the G7, and BRICS’s growing share of global output is expected to further outpace the G7’s in coming years.

Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has invested some of its huge foreign exchange surplus in a new transport infrastructure across Eurasia to more quickly import raw materials and export manufactured goods, and to build growing trade relations with many countries.

Now the growth of the Global South will be boosted by the New Development Bank (NDB), also known as the BRICS Bank, under its new president Dilma Rousseff, the former president of Brazil.

Rousseff helped to set up the BRICS Bank in 2015 as an alternative source of development funding, after the Western-led World Bank and IMF had trapped poor countries in recurring debt, austerity, and privatization programs for decades. By contrast, the NDB is focused on eliminating poverty and building infrastructure to support “a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable future for the planet.” The NDB is well-capitalized, with $100 billion to fund its projects, more than the World Bank’s current $82 billion portfolio.

On the surface, the Ukraine war has brought the United States and Europe geostrategically closer together than ever, but this may not be the case for long. After French President Emmanuel Macron’s recent visit to China, he told reporters on his plane that Europe should not let the United States drag it into war with China, that Europe is not a “vassal” of the United States, and that it must assert its “strategic autonomy” on the world stage. Cries of horror greeted Macron from both sides of the Atlantic when the interview was published.

But European Council President Charles Michel, the former prime minister of Belgium, quickly came to Macron’s side,insisting that the European Union cannot “blindly, systematically follow the position of the United States.” Michel confirmed in an interview that Macron’s views reflect a growing point of view among EU leaders, and that “quite a few really think like Emmanuel Macron.”

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the Monroe Doctrine, which has served as a cover for U.S. domination of Latin America and the Caribbean. But nowadays, countries of the region are refusing to march in lockstep with U.S. demands. The entire region rejects the U.S. embargo on Cuba, and Biden’s exclusion of Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua from his 2022 Summit of the Americas, which persuaded many other leaders to stay away or only send junior officials, largely doomed the gathering.

With the spectacular victories and popularity of Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador in Mexico, Gustavo Petro in Colombia, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil, progressive governments now have tremendous clout. They are strengthening the regional body CELAC (the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) as an alternative to the US-dominated Organization of American States.

To reduce reliance on the US dollar, South America’s two largest economies, Argentina and Brazil, have announced plans to create a common currency that could later be adopted by other members of Mercosur–South America’s major trade bloc. While U.S. influence is waning, China’s is mushrooming, with trade increasing from $18 billion in 2002 to nearly $449 billion in 2021. China is now the top trading partner of Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay, and Brazil has raised the possibility of a free-trade deal between China and Mercosur.

One of the false premises of US foreign policy is that regional rivalries in areas like the Middle East are set in stone, and the United States must therefore form alliances with so-called “moderate” (pro-Western) forces against more “radical” (independent) ones. This has served as a pretext for America to jump into bed with dictators like the Shah of Iran, Saudi Arabia’s Mohammed bin Salman, and a succession of military governments in Egypt.

Now China, with help from Iraq, has achieved what the United States never even tried. Instead of driving Iran and Saudi Arabia to poison the whole region with wars fueled by bigotry and ethnic hatred, as the United States did, China and Iraq brought them together to restore diplomatic relations in the interest of peace and prosperity.

Healing this divide has raised hopes for lasting peace in several countries where the two rivals have been involved, including Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and as far away as West Africa.

Excerpted: ‘Can the US Adjust

Sensibly to a Multipolar World?’

Courtesy: Commondreams.org