TRANSFORMATION OF ECONOMIC AND SECURITY POWER GROUPINGS IN THE WORLD COMMUNITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

TRANSFORMAREA GRUPĂRILOR DE PUTERE ECONOMICE ȘI DE SECURITATE ÎN COMUNITATEA MONDIALĂ ÎN SECOLUL XXI

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Summary. *Historically, the centers of economic power shifted among various world regions. With the growth of economic strength, whether of individual states or regions, their military strength and political power in the world also increased. Our paper focuses on identifying the most significant factors that may lead to a transformation of the current unipolar order, led by the United States and its Western allies, into a multipolar world. The outcomes of the Second World War led to the creation of a bipolar world, alongside which the so-called Third World with limited opportunities for development also emerged. After the dissolution of the USSR, the multipolar world became a unipolar one, with the USA as the economic, military, and political hegemon. However, economic reforms in China began to shift the balance of economic power, and subsequently also military and political power, in the world community by the beginning of the 21st century. In line with many published scientific works and political statements of the world's leading political figures, a multipolar world order is increasingly emerging.*

Keywords*: Formation of bipolar, unipolar, and multipolar world.*

INTRODUCTION

The global political order and the position of individual states within it have historically been influenced by their economic power and subsequently their military strength. Great empires in human history were formed, developed, flourished, and then declined. Thus, the world order also changed.

The current world order was defined after the Second World War and, over eighty post-war years, has undergone certain transformations. The post-war arrangement of the world was determined by agreements concluded by representatives of the USA, the USSR, and the United Kingdom at international conferences in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam. The world community was divided into two blocs, creating a bipolar world. On one side were the industrially developed states with a market economy and liberal democracy led by the USA; on the other side were states with centrally planned economies led by the USSR, referred to as totalitarian regimes. The USA and the USSR represented two superpowers with defined spheres of influence. A balance prevailed in the world,

although within it some crises and military conflicts such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War occurred. This relative stability of international relations was maintained from 1945 until the collapse of one of the superpowers, the USSR, in 1991.

From the mid-1950s, the process of decolonization intensified and the Non-Aligned Movement began to develop. Its initiators were then-Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, and Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The countries of the Third World, mostly former colonies of Western European states, were rich in natural resources but had underdeveloped industrial production, low levels of education, and low living standards of the population. The new economic policies of some developing states, such as the Asian Tigers or the People's Republic of China, placed them on a trajectory of rapid economic growth and allowed them to escape, or are allowing them to escape, poverty. Their position and influence in the world order is changing. While the Asian Tigers – the Republic of Korea and Taiwan – are political and military allies of the USA, China, with the second-largest population and the second-highest GDP, is currently forming into an independent center of economic, political, and military power in the world community. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the political importance of states such as Brazil, Turkey, and Iran has also increased. These states are creating new regional power centers. Other countries, from which one might also expect economic rise and political importance, have not yet achieved such significant growth. Among them are Pakistan, Egypt, Nigeria, and Argentina. In the future, their rise may also be expected.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The issue of creating a new world order must be examined from a historical perspective, in the context of the development of individual world regions, their rise and decline. Alongside the historical method, we also applied the method of comparative analysis, using statistical data documenting developments in individual world regions and the most significant economies (Brazil, China, India, Japan, Russia, and the USA). To better understand other perspectives on the issue, we studied numerous scientific articles. From this large volume of literature, we decided to highlight the approaches of several notable authors regarding the possible future direction of the world order.

Amitav Acharya (2025), in his article *"The Decline of the West and the Rise of 'the Rest' Will Lead to a New World Order",* uses less common terms in scientific literature such as reglobalization, deglobalization, and hyperglobalization. According to Acharya, a potential withdrawal of the United States from its leading international role will not result in global collapse. Instead, we are witnessing the formation of a 'multilateral' order and the development of a process of reglobalization led by Asia and the countries of the Global South. The era of hyperglobalization, celebrated as a guarantee of prosperity and peace, ended with the misuse of trade and geopolitics to maintain a stable world order. This situation led to deglobalization processes, in which many states reduced dependence on foreign trade and achieved greater national self-sufficiency. In the process of reglobalization, countries of the Global South will play a more significant role. Asia is

regarded not only as the center of global growth – in 2015–2021 Asian states produced 57% of world GDP – but also as a new 'global connector'.

Another author, Oliver Della Costa Stuenkel (2024), in *"The New World Order and the Global South"*, seeks to answer whether the shift of power away from the most economically developed Western states can be considered a key element of the crisis of the liberal international order and the creation of a new world order. He examines the views and positions of Global South countries, noting that many of them tend not to oppose the values of the liberal order themselves but object to the ways in which these values are applied. The main challenge for existing structures of global governance, therefore, is not rejection of the basic rules by non-Western countries but whether today's system can transform into a truly multipolar order where power and privileges are less concentrated in the Global North. Some subsets of Global South states explicitly reject a Western rule-based order. However, the author argues that there are few signs that the Global South has the interest or capacity to formulate a genuinely new or alternative model attractive enough to gain wide support and transform into a new world order.

Another significant author, Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2025), in *"How World Order Changes",* reminds us that after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and almost a year before the collapse of the USSR in 1991, then U.S. president George H. W. Bush declared the creation of a "new world order". Two months into Donald Trump's second presidential term, Kaja Kallas, the EU's top diplomat, stated that "the international order is undergoing changes of a scale we have not seen since 1945." Nye seeks to answer what "world order" is and how this system is maintained or disrupted.

In his paper, Nye states that in terms of world order, we can measure changes in the distribution of power and resources, as well as adherence to norms establishing its legitimacy. We can also measure the frequency and intensity of violent conflicts. Stable distributions of power among states often involve wars as part of balancing processes in international relations. Technological changes that alter the distribution of military and economic power also influence the structure of world order. Similarly, domestic social and political changes can alter a state's foreign policy. The activities of transnational forces or domestic revolutionary movements can also spread beyond governments' control and change public perceptions of the legitimacy of the prevailing order.

He further asks whether the Trump administration will maintain this unique source of America's continuing power or whether Kallas is right that we are in the midst of changing the existing world order. Nye highlights that 1945, 1991, and 2008 were watershed years. Future historians may add 2025 to the list, as a possible result of U.S. policy.

Another significant author, Mehdi Sanael (2024), in "*The Transition of International Order: Current Debates and Future Direction*", argues that the beginning of the third millennium witnessed the outbreak of global crises and challenges that exposed the weaknesses of a hegemon-led world order and the negative aspects of globalization. This spurred extensive debate among scholars of international relations about the transition period and the creation of a new structure of world order. The recent emergence of two

major crises – the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine – accelerated this transition and forced representatives of various schools of international relations to consider different future scenarios of world order formation. These scenarios can be grouped into several categories: (a) revival of unipolar order with new characteristics, (b) emergence of multipolar order, (c) creation of a new bipolar order, (d) formation of a non-polar world, and (e) rise of multiple regional hegemons. Given differences and challenges in consolidating the power of individual centers and lack of agreement on international norms, it is unlikely that any of these scenarios will be realized in the short term. Without an omnipresent, tangible threat or a fundamental shift in political culture, the rules and structures of the old order will persist, albeit weakened. This prolongs the transition period and increases global instability. Therefore, it is crucial to manage this transition peacefully by supporting regional alliances and respecting cultural and civilizational differences of key actors. A new world order can ultimately only emerge through dialogue between major powers and consensus on the rules shaping the new system. Until then, the global community must prioritize stability and transitional management.

Mehdi Motaharnia and Ensiyeh Salehi (2017), in *"The Transition of International Order: Current Debates and Future Direction"*, emphasize that thinking about the future is not new. Imagining the future has existed in all human societies. This work also addresses existing scenarios of international system development, predicting that the future system will be a flexible bipolar system in which the West and East – specifically the USA and China – oppose each other.

To this part of our work, we also add the view of current Czech president Petr Pavel (2025) who in a radio interview commented on changes in the world security order, suggesting that he expects its transformation in the context of redefining geopolitical relations and strategic priorities, while questioning many previous certainties.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Changes in the Distribution of Power in the World Community

At the turn of the last decade of the 20th century, several major changes took place in the world community. After the dissolution of the USSR in the early 1990s, fourteen union republics declared independence. The Russian Federation became the successor state of the USSR. Its political, economic, and military strength was significantly weakened compared to the USSR, even though it remained a nuclear power. (Latypova, 2022) In the last decade of the 20th century, Russia experienced economic decline. According to Table 1, Russia's absolute GDP fell by half at the end of the 1990s compared to its value at the beginning of the decade. At the start of the 21st century, Russia's absolute GDP began to grow again, / though it was also negatively affected by the 2008 financial crisis. The country's economic situation influenced its military and political strength in the world community. Currently, Russia, with 144 million inhabitants, represents 1.75% of the world's population (8.2 billion) and contributes 3.6% to global GDP. (Worldometer, 2025, A)

We examined Russia's economic situation in more detail because it displayed significant instability after the collapse of the USSR. The Russian economy is now relatively stabilized, though its 'special military operation' in Ukraine since 2022 has influenced growth through increased military spending. Despite this, Russia remains an important actor in international relations both economically and militarily.

Table 1. Changes in absolute GDP in billion USD of the Russian Federation (Worldometer, 2025 C)

	1991	**1992**	**1993**	**1994**	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**
	518	460	435	395	396	391	404	270	196	260
Change from previous year	*	-12 %	5,5 %	10 %	0 %	-1,2 %	+1 %	-33 %	- 28 %	+32 %
	2001	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**
	306	345	430	591	764	989	1 299	1660	1 222	1 525
Change from previous year	+ 17 %	+ 12 %	+ 12 %	+ 14 %	+ 29 %	+ 28 %	+ 24 %	+22 %	-27 %	+25%
	2015	**2020**	**2022**							
	1 363	1493	2 240							
Change from previous year	-11%	+10%	+50%							

The world transformed from a bipolar to a unipolar order after the collapse of the USSR, with the USA as the sole political, economic, and military hegemon. Currently, a quarter of a century after the formation of the unipolar world, a gradual transformation is underway. This transformation is based mainly on the rising share of Asian states, particularly China and India, in world GDP (see Table 2). Given stable development trends, the share of Asian economies – including Vietnam and Indonesia – can be expected to grow further, making them important contributors to the formation of a multipolar order.

Table 2. Share of selected countries in world GDP in thousand billion USD (WITS, 2025)

State						**Change 2022/1990**
	1990	**2000**	**2010**	**2020**	**2022**	
USA	5,9	10,25	15,04	21,1	25,5	4,3 x
China	0,36	1,2	6,01	11,7	17,9	49,7 x
Russia	0,56	0,26	1,52	1,51	2,24	4,0 x
India	0,14	0,47	1,67	2,67	3,38	24,1 x
Japan	3,1	4,97	5,29	5,04	5,01	1,6 x
Brasilia	0,46	0,66	2,20	1,47	1,65	3,6 x

Economic Rise of Selected Countries and Changes in Their Position in the World Community

The economic development of a country is determined by many factors: the level and quality of education, availability of natural resources, population size (labor force and domestic market), and the amount of domestic and foreign investment per capita. The first three factors are given and cannot change in the short term (e.g., within a decade). The most flexible factor is investment. However, the volume of investment depends on political conditions such as the stability of the political system, its relationship to business, property rights, and corruption. Thus, the ability of a state to create favorable conditions for investment is crucial to its development into a new power center.

Most states that contribute to the formation of new power centers emerged or were reshaped after the Second World War, either through decolonization (India, Vietnam) or through major domestic political changes (China).

The People's Republic of China holds a special position. Proclaimed on October 1, 1949 (Office of Historian, 2025, A), it represented a significant, though economically backward, actor in international relations. In 1971, China became a member of the United Nations, replacing Taiwan, and in the same year became a permanent member of the UN Security Council (United Nations, 2025). Despite being one of the world's oldest states (Ethiopia, China, Japan), China underwent major political and economic changes in 1949, transforming into a centrally planned economy under Mao Zedong. After Stalin's death, the country politically separated from the USSR. They even became enemies. (Fact Sheet, 2025). After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping led successful reforms that shifted China from a centrally planned to a market economy and opened it to foreign investment. (Szapary, Dunaway, Burton, Blejer, 1991). Relations between China and Russia gradually normalized.

The first significant successes of China's reforms appeared in the 1990s, when the country began to record rapid growth and increase its share of global GDP. Growth since the late 1970s was based on cheap labor and inflows of foreign investment. The authoritarian system guaranteed security for foreign investors and created more favorable conditions for them than for domestic investors. As a result, China has become the world's second-largest economy after the USA. With economic growth came rising military and political power. China plays an important role in the ongoing shift of economic power to Asia and, given its economic potential, is expected to form, alongside the USA, the second main power center in the world order.

India's path to economic growth has been different. Until the 1980s, India industrialized in a Soviet-like manner, with the state playing a major role in building heavy industry. Later, India shifted its focus to developing information technologies. With the world's largest population (1.46 billion, or 18% of the global total)(Worldometer, 2025 D) and relatively rapid growth, India will undoubtedly also play a role in shaping the new world order.

Brazil is also becoming a new economic giant and an important actor in the world community. With 213 million inhabitants (Worldometer, 2025, E) and a broadly developed industrial base, its products succeed on world markets. Other rapidly developing Global South states such as Iran, Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia, and Mexico are also becoming integral to the new global economic order and a multipolar political world.

When we talk about the world order as a balance among the strongest states, we can expect the distribution of power to continue shifting in favor of selected Global South countries that will form the core of the new order. At the same time, we must note that Global North states led by the USA and Western Europe will continue to play an irreplaceable role, primarily due to their leading position in fundamental science, a decisive factor in global progress. South Korea and Taiwan must also be mentioned, as they transformed within six decades from the 1960s into highly developed countries with a strong share in global scientific innovation.

CONCLUSION

Throughout world history, the distribution of economic, military, and political power has changed continuously. Shifts in world order took place as empires rose, declined, and gave way to new centers of economic, military, and political strength. After the First World War, the USA became the world's largest economy. Its role was reinforced after the Second World War, when it accounted for half of global GDP. Its military strength was then balanced by that of the USSR, resulting in the formation of a bipolar world. Gradually, the USA became the world's economic and political hegemon. This position was strengthened after the collapse of the USSR, which led to the creation of a unipolar world order. With China's economic development, especially since the early 1990s, its military and political power has also increased. With the growing role of China and other Global South states – notably India, Brazil, and Vietnam – a multipolar world is taking shape. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Russia's economic power has also stabilized, giving it an important role in shaping this multipolar world.

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