

PREFACE

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The dynamic nature of the interaction of actors in the international system requires constant analysis and a certain amount of staring into the crystal ball in order to attempt a prediction of what is upon us. The end of the Cold War, the post 9/11 world, and now the rise of a new international order, heightens the relevance of studying the changing behavior of traditional actors who in a necessary attempt for adaptability try on every suit available to them in order to see which fits best.

Whether we live in a non-polar world as Hass suggests, a multipolar or in Grevi's non-polar world, the future focus of study of international relations undoubtedly lies in the Asia Pacific region. We have witnessed in the last decade a surge in the activity and importance of "middle powers" whose activity has been studied individually and as groups that group under acronyms such as BRICS, MIKTA, MINT, CIVETS or CARBS.

The rise of the so called middle powers (although the suitability of this concept is one prone to debate as well, given China is hardly a middle power) has had a profound impact in the dynamic and rules by which the game is played. The end of the bipolar world gave way to the endless readaptation and interpretation to the rules, which is endemic to the game. Actors such as China and India have had to wiggle their way through and secure (hopefully increasing) in the spotlight and give themselves more room to maneuver. The indisputable domination of the US and the power bandwagon that Europe enjoyed prompted these actors to seek interaction among them.

The moment China, India, Russia and Brazil started their own conversation and were listened to by emerging powers leaving the traditional heavyweights out, was the moment alarm bells started to go off in Washington, London and the rest of the European capitals. That "friendemy" they avoided for years and worked to keep out the way is suddenly an im-

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portant voice, regional power and a serious contender in the race for world leadership.

An undermined, eroded, divided and slower growing USA has lost ground when comparing it to the growth, population, influence and power of rising China. This is not to say that the United States and Europe will be replaced and superseded, but the doings, comings and goings of these Asian giants must be monitored carefully and their potential studied in depth.

The chapters provide a concise, yet insightful analysis, into this undeniable force of change that the rise of China, India and Russia represent. Oropeza takes on the disjunction between not only regions, but also civilizations, that the TPP represents and provides an analysis on whether this opportunity offers enough to the Asia Pacific region for them to alienate China. In the recent past Asia Pacific has found they share not only a geographical area but also values, structures and a vision. In this analysis it is important to take into account the broader and more general issue of the division the TPP could generate in this never ending fight for power. As Oropeza underlines: “The TPP is a proposal that goes beyond the boundaries of a free trade agreement, and is inserted directly into a clash of regions (Atlantic-Pacific) and civilizations (West-East Asia) that will be determined throughout the first half of the 21st Century”.

The West and Asia could find themselves in a wedge and countries like Mexico could be caught in the middle. The author remarks the importance of considering not only the momentum but the conditions, clauses and situations that derive from this mechanism in the medium and long term.

The reflection on the BRICS project and the role of China considers this issue of studying the changes of the international system, its actors and its interactions in order to understand not only what is coming but more importantly, how what is coming is going to affect us and the functioning of the system. Not only answering what lies ahead, but what effect this is going to have. It provides a brief overview of the leaving behind of the Bretton Woods system and the rise of the BRICS in a global economy that is under reconstruction, the relevance these countries have in the construction of the future in a world that is less reliant on US stability but at the same time eager to seek new partners, to grow and to interact with strong players. The role of China in this respect (and especially among the BRICS) is crucial. It symbolizes rupture, a different and perhaps not as wholesome (in the western conception of the word), avid for recognition and active in its participation whilst loyal and adherent to its values and a development model that speaks for itself and that in around three decades has lifted China from extreme poverty and turned it into the next “it” kid around the block.

The importance of BRICS lies not only in the group per se, but in what it represents on the whole. Often the synergies of the system strike us and this is one of those times, perhaps they are the invention of an economist, but they represent the rise of the underdogs, those that now have a chance at playing at the highest leagues and become global powers.

Of course, there are certain aspects that are to be taken into account, although the Chinese development model has been successful, there are numerous social challenges and issues that remain unaddressed. The challenge for China now remains to address these issues, provide sustainability for its model and continue to provide an alternative to a western dominated neoliberalist system.

Oropeza studies also the case of India, a country preferred by the West to lead the BRICS alliance given its shared values. Being the most populous democratic country in the world, the support India receives from the West is considerably more important than that of China, especially with regard to political aspects. The issue with India lies on the numerous fronts in which it faces issues. Unlike China, India is a country that is culturally, religiously, socially and economically fragmented. It has a large percentage of its population living in extreme poverty and they cannot overcome their inability to provide basic services, such as healthcare and education to their population.

India is very much like Mexico in the duality of its societies. Academics often debate on the fact that there are two Mexico's one that struggles with poverty, inequality and stability and another that is pushing forth reforms, one that wants to jump on to the modernity train. As is the case of Mexico, India cannot logically assume the leadership of such a group with such unfinished issues when China is not only more stable and grows at a faster rate, but has in some measure tackled or is implementing measures that will attempt to overcome its deficiencies.

Russia struggles with a decaying economy, greatly affected by the sanctions imposed by the West and harbors a historical resentment that logically drives it to adhere to groups that seek to overtake the Western dominated order. As the author suggests, the Russian model for development is not particularly clear and they must make haste in thinking it out. Its geopolitical and economic importance gives Russia a certain bonus which neither China nor India have had in this quest for power and influence. It must be exercised in the right time or it may risk being lost.

It represents an arduous and daunting task for emerging and middle powers (such as Mexico) to find their role in the world, balancing their existing relations with dominating powers, building and strengthening their relations with aspiring powers and not upsetting everyone else. However

this is the way in which middle powers rise and it is part of the adaptability and nature of states in the international system. The rise of Asia Pacific and especially these three giants should be taken as an opportunity and it must be studied in depth in order to learn which opportunities and possibilities lie for countries like Mexico in the future both internally and externally. Re-arranging, rebuilding and reshuffling priorities and resources is an essential part in the development, growth and survival of a nation and something that must be done constantly if one wants to keep playing the game. Learn the rules and adapt to them, only doing this can one thrive.

In this sprawling inquiry into the shift of economic and political power from the Atlantic to the Pacific, Oropeza delivers a good researched, interesting and readable book about the new international order. Through his insight, understanding and ability to deliver an eye opening analysis, Oropeza establishes himself as a leader in the field of strategic studies.