

## BRI AXIS: EMERGING POWERS SHAPING THE NEW WORLD ORDER

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**Corresponding Author: \*****Abbas Rashid Butt1****Abstract**

This article presents an analytical discussion on the developments that may lead to the emergence of a 'New World Order'. In this context, major trends within the existing 'liberal order' and the challenges confronted by it in the backdrop of 'emerging powers' have been discussed. It is argued that the influence of 'leading powers' led by US is diminishing fast, giving way to rules and institutions espoused by 'emerging powers' like China, Brazil, India etc. This may lead to an altogether new global system closer to the Chinese vision manifested in the form of BRI. In such a case, it is hypothesized that the relative significance of the actors in global order will be determined by their placement within BRI instead of their individual economic or strategic strength.

**INTRODUCTION**

Since the end of cold war, a number of developments in the global arena have attracted the attention of scholars around the globe. The most significant among these developments, perhaps, is the rise of China on global theater that has not only impacted the geo-economic structure of the existing order, rather, it has also shaken the very foundations of the edifice of prevailing international political system. Lately, however, a number of events have taken place at global level which, owing to their consequential impact, cannot be ignored or escape the sight of the researchers and observers of international scene. Among these developments, the rise of 'emerging powers' in the backdrop of diminishing US preeminence simply stands at the top of the ladder whereas practical manifestation of this shifting reality is the Chinese flagship connectivity project of BRI.

A number of scholars believe that the traditional 'liberal order' is on the decline, giving way to a new arrangement that may be closer to the ideals espoused by China and her new found partners in the context of BRI as well as BRICS. However, there are others who opine that China is destined to shape the contours of the emerging global order to a large extent, but it may not be able to replace the existing 'liberal order' altogether while the same may continue to determine the principles of global governance in years to come. It is, therefore, significant to evaluate, analyse and comprehend what will be the contours of the emerging world order in the backdrop of changing nature of relationship between the leading powers of the past and emerging powers of the present? On the other hand, it is also important to estimate the extent of trans-formative impact of these shifting dynamics and how these may

affect the international configurations? The following research questions are going to be addressed in this paper:

1. What will be the nature and direction of the new world order?
2. What will be the nature of relationship between leading powers and emerging powers within the future global order?
3. Does BRI qualify the requirements of a full-fledged global order?

It is hypothesized that in the future global order, the significance of various actors [states] in the international political system will be determined by their placement within Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

### Existing Global Scenario

The available literature regarding China and 'New World Order' seems to encompass wide range of topics including 'rising China', 'emerging powers', 'Sino-US contestation', complexities of regional and global dynamics and shifting ground realities. The scholars around the world have approached the subject from two distinct angles. Some believe that China is destined to take over the US in terms of world leadership. Others, however, view that the US dominance will continue along with her liberal order while China and allied powers will also support the status quo as they have thrived within the same scheme of things. Authors like Giles Chance has explained China's role in global dynamics in the backdrop of shifting ground realities. Others, however, focus on changing global environment as explained in the article "The world has changed". There are still others who emphasize the need to re-evaluate traditional liberal power structures and alliances. Some of the authors highlight interconnectedness of global economies as against the complexities of interdependence phenomenon. One such article is titled, "Did China Cause the Credit Crisis?" Various analysts believe and advocate the resilience on the part of Chinese philosophy in the face of prevailing dysfunctional global economic system. Likewise, in the article "From G8 to G20: China's Role in Global Governance" China's growing importance in shaping ongoing economic trends and decision-making processes has been explained. There are a number of writers who, toeing

the same line, highlighted a more inclusive approach regarding multipolar system of governance at international level.

Nevertheless, the topics related and linked to new world order also tend to cover subjects whereby US's role in the existing global order has been focused. One such piece is titled "An End to Dollar Dominance?" in which future of US dominance has been questioned while highlighting its implications for IMF in the backdrop of China's rise. There are still others who focus Sino-US ties as part of global order. In the articles "Sino-American Relations" and "China as Asian Leader" the intricacies involved in the relations between the two states have been explored along with their regional implications. A significant number of scholars view that along with complexities attached with multifarious nature of relationship between China and US, there are many opportunities available for regional states particularly linked to China's emerging role in Asia.

Some of the scholars tend to discuss China's engagement with other emerging economies within the context of South-South cooperation such as in the article titled "China and the Emerging World" the same theme has been focused. Again, in the article "Nova Pax Sinica - Can China Lead the World?" author explains China's capacity and willingness to assume global leadership and thus debates about the emergence of a new global order. Some, however, like to present a nuanced approach about china's evolving role at the global stage by comparing old and new China as discussed in the article "New China, Old China".

Nonetheless, there is a literature gap on the emerging contours of the evolving order and how this transformation may impact the old established liberal traditions? In addition, there is hardly any material whereby BRI has been analyzed as an alternative global order which may determine the significance of the actors or states in the international political system. In this context, this research work endeavors to evaluate the true potential of "Belt and Road Initiative" by China as an alternative global order in the making.

### Shifting Ground Realities

The world is changing fast: prevailing international political order is undergoing profound

transformation in the backdrop of shifting ground realities marked by the rise of emerging economic power houses such as China, India and Brazil, challenging US preeminence along with resurgent Russia; economic priorities taking over strategic interests wherein new groupings such as BRICS are taking the lead in shaping regional as well as global dynamics, and thereby laying the foundations for the next global order. It is believed by many that existing liberal order is giving way to a new global arrangement, characterized by complex regional dynamics and global strategic uncertainties, impacting not only the leading international powers but also the middle and emerging powers seeking to find a suitable place within the global priority ladder. These changes warrant re-imagining of current global system which may require some fundamental alteration in the existing geo-political landscape. It is clear that the end of 'Pax Americana' is not on the anvil but there is a growing consensus that the US led model of global governance has failed to deliver and may not be able to meet the challenges of the future. There is a need for new set of rules and institutions to deal with the complexities which entail the evolving economic, political and security issues.

It may be pertinent to mention that the shifting dynamics within the existing order owes much to the nature of interaction between the leading powers such as USA, UK and EU with emerging powers that may include China, Russia, Brazil and India. It is noteworthy that the European nations are fast losing their influence due to recurring crises within and beyond Europe linked to intricate issues ranging from border issues to financial and defense matters particularly since the turning of the current century. Above in view, it seems a safe inference that the evolving geo-political scenario posit a serious challenge to the leadership role played by West in global arena since WWII.

Consequently, a sizeable magnitude of the scholars around the globe think that behind the dwindling traditional order, a new arrangement is taking shape whereby the 'developing' nations of the past are trying to assert, and replace the big powers through performance of roles previously considered the exclusive zone of the developed nations. Hence, we invariably find states like Brazil, India, Turkey and

Indonesia swiftly realigning to responsible positions reflecting increased political influence and economic strength. The 'Emerging States' now lead the process of evolving global power dynamics and demand higher pedestal mainly owing to their ever growing significance, challenging both the global governance mechanisms as well as the prevailing political order. Similarly, these shifting ground realities also have an impact on the interplay of multilateral organizations such as World Bank, IMF and UN and their interactions with emerging powers. Here also, we may notice the same pattern. The influence of emerging powers taking lead over centers of traditional power dynamics. As a result we invariably come across terms as 'Global Factory' for China's ever increasing manufacturing sector and 'world's warehouse' for India based on their high growth rates, better placement within global economic institutions and growing institutions with diverse trajectories.

#### Emerging Powers and New World Order

Since 1990s, liberal order is dominating the global scene backed by a multitude of initiatives encompassing areas such as economic liberalization, human rights, and global capitalism. A number of institutions were established to accommodate these initiatives at international level, turning them globalized by all means. By 2012, renowned theorist Robert Keohane was obliged to observe that, "the dominance of the view that cooperation in world politics can be enhanced through the construction and support of multilateral institutions based on liberal principles". Thus, the concept of global governance could ensure not only the common interest, but also a better society.

Nevertheless, amid these developments surfaced the phenomenon of emerging powers. The analysts, seeing the shifting ground realities, started questioning about the future of global governance. The realists viewed global governance being undermined and reverting back to great-game or resurgence of geopolitics. They were of the view that the US led liberal institutions would wither away leading to strategic conflict of the cold war era. A number of scholars opine that there may be a return to the old order marked by conflicts, competitions and rivalries characterized by an overall insecure

environment at regional as well as global levels. Neoliberalists, however, advocated the scenario based on convergence of interests. They opine that rising powers like China will also side with status quo (current global governance system) as they have also thrived within the same order. In other words, the optimists envision a smoother transition, where great powers, both old and new, collaborate to construct and manage a new global architecture grounded in principles of multilateralism and cooperation.

Narlikar and Rajiv Kumar (2012) have discussed the complexity of the economic ascent of arrangement by the emerging powers known as "BRICS" (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and their consequences for the global economy in 2012. Among the early outcomes of these changing parameters for the new world order are the newfound mechanisms like India-Brazil-South Africa 'trilateral development initiative' and the BRICS summit reflecting shifting power dynamics from the traditional poles to new actors. Likewise, the new actors on the global power pyramid now play a significant part in various global arrangements including the G20 group that comprises leading economies of the world, touching upon issues including climate change to international trade talks. These shifting realities amply reflect that the global scene is undergoing significant changes and the emerging geopolitical landscape is different from the existing order, where power sharing is likely to be more complicated than just uni-polar or even multi-polar as perceived in the past.

Particularly, among the BRICS countries, a third model of capitalism that is more state-centric in its approach to growth has become increasingly popular in emerging market economies. By means of industrial policy, financial regulation, and technical advancement, the state actively intervenes in the management of economic development in these "refurbished state capitalisms," or new types of state capitalism.

The 2008 financial crisis severely undermined the power of the neoliberal American consensus, which controlled international economic governance for decades. While some contend that the consensus that exists in Washington is eroding, others assert that the continued influence of multinational

businesses is a major factor in the persistence of neoliberalism. According to McNally (2013), the biggest threats to the neoliberal paradigm are revived state capitalisms. These structures maintain state authority over economic growth while incorporating elements of neoliberalism. China is a shining example, showcasing pragmatism in maintaining state influence while merging with the global economic system. There are competing political-economic systems, with resurrected state capitalisms rising as opponents of the neoliberal order. But these systems also show how they are in conflict and mutual reliance with neoliberalism, which creates an evolving relationship inside the changing new global order.

Narlikar and Kumar raise an important question: Would the distribution of power across a wider range of nations lead to the creation of a new international economic system, similar to a "Pax Mosaica" to replace the "Pax Americana" of the previous century? There are four main phases to their argument. First of all, they provided a brief evaluation of the achievements and drawbacks of the post-WWII international order, which is personified by the lasting 'Pax Americana'. Secondly, they examined the rise of multi-polarity in detail, outlining the advantages and disadvantages that it brings. Thirdly, they investigated possible avenues by which the evolving power dynamics could be directed toward the establishment of a "Pax Mosaica." This entails raising important concerns about peace, prosperity, and stability of the economy in light of a diverse power structure.

Essentially, as the dynamics of power change and develop in the new world order that is emerging. Both the authors emphasize the necessity of proactive adjustments and reform within the field of global economic governance. Examining these dynamics' course via the prism of North-South competition could be fascinating. Golub pointed out that the underpinnings of the post 1945 liberal capitalist system were collectively challenged by the G77 & the Non-Aligned Movement, or NAM, in the early 1970s. They attempted to create the New International Economy Order (NIEO), at the UN through coordinated action, with the goal of resolving the core-periphery imbalances that had long afflicted the global South. But in the end, the

NIEO failed due to opposition from the North at large and the internal disputes inside the NAM, despite its great intentions.

In the modern age, Golub saw a reappearance of global South governments making a more successful effort to make their voices heard and change the international order. These reemerging governments are making internal structural adjustments in an attempt to take the center stage in the global capitalist system. Consequently, a polycentric international organization is progressively replacing the conventional vertical hierarchy that was controlled by the "West" and centered in the Atlantic. The earlier dominant position of Western countries is being challenged by regional and international alliances of southern nations in the emerging new world order. Golub's analysis highlights how the balance of power in the world is still shifting and how southern actors are becoming more and more influential in determining the future international relations.

The Asia-Pacific region's dynamics become much more important. The patterns of regional relations and international contacts have been impacted by the historical progression from colonialism through the period of the Cold War to the present. The growing significance of the Asia-Pacific area raises challenges regarding the development of the regional structure and its consequences for the global landscape at large. There are major changes occurring in the security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific area, which have consequences for both international relations and regional stability. Nations including the US, China, and Japan are actively reorganizing their defense and foreign policy to reflect the changing geopolitical landscape. The Asia-Pacific area is ripe with strategic uncertainty, impacting not just great countries but also intermediate powers who are trying to make their way through intricate regional dynamics.

In 2018, David Lewis conducted a thorough analysis of the development of Russia's foreign policy thought during the post-Cold War era, with a specific emphasis on the 'Greater Eurasia' concept. An entirely new geopolitical framework based on collaboration between China and Russia is envisioned by this spatial initiative. Beyond outlining a revised role for Russia in international affairs, the

rhetoric surrounding 'Greater Eurasia' makes larger claims about the coming post-liberal world order. "Greater Eurasia" offers a unique vision for reforming international relations within the framework of the evolving new world order, emphasizing strategic relationships and collaboration throughout the Eurasian continent. It opposes Western-centric viewpoints and proposes a more multipolar global environment, marking a dramatic break from conventional geopolitical paradigms.

Following the 2008 global financial crisis, McNally examined how the global economic order was changing. He emphasized how new forces were emerging, threatening the neoliberal model of capitalism that had previously been in place. In contrast to the Cold War era, where the main focus was the struggle between capitalism and communist, the current situation is typified by a rivalry between various forms of capitalism. Free-market capitalism was dominated in the past and favored little government involvement in economic affairs. Different forms of capitalism, like those in Japan and continental Northern Europe, provided substitutes, nevertheless, by combining the interests of labor, the state, and capital in a centrally coordinated manner.

Apropos, it is important to estimate and analyze that what will be the nature of this new emerging global order as the world transition from uni-polarity to multi-polarity? It may be of interest to point out that in the post-cold war scenario, American model seems failing to serve as an ideal system within the existing liberal order while non-Western powers like China appears to have presented more suitable solutions to match the changing global dynamics of power. Since 2010, scholars like Nel and Nolte viewed the changing regional and global dynamics and the emergence of a new global framework characterized by few distinct yet intertwined factors. At one side of the spectrum they identified the leading power blocks led by US, UK, Japan and the EU steering global trends and shaping the global geopolitical and go-economic priorities trends through by influencing the existing ground realities. On the other side, they pinpointed the rise of "new power blocks" led by 'emerging powers like China, Russia, Brazil, India, Mexico, South Africa, Venezuela etc. Gradually, these powers seemed to have created their niche within the global arena and



have made their presence felt by tangibly contributing in regional and global decision-making processes. Over a period of time, growing contribution on the part of these emerging nations at various global and regional plate-forms has not only improved their position within the global go-strategic ladder, but has also resulted in their demand for a more equitable power sharing and power distribution system within the global order. Today, these new centers of power not only wield enough influence to cater for their interests within the existing scheme of powers sharing, but also represent the extended stakes of their respective regions.

However, different regions have different priority areas. Asian region as per its economic significance are likely to have a greater say [and role] in the new order while the nations of Arab land or the African states may fear the possibility of marginalization in upcoming global order due to their peculiar circumstances which the new global mechanisms may fail to appreciate fully or properly cater for. These demands by emerging nations for redistribution of power mixed with diminishing US global influence have come to set new principles whereby the Western led instruments of global governance architecture like IMF, World Bank and traditional epic-centres of power such as G-8 / G-7 are witnessing profound changes.

#### **BRI AXIS - Next Global Order or An extension of China's rise?**

Present international economic system is gradually moving towards integration through the new found concepts of connectivity and interdependence. Leading economies and markets are being tangled, wielding significant impact over the world economy. A significant reflection of this growing interdependence is BRI (Belt and road Initiative) which is merely an extension of Chinese form of capitalism within and beyond the region. The avowed aims by China behind these ventures is to seek regional integration and connectivity through creating win-win situation.

Chinese initiative of BRI continue to raise eyebrows regarding her geopolitical ambitions, seriously impacting global scenario in the context of emerging new world order. Generally, China's rise as an eminent power with tangible global influence has

been seen through an economic perspective. Nevertheless, perception of China in Western circles is changing fast due to her evolving global role in international affairs. Scholars like Giessman identify a more robust, internationalized and multilateral orientation of Chinese decision making whereby renewed ties with EU states and reforming international institutions tops the agenda among their global strategic priorities.

China's economic rise owes much to globalization whereby China played the major role in massive trade and investment activities involving leading economies world over. Since the advent of China on global economic theater, it has mainly catered for the intermediary manufacturing sector across all regions supported by well-regulated institutional mechanisms. However, in doing so, it remained heavily dependent on imports and global financial inflows. On the other hand, the global political order is mainly concerned with treaty backed interactions, particularly between leading states and bounded by pacts and agreements under global institutions. In this context, also, China has been seen proactively participating in global political issues such as arms race in the Western Pacific besides competing in terms of influence at international level. These treaties and institutions together form part of global governance through which the leading nations tend to control the global dynamics.

Since the advent of China on global scene, the global order is led by big powers such as US, UK which espouse liberalistic ideals. China, on the other hand, kept following her own economic, political and strategic orientation while playing a tangible role in the existing global order. However, the custodians of liberal order did little to fully engage China into the institutions of global governance. China was given way to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), became a part of G-7 within fold of "+5" mechanism, while with a view to pacify Chinese lofty ambitions, she was engaged in the creation of G-20 grouping. Again, China's increased role in the funding of WHO during Covid-19 and Climate Change was due to the absence of US proactive policies under US President Trump. However, the Chinese ship once sailed into the ocean never turned back; China swiftly permeated into the global governance systems and could successfully create her exclusive space

engaging a number of states in the 'global south' to which it vociferously claim to belong even today.

China and her allied emerging powers intend to encroach upon the space left over by USA in the global arena. The weakening international political system renders the leading western powers less efficient in delivering the ever increasing global requirements when compared to the emerging powers led by China which is growing fast in critical areas such as 5G, food technology and many others that determine the pace of global economy. Consequently, we find countries like China, Brazil, India and even South Africa way ahead of the rest of the World in terms of growth, particularly during the last one decade or so. China, above all, aims to achieve the status of number one country of the world ladder by 2049, the year that marks 100 years of China's independence.

China has not only progressed by herself, rather the Chinese leadership always had the vision to use their economic leverage in permeating the regional states, influencing them for mutual benefit and creating linkages for long term partnerships which they term as win-win mechanism. On their part, western states led by US have been trying to balance out the emerging powers' onward march by taking various initiatives such as B3W, Quad etc. However, these western ventures have not been able to properly match the Chinese vision. For instance, B3W project that was launched by America to counterbalance the Chinese flagship project of BRI, has not produced the desired impact for lack of substantial initiatives by US and allied powers.

Nonetheless, scholars still believe that despite the coming of various new actors on the global theater with enhanced power and ability to act, the established powers still occupy extended space within the existing order, with the United States enjoying a significant, albeit less prominent place as compared to her past stature. Thus, we may find the international system a bit asymmetrical or dis-balanced where the most significant actor of the recent past is losing her place in favor of her competitors but it is not completely out of the game yet. The global order is confronting challenges marked by inability on the part of leading powers like USA to achieve desired results and incapacity vis-a-vis emerging powers to exclusively shape

institutions and influence rule-setting to their benefit such as the emergence of BRICS is a major breakthrough in this context. This dis-balance not only present a major source of anxiety but also a possible cause of conflict for the future of present world order.

Again, the national decision making processes in many countries fall short of requirements to meet the demands of ever increasing financial markets rendering the current economic order asymmetrical where political arrangements lag behind market developments. Resultantly, we may infer that global institutions have failed to match market growth and generate collective good making the system vulnerable. The need of the hour is to improve the existing order with a view to enhance global governance and reinvigorate the rules-based international framework. Li and Zhang (2018) sought to provide a theoretical framework known as "interdependent hegemony" in order to improve comprehension of the worldwide consequences resulting from the ascent of emerging powers sparked by globalization. The goal of this framework is to improve knowledge of power relationships in the newly formed global order. The phrase "interdependent hegemony" suggests a move away from conventional ideas of a single, hegemonic power structure and toward a more complex comprehension of interdependent power systems. It acknowledges that hegemony in the new global order is defined by intricate interdependencies among many parties rather than being centered just on the domination of one state. Li and Zhang add to the current conversation about the changing nature of power dynamics within the framework of the new global order by presenting their conceptual framework. Their method highlights the interdependencies and connections that shape modern global dynamics, providing insights into the complex structure of hegemonic power in the modern world.

Scholars also highlight the effects of the new global order in a number of areas, such as the state of the international economy, changes in the balance of power, environmental crises, and sustainability initiatives. The discourse also include the intricacies of modern urbanism and the way that knowledge and values are changing.

There is a paradigm shift in the role of China in international affairs as professed by Europe in contrast with China's self-assumption criteria of its international perception and role play. The foreign policy of China has different goals and strategies. It tends towards proactive, multilateralism, and result-orientation, to strengthen ties with Europe in particular with Germany and France, and to advocate reforms in the international institutions such as UN which are viewed as strategic tactics of the Chinese foreign policy in the context of the evolving world order.

### Take-Aways

1. In the middle of the emergence of this new world order, there are debates concerning the emergence of new powers, the possible downfall of the US, and the return of multi-polarity in the political and economic spheres as a result of significant structural changes that are changing the worldwide distribution of wealth and power.
2. Determining the standards for classifying a state as a major or emerging power is still an important issue. It is crucial to comprehend emerging powers' goals and motivations as well as how they affect global order.
3. Furthermore, it is critical to investigate how rising and aspirational countries' interactions with other global players are influenced by the underlying worldviews that shape their foreign policy. Therefore, it is important to think about how these dynamics will influence the moral and institutional frameworks that make up the global order.
4. The concerns regarding America's place in the globe and its ties to rising nations like China are central to the emerging new world order. Robert Kagan in his work "The World America Made," argues in favor of upholding America's historical contribution to the creation of the liberal international order. Whereas, writers like Zbigniew Brzezinski envisages in their article "Strategic Vision" that China, India, and Japan are becoming more influential on a worldwide scale as the geopolitical landscape shifts from the West to the East.
5. US global dominance is impractical and that Europe's political paradigm is out of date. America needs to confront its internal problems, such as the growing national debt, the vulnerabilities of the

financial system, inequality, and deteriorating infrastructure. America's prestige has been damaged by its involvement in conflicts such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq.

6. In the future multipolar world, various powers destined to fight for control in different regions, especially East and South Asia.
7. US should maintain close relations with other Asian countries while acknowledging China's increasing importance, advocating for a measured approach.
8. Powers like Russia and Turkey should be incorporated into European and transatlantic organizations to enlarge the Western realm.
9. To control rivalries throughout Asia, West should develop a constructive alliance with China.
10. It is assessed that China to influence global affairs in the long run needs to incorporate principles from other traditions into its core beliefs.

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