

GREAT POWER RIVALRY IN A CHANGING INTERNATIONAL ORDER

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Abstract

The article aimed to comprehensively analyse the great powers' rivalries in the current international political and geopolitical landscape, which may be leading to a changing global order. Great Power in the Changing International Order refers to the intensifying competition and conflict among the major powers, especially the US, China, and Russia. It covers various issues such as trade, technology, security, human rights and global governance. The emergence of this rivalry has challenged the existing international order, shaped mainly by the US and its allies after the Cold War. It has created new opportunities and risks for the middle and smaller powers caught between the great-power axis. The latter half of the 20th century saw a shift toward a multipolar world due to globalisation, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and technological advances. However, the 19th and 20th centuries were marked by the dynamic nature of multipolarity, with periods of stability and instability. The receding US influence, the rise of other power centres, and the transition from geopolitics to geoeconomics are among the main factors driving the transition in the world order.

Keywords: The US, China, Power Politics, Middle Powers, Rivalries, International Order.

Introduction

Great powers in the past included Austria, Russia, Prussia, France, and Great Britain, which emerged as great powers in Europe after the Congress of Vienna in 1815.¹ After World War I, the United States of America (US) built up its importance; furthermore, after World War II, the US and the Soviet Union (USSR), through their industrial strength, global influence, and nuclear capabilities, attained the status of 'superpowers', and world events became dominated by bipolarity. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the only superpower remaining is the US. However, China's growing economic and military strength may ensure its superpower status in the coming years.² The UK and France have declined in their former great power status, although they remain permanent members of the United Nations Security Council with the power of veto.³

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Power rivalry is the attempt to gain an advantage over the self-interested pursuit of contested power, security, wealth, influence, and status. There is an ongoing, persistent degree of interstate rivalry to maximise power or influence; more pointed rivalries between states seeking system leadership. The fundamental reality of the international system is that nations compete in different ways for different ambitions.

This study examines great power rivalries using qualitative analytical methodology. To develop a theoretical framework, a thorough analysis of the current literature was conducted. This study uses exploratory and descriptive methods, grounded in a qualitative research approach. It entails taking an exhaustive effort to understand the change and transition. Both primary and secondary sources, such as academic papers, online resources, and other pertinent studies that offer context for the research topic, provided the data for this study. Nonetheless, the researcher's own findings are included with the data obtained from the primary sources.

Theories of Great Power Rivalry

Classical Realism in International Relations

Realists frequently claim to draw on an ancient tradition of political thought. Among classic authors often cited by realists are Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Max Weber. Realism as a self-conscious movement in the study of international relations emerged during the mid-20th century and was inspired by the British political scientist and historian E.H. Carr. Thereafter, realism became established in American political science departments, its fortunes boosted by several European scholars, most notably the German-born political scientist and historian Hans Morgenthau.⁴ The realism of Carr, Morgenthau, and their followers is known as classical realism.

According to realism, states exist within an anarchic international system in which they are ultimately dependent on their own capabilities, or power, to further their national interests.⁵ The most important national interest is the survival of the state, including its people, political system, and territorial integrity.⁶ Other primary interests of realists include preserving a nation's culture and economy.⁷ Realists contend that, as long as the world is divided into nation-states in an anarchic setting, national interest will remain the essence of international politics.⁸

Neo-Realism or Structural Realism

This theory was introduced by Kenneth Waltz in 1979. Waltz extends these three principles to the international system. The ordering principle is anarchy; if this were to change, inter-unit interactions would change as well. In anarchy, different units exist within a self-help system; therefore, there is no functional differentiation among them.

So, the two relevant characteristics of the international system are anarchy and relative capacity. Balancing can take two forms: Internal and external. Internal balancing refers to the investment of military power to match that of other states. External balancing refers to the alliance of states to counter a stronger power, or a hegemon. States will choose the weaker of the available coalitions because they understand that the stronger side is the one threatening their security.

The system's structure is primarily based on the distribution of power. In other words, the distribution of power is the primary determinant of international outcomes. Since states are concerned with their own security, they seek to maximise their relative power vis-à-vis other states. Waltz investigates how changes in the global system's structure affect alliances. He focuses on the difference between multi-polar and bi-polar alliance systems. He defines multi-polar systems as those containing more than two major powers, and finds most distinctions between different multi-polar systems generally faulty.

The primary difference between multi-polar and bipolar balancing is that multi-polar balancing occurs externally, while bipolar balancing occurs internally. Because external balancing is more uncertain, bipolar balancing tends to produce less conflict. Waltz argued that the most stable arrangement was bipolarity or a balance between two great powers. Waltz discusses several additional features of multi-polar balancing. States will woo alliance partners by adapting to them. Example: France and Russia attempted to appear more alike one another to form their alliance in 1894. For security, states are willing to align with anyone. The weaker partner in an alliance will determine policy in a moment of crisis. International competition will tend to force states in a multi-polar order into two blocks.

Having two blocks does not mean that the system is bipolar, because alliance shifts and defections can still occur. These alliance shifts and defections make the multi-polar order dangerous. The flexibility of alliances makes for rigidity in strategy. Alliance leaders do not need to worry much about the faithfulness of followers. In bipolar systems, there will be unequal burden-sharing between the major and minor powers in an alliance. Major powers in a bipolar system do not need to make themselves attractive to alliance partners. For example, the Soviet Union and the US did not alter their strategies to accommodate allies. The rigidity of bipolar alliances makes for a flexible strategy.

Great Power Competition

John Mearsheimer has written the most important realist work of the post-Cold War era. His theory, based on the concept of offensive realism, holds that the structure of the international system forces states that seek only security to nonetheless act aggressively toward each other. His explanation for why great powers pursue power and strive for hegemony rests on five 'bedrock' assumptions.

First, the international system is anarchic, in that there is no government of governments. There is no higher authority to come to their rescue; states cannot depend on others for their own security. Second, great powers possess offensive military capabilities that enable them to harm and possibly destroy one another. Third, states can never be sure about the intentions of other states. Fourth, the primary goal of great powers is survival. Finally, great powers are rational actors.

The Balance of Power Theory suggests that states may secure their survival by preventing any one state from gaining sufficient military power to dominate all others.⁹ If one state becomes much stronger, the theory predicts it will take advantage of its weaker neighbours, thereby driving them to unite in a defensive coalition. Some realists maintain that a balance-of-power system is more stable than one with a dominant state, as aggression is unprofitable when there is an equilibrium of power between rival coalitions. When threatened, states may seek safety either by balancing, allying with others against the prevailing threat, or bandwagoning, aligning themselves with the threatening power. Other alliance tactics include buck-passing and chain-ganging.

Hegemonic Stability Theory, coined by Robert Keohane in 1980, is a theory of international relations.¹⁰ He used insights from the new institutional economics to argue that the international system could remain stable in the absence of a hegemon, thus rebutting hegemonic stability theory. Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) is a theory of international relations that indicates that the international system is more likely to remain stable when a single state is the dominant world power or hegemon.

Thus, the end of hegemony diminishes the stability of the international system. As evidence of the stability of hegemony, proponents of HST frequently point to the Pax Britannica and Pax Americana, as well as the instability before World War I, when British hegemony was in decline, and the instability of the interwar period, when the American hegemon reduced its presence in world politics. Hegemonic stability may entail self-reinforcing cooperation, as it is in the interest of the hegemon to provide public goods, and it is in the interest of other states to maintain an international order from which they derive public goods.

Concept of International Order

Various economic, political, technological, and military factors affect the dynamics of international relations. Analysing this system and forecasting its future presents many difficulties. In the international political system, the unipolar world order is a power distribution in which only one state dominates most of the economic, social, cultural, and military influence over the globe. Bipolarity can be defined as a system of world order in which most of the global economic, military and cultural influence is held between two states.

The classic case of a bipolar world is that of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, which dominated the second half of the twentieth century.¹¹ A multipolar world is one where power is distributed among several states rather than being dominated by one or two states.

Great powers are judged primarily by their military, economy, and influence. Every international order is the aftermath or outcome of great power rivalry/interactions. Great power rivalries result in war or some form of conflict/instability. In an international order, the rise or emergence of one of the great powers as a hegemon precipitates resistance from other great powers.

An Overview of Multi-Polarism in History; Analysing the Extent of Stability/Instability and its Major Causes during 19th & 20th Centuries

The world witnessed multi-polar configurations, with several powerful civilizations coexisting.¹² Decentralised power structures often led to regional stability, but conflicts and power struggles were not uncommon.

The emergence of nation-states in the early modern era introduced a different form of multipolarity. The subsequent balance-of-power diplomacy sought to prevent any single state from dominating the continent, promoting stability through strategic alliances.¹³

The 19th century saw the Concert of Europe, an attempt to maintain a multi-polar balance after the Napoleonic Wars. While the system aimed at stability, underlying tensions and nationalistic aspirations eventually led to periods of instability.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the intensification of imperialistic pursuits. The subsequent Treaty of Versailles attempted to reconfigure the global order, but its punitive measures sowed the seeds for further instability.

The aftermath of World War II marked a transition to a bipolar world order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. The Cold War era brought a semblance of stability through the balance of power between these superpowers. However, proxy conflicts, such as the Korean and Vietnam Wars, demonstrated the challenges and tensions within this bipolar structure.

The late 20th century witnessed a shift towards multipolarity as new actors gained prominence. The end of the Cold War further accelerated this trend, leading to a world characterised by multiple centres of power.

The latter part of the 20th century and the early 21st century saw increased economic interdependence, driven by globalisation. This economic interconnectedness both contributed to stability and introduced vulnerabilities, as demonstrated during financial crises.

The latter half of the 20th century saw a shift toward a multipolar world, driven by globalisation, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and technological advances. However, the 19th and 20th centuries were marked by the dynamic nature of multipolarity, with periods of stability and instability.

The Current International Order – The US-led Liberal International Order (Unipolarism)

With the end of the Cold War and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, the bipolar world (i.e., the United States versus the Soviet Union) was disrupted by the absence of competition between the two powers. The United States then seemingly became the world's sole superpower economically, politically, and militarily. Some would even argue that the balance in the world was broken, given the unipolar environment. The United States would be able to make self-interested decisions without being questioned. It is important to acknowledge some features and characteristics of a US-unipolar world, including the following: a Western liberal democracy is being promoted (albeit an American one). The US maintains an unmatched military to respond to such situations. The centre of the world's power revolves around the United States. The US dollar has remained strong over the past 30+ years. It remains the most dominant reserve currency and the most widely used currency, a position it has held since World War II.

Rise of China as a Great Power

In 1978, the PRC's new leader, Deng Xiaoping, decided to break from the Soviet-style economic policies.¹⁴ He tasked his economic team with gradually transitioning to free-market principles and open trade and investment with the West. All reforms sought to decentralise economic policies, especially regarding trade. Economic control over various enterprises was given to provincial and local governments, enabling them to operate under free-market principles. Trade barriers were removed. Citizens were encouraged to start their own businesses.

Over the past 40+ years since implementing the reforms, the PRC's economy has grown substantially faster than it had during Mao's time. China is now the second-largest economy in the world, but ranks first in terms of economic purchasing power parity, value-added manufacturing, merchandise trade, and foreign exchange reserves.

The current and next phase of China's economic growth and development is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁵ BRI represents the PRC's grand strategy to finance infrastructure throughout Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond. If successful, this initiative could significantly expand export and investment markets for China and increase its soft power globally.

Militarily, the PRC has made significant strides over the past decades with its security forces. China's three sea forces – Navy, Coast Guard, and Maritime Militia – are now the world's largest by number of ships. It has the largest Air Force in the Indo-Pacific. The PRC has the world's most significant sub-strategic missile force. It has one of the largest and most sophisticated surface-to-air missile forces in the world. China still maintains the most significant active ground force in the world. Xi has ordered the Chinese military to be modernised entirely by 2035 and capable of fighting and winning wars by 2049. The Chinese Navy's ship count will increase by 40% between 2020 and 2040.

Resurgence of Russia

Today, Russia is one of the ten largest economies in the world. Russia is a world leader in oil and natural gas production.¹⁶ It also exports large quantities of coal, gold, and wheat. Even with the current sanctions during the Russia-Ukraine War, they are still finding new customers. Russia continues to see all former Soviet Union countries as critical strategic interests. Since Putin began to lead Russia, political freedom has deteriorated, as many journalists and opposition politicians have been harassed or killed. Throughout his time in power, Putin has sought to define Russia as a unique society with values distinct from those of the EU or the US. Additionally, Putin has been accumulating a running list of objections against the US, including: the invasion of Iraq; support for opposition forces in Russia-friendly states like Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine; and the deployment of missile defence systems on NATO's eastern boundary.

US Unipolarity in Decline in the 21st Century

Since the end of World War II and continuing at the conclusion of the Cold War, the US has sought to lead an international order or rules-based order that includes respect for the territorial integrity of nations and the unacceptability of changing international borders by force or coercion; a preference for resolving disputes between nations peacefully without the use or threat of use of force or coercion; strong international institutions; respect for international law and human rights; a preference for free markets and free trade; and the treatment of international waters, international air space, outer space, and (more recently) cyberspace as international commons. Unfortunately, the US, China, and Russia have all violated at least some of these tenets over the past two decades.¹⁷

It could be argued that the beginning of the end of the US' unipolarity occurred on 9/11. At the time, the US and the world rallied to respond in unity to the attacks; however, the subsequent mission creep beyond al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden led to nation-building in Afghanistan, which would ultimately be seen as a mistake.

Further, in 2003, the US and some allies decided to invade Iraq (on what would turn out to be a pretence) despite not receiving UN Security Council authorisation, which would be an even bigger mistake and result in more nation-building efforts. Both wars would drain the US and many nations of trillions of dollars in resources and countless lives. And the view of the US as the world's unipolar leader would begin to be questioned.

Impact of the Current Great Power Rivalries on the International Order

In today's world, several impacts or features can be seen in the development of great power rivalries. There has been renewed ideological competition, this time pitting democracy against 21st-century forms of authoritarianism and illiberal democracies like those in Russia, China, and elsewhere. Competition among allies and partner states across many geographic areas has ramped up, especially over economic interests. A technological competition has also developed over the past ten years between the US and China in both the economic and military arenas. Both Russia and China have challenged key elements of the US-led international order, specifically the unacceptability of changing international borders by force or coercion and a preference for resolving disputes between countries peacefully, without the use or threat of force or coercion. Additionally, Russia and China have used new forms of aggressive or assertive military, paramilitary, information, and cyber operations – sometimes called hybrid warfare, grey zone operations, or ambiguous warfare, among other terms.

The current war being waged by Russia in Ukraine further highlights the impacts of today's power rivalries on the international order. From the moment Russia invaded Ukraine, the US and its NATO Allies have staunchly supported Ukraine throughout the conflict. In October of this year, China and Russia vowed to deepen their bilateral relations at all levels to drive the world toward a multipolar global order.

Multipolar, Bipolar or Unipolar World: Future Outlook

The gradual shift of the economic centre of gravity from the West to the East in the twenty-first century has challenged the existing world order, indicating that the international political system is transforming and moving towards multipolarity.¹⁸ The world in the coming decades will look different as power diffuses.

Multiple power centres are emerging in the international arena, leading the world to multipolarity, an order with more than two power centres with equal or competing military, cultural, and economic influence. Though the existing world order is in flux, the US remains a preponderant power, the largest economy, with powerful military capabilities, immense global influence, a soft image spread through popular culture, and control over international financial institutions.

Rising powers also have limitations, which place a premium on alliances to challenge the status quo. The contests in the existing world order are less about the receding influence of the US and more about the rise of others, such as China, Russia, India, and Brazil, or in blocs like the EU, BRICS, SCO, and QUAD, to name a few.¹⁹

Predicated on an aversion to conflict, China's rise has been gradual and steady over the last four decades, with a long-term focus on economic development, yet with limitations in the military, cultural, and political domains. Chinese geoeconomic strategy based on alliances and connectivity emerged as a significant challenge to the existing world order. China's growing military modernisation, India's aspirations to seek permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and America's new strategic partnership with India and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region are a few indicators of the future global security environment.²⁰

Meanwhile, Indo-US strategic partnerships and other alliances (AUKUS, QUAD) are intended to challenge Chinese ambitions, especially in the Indo-Pacific Region and South Asia.²¹ These developments, alongside other juxtaposing factors, have ushered in increased uncertainty in already volatile regions, including the Middle East, South Asia, and, especially, Europe after the Ukrainian War. The emerging regional economic and security mosaic has engendered many challenges for the rising powers in the regions mentioned above.

Today, the international system is in a state of flux. Major geopolitical and geoeconomic realignments are taking place. The US' unipolarity is challenged by rising and resurgent powers such as China and Russia. America's growing interest in the Asia-Pacific Region, the Indo-US strategic partnership, China's 'string of pearls' strategy for the Indian Ocean, and the solidification of collaboration between Russia and China through the SCO are a few pointers to the emerging environment in Asia. It is difficult to ascertain whether emerging powers will remain satisfied with the transition of power and existing international systems in the UK and the US before the First World War or will forcefully alter the course in their favour over the mid-term (5 years) to long-term (10 years and beyond).

Factors Leading to a Transforming World Order

The receding US influence, the rise of other power centres, and the transition from geopolitics to geoeconomics are among the main factors driving the transition in the world order. Perhaps the question is not about whether the US is receding; instead, it is about the rise of other powers, especially China. Fearing its rise, imposing protectionist trade barriers, waning alliances and demanding to pay more for their collective defence have further weakened the US global position. The federal government's lack of response and assistance to its subordinate states during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in dissatisfaction among them. American exceptionalism, an idea of America being a nation above nations, has been one of the causes leading to perpetual wars (Gulf wars, Afghanistan, etc.).

The existing international order is aggressive, destabilised, lacks governance and faces a power imbalance. Globalisation has resulted in the rise of technology and the fading of borders. Globalisation has compromised the traditional sense of territorial boundaries. China, Russia and other rising regional powers see the global political structure as illegitimate and continue to contest it. However, the world order will change only when it no longer suits China, Russia and other countries whose legitimate interests are threatened.

Changing Global Order and Strategic Stability

The global order witnessed a fundamental change in strategic stability. After the end of the Cold War, strategic stability was known as the lack of incentives for the US and Russia to launch a nuclear first strike. Onward, the geopolitical, technological and geoeconomic landscape has prevented major armed conflict between major powers. This suggests that the very notion of strategic stability has been altered. However, the rapid technological changes, along with the influx of political order, have changed global strategic stability. The world is witnessing the revival of great power competition. The competition has returned to international politics in the twenty-first century. The US dominance is ending. The US leadership undermined the rise of China, the 2008 financial crisis, the Russian resurgence resulting in the Ukrainian crisis, and the changing Middle Eastern politics. The ongoing confrontation between major powers is unlike the Cold War. Modern rivalries have emerged in the information, economic and technology sectors.

The twenty-first century is witnessing the Sino-US and US-Russian rivalries. On the contrary, Sino-Russian relations have improved tremendously. The strategic imbalance between the US and China, and between the US and Russia, has increased the likelihood of destroying the post-Cold War order.

The nuclear arsenals of de facto and de jure nuclear powers are increasing with the induction of hypersonic, artificial intelligence, quantum computing and machine learning technologies. Technological advancements are diverse and have revolutionised electronics, physics, chemistry, biology, and their associated technologies. AI is considered one of the most transformative technologies of this era. Due to its pervasive nature and wide applications, AI has become essential in both commercial and military domains.

The US, Europe, and like-minded partners form a counterweight to China's sphere of influence. The US, EU, and their partners confront China. The spheres of influence of both major blocs are clearly delineated. The US is the leading power in the West; the EU is the junior partner. Europe seeks to maintain its autonomy, e.g., in its relations with China, and to expand its influence worldwide. China works to establish new international institutions and to include Russia in the creation of an anti-Western bloc.

The US and Europe want to join forces with like-minded states, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India, to establish new supranational structures based on democratic values.

Way Forward for the International Community, Especially Emerging Blocs/Players

- One of the main challenges that the international community faced was the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused unprecedented health, economic, and social crises around the world. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities and inequalities of the global system and has tested the resilience and cooperation of the international community. The emerging blocks and players, such as ASEAN, have shown leadership and solidarity in responding to the pandemic by coordinating their efforts to ensure the flow of essential goods, enhancing the resilience of their supply chains, and supporting the development and distribution of vaccines. However, more needs to be done to overcome the pandemic and its impacts, including strengthening global health governance, ensuring equitable access to vaccines and treatments, and supporting the recovery and transformation of the most affected sectors and countries.
- Another challenge that the international community faces is the changing geopolitical landscape, which is characterised by the rise and resurgence of new and old powers, such as China, Russia, India, Brazil, and Turkey, and the relative decline of the United States. These changes have created new dynamics and tensions in the international system, as the great powers compete for power, influence, and resources, and challenge and undermine the existing order and norms. The emerging blocks and players, such as the European Union, have tried to navigate and balance the interests and values of the great powers, and to promote dialogue and confidence-building measures to prevent and resolve conflicts. However, more needs to be done to enhance the cooperation and stability of the multipolar system, such as developing new, flexible rules of the road, addressing the root causes and consequences of problems and challenges, and fostering mutual benefits and interdependence among the great powers.
- A third challenge that the international community faces is the emergence and proliferation of new issues and actors, such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, non-state actors, civil society, private sector, media, academia, and transnational movements. These issues and actors have significant influence and interests in the international system, and challenge and complement the role and function of the state and the traditional institutions. The emerging blocks and players, such as the African Union, have embraced and engaged with these issues and actors, provided new ideas and solutions for the problems and issues of the 21st century, and fostered

new forms and levels of participation and engagement in the international system.

However, more needs to be done to harness the potential and manage the risks of these issues and actors, such as enhancing the innovation and transformation of the international system, addressing the constructive and disruptive impacts of these issues and actors, and influencing and shaping the behaviour and interactions of the great powers and the regional powers.

- Smaller powers can navigate the great powers' rivalry in different ways, depending on their interests, values, capabilities, and constraints. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for smaller powers, but one option is to align with a single great power or a coalition of great powers to counter the threat or influence of another great power. This strategy can provide security and protection for smaller powers, but it may also entail costs and risks, such as loss of autonomy, entrapment, or abandonment. For example, some smaller powers in the Indo-Pacific region, such as Japan, Australia, and India, have formed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) to balance against China's rise.
- Smaller powers can align with a dominant or rising great power to gain benefits or avoid harm. This strategy can provide economic and political opportunities for smaller powers, but it may also entail dangers and challenges, such as dependency, exploitation, or resentment. For example, some smaller powers in Africa and Asia, such as Ethiopia, Pakistan, and Cambodia, have joined China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to access infrastructure and investment.
- Smaller powers can maintain relations with multiple great powers without committing to any one of them. This strategy can provide flexibility and leverage for smaller powers, but it may also entail uncertainty and complexity, such as ambiguity, inconsistency, or miscalculation. For example, some smaller powers in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore, Indonesia, and Vietnam, have pursued hedging strategies to cope with the US-China rivalry.

Conclusion

China and the US recognise the added value of working closely together and dominating the world. Europe plays an important supporting role. The US and Chinese policies largely coexist in peace. Despite their systemic differences, the superpowers recognise the potential of working closely together. This scenario assumes that the world is divided into multiple dominant blocs. The EU asserts itself next to the US and China as the world's third major bloc. Other blocs are possible, for example, under Russia's leadership and these power centres interact with each other; they are clearly demarcated from each other. The democracies in the US and Europe face off against single-party democracy in China, whereas the Communist Party has a monopoly on power. The US and China are locked in an ongoing conflict. Europe is crushed between the two. Each bloc views the other as an adversary.

'My country first' mentality and the effects are felt around the globe. Each superpower uses any available means to draw third-world states closer, for example, to position them as representatives of its interests vis-à-vis its rival. The multilateral structures, such as the UN or WTO, built up over decades, are in danger of collapsing altogether. Even the EU is at risk of disintegrating. Smaller powers can abstain from taking sides or participating in the great powers' rivalry. This strategy can provide independence and peace for smaller powers, but it may also entail isolation and vulnerability, such as irrelevance, marginalisation, or coercion. For example, some smaller powers in Europe, such as Switzerland, Finland, and Sweden, have adopted neutral or non-aligned policies to avoid involvement in the US-Russia conflict. Smaller powers can play a constructive role in facilitating dialogue and cooperation among the great powers. This strategy can provide influence and prestige for smaller powers, but it may also entail difficulty and backlash, such as resistance, criticism, or retaliation. For example, some smaller powers in the Middle East, such as Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait, have acted as mediators in the US-Iran tensions.

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