

Chapter 5: Rising powers and the emerging global order

- During the 1990s there was near universal agreement that the global system was led by the power of the United States and its allies and by the institutions that it dominated.
- From the perspective of the emerging powers, the US order involved a powerful move to change many of the existing rules, norms, and practices of global politics. Seen from the global South, the United States has rarely been a status quo power but has often sought to mould the system in its own image. After the end of the cold war it was in many ways a strongly revisionist power: in the 1990s, in terms of pressing for new norms on intervention, for the opening of markets, and for the embedding of particular sets of what it saw as liberal values within international institutions; in the early years of the twenty-first century, in terms of its attempt to recast norms on regime change, on the use of force, and on the conditionality of sovereignty more generally.
- The states of the global South did not face the United States within a stable notion of a 'Westphalian order'. In their view, the dominant Western states were insisting that many of the most important norms of the system ought to change, above all in ways that threatened greater interventionism and sought to mould the ways in which societies were to be ordered domestically. But, at the same time, it seemed to many that there was little alternative but to accommodate Western power.
- There was widespread consensus that challenges to the US-led order would result from 'blowback' or 'backlashes' against US and Western power and would be focused around anti-hegemonic social movements or radical states.
- In the first decade of the century, countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, the ASEAN states, and Mexico experienced significant economic development.
- Many believed that the continuation of this trend would lead in the longer term to an alteration in the economic balance in favour of the dynamic emerging markets.
- With this greater economic share of the world market, emerging countries felt that they deserved a greater political say in the international community as well. The financial crisis that began in 2007 seemed to underscore the shift in relative economic weight and made this call for a seat at the top negotiating tables stronger and more urgent.
- Although Southern diplomatic and institutional activism has continued, doubts have grown about the economic and developmental foundations on which this assumed new role of rising powers has been built.
- Realists believe that power is the common currency of international relations. But for many analysts there can be no generally accepted definition or understanding of power in International Relations.
- Power diffusion can be understood in two different ways. Sometimes it is seen as a shift in the balance or distribution of power between and among states. Sometimes it is viewed as a broader and more complex process by which different groups across the world become economically more important and politically more mobilized.
- For both liberals and constructivists, power is always connected with actors' values, purposes, and identities.

- Power is very rarely understood in terms of the resources that a single actor possesses. It is a relational concept and usually best understood in a given social context.
- For mainstream realist and neorealist writers, rising powers matter because their growing material power disrupts the balance of power. There is great debate about exactly how changes in material power cause conflict, but widespread agreement that power shifts are associated with conflict and that this will continue. Hence many neorealists predict that conflict between the US and China is inevitable.
- These materially-based approaches to rising powers and global order remain highly influential. But they do not tell enough about the potential pathways that might lead to the emergence of major power competition. What remains unexplained is precisely how an international system might move across a spectrum from the general diffusion of power, to a situation of multipolarity, to a system in which the foreign policies of the major states are driven by balance of power politics and logics. Such systems do not suddenly appear out of nowhere.
- Material understandings of power provide an insufficient basis for comprehending the reasons for challenges to the existing order and the crucial importance of status and recognition as factors in the foreign policy behaviour of emerging powers. Even if one accepts the idea of rising states as revisionist, it is difficult to understand the sources of their dissatisfaction purely within a world of material power and system-given incentives.
- For international society theorists, power hierarchies are not simply about material power. Great Powers constituted a particular social category. Being a Great Power (as opposed to a great power) is of course related to material power but also to notions of legitimacy and authority. A state can claim Great Power status, but membership in the club of Great Powers is a social category that depends on recognition by others—by its peers in the club, and also by smaller and weaker states willing to accept the legitimacy and authority of those at the top of the international hierarchy. The stability of power transitions will be crucially affected by the accommodation of rising powers.