

# NO SINGLE POWER WILL BE ABLE TO DOMINATE THE WORLD

The Italian political scientist Giovanni Grevi argues that the world will become both multipolar and more interdependent. A cacophony will replace the US hegemony but all powers will be dependent on each other in a new way. The world will become inter-polar. *LookingGlass* interviewed Grevi. →

What global order will arise when the USA climbs down from its current position of power? It will be a post-American world, says *Newsweek* editor Fareed Zakaria in the book *The Post-American World and the Rise of the Rest* (292 pp, Penguin Books, 2009. See review on page 14).

Power and influence will be distributed in a completely different way, but that need not mean an anti-American world. The USA will be able to build better relations with all the other powers than they have with each other, and in that way can take on the role of a world hub. Ultimately there are not that many ways in which to be modern. The up-and-coming states are going “America’s way” and becoming increasingly open, market-oriented and democratic.

A different answer comes from the Italian political scientist Giovanni Grevi of the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) in Paris, in the recently published report “The inter-polar world: a new scenario”. His view is that the international position of the USA has weakened, and it has happened with surprising swiftness. It is partly due to the aggressive unilateralism of the Bush administration – a changeable factor. However, the weakening of the USA is also related to a general power shift from West to East, which seems to have been hastened by the global crisis. Add to this the fact that the USA’s trump card is losing its value: USA today is in a class of its own when it comes to projecting power globally, but this is giving diminishing returns, both at home and abroad.

The world is unlikely to go “America’s way”, according to Grevi. Instead of convergence towards Anglo-Saxon capitalism we will see co-

existence and competition between different models. The state too will play a much bigger role in the economy than was assumed until quite recently.

This is the essence of Grevi’s analysis: the ascending powers will not merely assert their interests, but also their own view of the world. The global order will be one of a cacophony of actors with different historical traditions and views on how international relations should be formed. The West must be prepared to be scrutinised much more closely in the future. It will not be so easy to admonish others if one does not respect basic norms and principles and applies double standards. Grevi’s recommendation is that we continue to strive to extend human rights and democracy, but with much fewer rhetorical sorties.

He chooses to dub this order *interpolar*, and this may be a keyword for the coming debate. With it he wishes to say that the world will be much more multipolar and more interdependent. Growth, the securing of energy and the environment form the centre of the interdependence. None of the powers alone can resolve these issues.

However, there are strong tensions in the international system. Grevi notes among other things that the biggest and fastest-growing economies are dependent for their energy supplies on a small number of countries that thereby have enormous political influence.

Read *Glasshouse Forum*’s interview with Giovanni Grevi on page 8.

# INTERVIEW WITH GIOVANNI GREVI

**LookingGlass:** The relatively rapid deterioration of America's international standing after 9/11 and the economic crisis, which started with the US subprime crisis, leads inevitably to the question: what will the new world order look like? *Newsweek* editor Fareed Zakaria, for example, has made the case for a new American sense of purpose in today's international environment. In your recent paper "The inter-polar world: a new scenario" you have a somewhat different answer. Would you agree that what we are witnessing now is actually a world dividing into spheres of interests?

Giovanni Grevi: I concur with the analysis of Fareed Zakaria inasmuch as he underlines the unparalleled potential and attractiveness of the American model of a dynamic and open society, provided that the US reverts to valuing engagement, including at the multilateral level, above unilateral ventures. President Obama's foreign policy goes very much in this direction, opening a major window of opportunity for confidence-building and international cooperation.

Unlike in the post-Cold War world of the 1990s,

however, US leadership, even when supported by the EU, is a necessary but no longer sufficient condition to achieve results. On most global issues, from climate change to proliferation, the US and the EU need the commitment of other global and regional powers. The international system is post-American in the sense that it is post-hegemonic. Cooperation will be more complicated but also more necessary.

In this new environment, major powers will always be sensitive to what happens in their neighbourhood and alert to opportunities to further their interests abroad. A strong centre of power always generates a sphere of interest. The problem arises when these spheres become exclusive blocs, closed to external influence and dominated by force. While there are some worrying signals, for example in the shared neighbourhood between the EU and Russia, I do not see much evidence of that on the whole.

What seems predominant is the growing convergence of interests and of the actors that express them: states, companies and trans-national

groups of all sorts. Most of these actors have an interest in staying connected, not isolated. That is the unsettling, but perhaps promising, news of our times. To conclude, there is no direct causal link between the waning of the hegemonic position of the US and the fragmentation of the world into separated spheres of interest. Such a scenario cannot be ruled out but it is not the only one in the pipeline, nor the one most likely to materialise.

**LookingGlass:** In your report you talk about an arising global concert – or cacophony – that includes players who have different historical traditions and conceptions of international relations and of their own places therein. How – if possible at all – might this heterogeneity be managed effectively and peacefully?

Giovanni Grevi: It is a fact that major countries like China, India and Russia, to mention only a few, present a different worldview from traditional Western powers. Since these differences are the product of heterogeneous cultural traditions, historical experiences, political regimes and levels of socio-economic development, that is hardly surprising. The bottom line is that what is seen as the "norm" for the West no longer necessarily translates into global norms and standards, and that the rest of the world does not necessarily aspire to emulate "us".

However, taking stock of differences should not lead to a new form of determinism, as if difference had to entail confrontation. For one thing, when looking at the priorities on the international agenda, ranging from economic recovery to handling geopolitical crises, there is little to indicate a front consistently opposed to Western powers across all issues. Alignments change

depending on the issues at stake. For another thing, mutual understanding is probably greater today than only a few years ago, if only because of the common challenge of the financial crisis, of the many summits held to address it, and of the new 'listening' mode of the US administration.

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Listening is not a guarantee of success, but is a good start. There is no magic recipe to make sense of the growing diversity of the international system and to make sure that fundamental values and norms are upheld by all. But there are some important steps that can be taken by all major powers. Firstly, build confidence with your partners in all possible ways, formal and informal, paving the way for joint initiatives when the time is ripe. Secondly, if possible, sequence your approach by harvesting the "low hanging fruits" first and creating larger political space to address more controversial issues at a later stage. The negotiations for the new START Treaty between the US and Russia, for example, may herald deeper cooperation on related issues, including non-proliferation. Thirdly, lead by example and be reasonably consistent, or your message will not be credible. This also applies to promoting democracy and human rights. Fourthly, if rules can be established, agree to play by the same rules as all the others and build institutions and regimes that enhance predictability and are based on reciprocity. If this cannot be done at the global level, one can start at the regional or mini-lateral level first.

**LookingGlass:** You also talk about the increasing importance of "negative power", the power to deny

others the fulfilment of their objectives, for instance by having access to natural resources like energy and food. Niall Ferguson, among others, is also discussing this issue in terms of rising commodity prices that are intensifying inflationary pressures in China, necessitating the imposition of price control and export prohibitions and encouraging “an extraordinary scramble” for natural resources in Africa and elsewhere which, to Western eyes, has an imperial undertone. Are we witnessing the beginning of a grab for resources which could potentially become a source of conflict and even war?

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**“Large emerging powers will need ever more resources to feed their legitimate ambition of economic development.”**

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Giovanni Grevi: The scramble for resources is a fact and a source of serious concern from Africa to Central Asia. Over time, it can undermine the stability of commodity-rich countries. In the short-term, however, it provides them with powerful implements to punch above their weight, to level the playing field and frustrate the aims of larger powers, if perceived as intrusive or otherwise detrimental. At one level, the trend is irreversible. Large emerging powers will need ever more resources to feed their legitimate ambition of economic development. At another level, the question is how to make such development sustainable.

As the scramble for resources carries several negative side-effects, so the effort to devise sustainable paths to development can carry many positive ones. Awareness of the need to make economic growth sustainable from an environmental

but also a social standpoint is present in the domestic debate in countries such as China, India and Brazil. International cooperation between public and private actors to mitigate climate change and adapt to it can trigger a more sustained dialogue on respective energy policies, and help establish competition on a bedrock of shared rules.

On a different note, the need to protect investments abroad and transport routes can foster cooperation. The anti-pirate naval operations off the coast of Somalia, involving the navies of all major trading powers with a degree of coordination, offers a small but significant example of that. More broadly, investments will not be secure if the stability of the countries where they are made is at risk. Ultimately, such stability can only be ensured by better structures of political and economic governance. Strengthening these frameworks should become the focus of a much stronger dialogue between all relevant powers and resource-rich countries, and implies better coordination of development assistance.

***LookingGlass: Taking a broader view towards the issue of the variety of models, the Western model of liberal democracy has been the object firstly of Francis Fukuyama’s idea of “the end of history”, secondly to “the return of history” which also implies great power rivalry according to Robert Kagan. However, your notion of interolarity indicates that something has changed and that great power rivalry is not feasible in the same sense.***

Giovanni Grevi: The question of whether and how history repeats itself leads to a very broad debate that cannot be addressed here. One can note, however, that people, ideas and even institu-

tions can make a considerable difference. Changes in Europe over the last 50 years have proven this. That said, national interests have been playing and will continue to play a fundamental role in shaping international relations, and the interests of large powers obviously carry particular weight.

All countries aim to preserve their own security and enhance their own wealth. The real question is how to achieve that. The definition of the best means to attain these and other objectives depends on two sets of factors: the internal political regime and social-economic model, and the external environment. Based on that, three brief points can be made.

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First, when looking at the strategic priorities of established and emerging powers, there are at least equal grounds for future cooperation as there are for unrestrained competition, not to mention conflict. By and large, all of them are interested in keeping trade and investment flowing as a condition for economic growth; all of them fear WMD (weapons of mass destruction) proliferation, all have an interest in preventing the worst effects of climate change, and all accept the need for a reform of global governance structures, although how to achieve that remains very much a subject of debate.

Second, while many fundamental interests do not seem to collide, that does not mean that “harmony” is around the corner. A good deal of contro-

versy and tensions are ahead, as can be expected in times of systemic change. But one should recognise that disagreements on how to come to a common solution to shared problems pose a different challenge from pursuing essentially different, or even opposing, objectives.

Third, looking at the context where international relations are played out, it is by now quite clear that strategic, some say existential, interdependence is an unprecedented condition of international life. The conjunction of the economic, environmental and energy crisis has entered the strategic calculations of all major powers, although not of all of them to the same extent. For all powers, however, including the US, it is increasingly hard to envisage how to fulfil core national interests without taking into account those of others. Based on this diagnosis, it is possible to imagine a future that is in many ways different from the past, and to prepare for it. An interpolar world is a realistic scenario, although certainly not the only one potentially facing us. Interpolarity is interest-based, problem-driven and process-oriented. So, it appears in many ways, is the foreign policy of many global and regional powers.