

The International System

Unipolarity on the Brink

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The article claims that the international system is emerging out of an interlude of unipolarity – characterized by US dominance – , and entering an age of so-called “diffuse multipolarity”, i.e. a situation in which less clear-cut regional entities challenge the pre-eminence enjoyed by the US. Neorealism – with Kenneth N. Waltz’s theories about self-help and balancing – represents the main theoretical frame that supports my conjecture. This theory is enriched on the one hand by a broader view on systemic approach to the international system, and on the other hand by relevant information extracted out of international society theory (Conway W. Henderson) and out of declinism (Paul Kennedy). Together, they support data collected out of recent UN studies and publications such as The Economist.

Justification

This examination of the international system is not the fruit of a presupposed flamboyant attempt at explaining the way the world today shapes its every nook and cranny. The author of this article does not have monumental intellectual ambitions in mind. However, it should be stated from the very moment that this article aims at shedding some light in the rather intricate landscape of world politics. The attempt is thus closer to a clarification – by matching together existing theories of international relations with existing facts that belong to the same field of discussion – of existing stands, than to an endeavour of offering a new stand on world politics.

As a matter of fact, it was the desire at clarification that triggered the very idea behind this article. Quite recently, I explored with great interest a most useful instrument for students in international relations, i.e. a textbook of international relations. The work of professors Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen is beyond any doubt an instrument that I myself used in my attempt of understanding international relations (Jackson & Sørensen 2003). However, it was one classification the two aforementioned authors presented in their work that drew my attention and acted as the incentive for writing this article. States could be defined, authors claim, either by their judicial statehood – the property of a region of being recognized as a state by both national and international official documents, or – more satisfactory apparently – by their empirical statehood. The empirical statehood is “the extent to which states have developed efficient political institutions, a solid economic basis, and a substantial degree of national unity” (Jackson & Sørensen 2003: 15). If one takes this criterion into account, than the global state system has five categories, the authors state: five great powers (USA, Russia, China, Great Britain, France), thirty highly substantial states (Europe, North America, Japan), seventy five moderately substantial states (Asia, Latin America), ninety insubstantial quasi-

states (Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Pacific), and numerous unrecognized territorial political systems submerged in existing states.

I reject this depiction out of two reasons. Firstly, it is a reductionist one. It ought to be mentioned that I view reductionism (as a theoretical approach to international relations) largely in the manner Kenneth N. Waltz presents it (Waltz 1979); the classification advanced by Jackson and Sørensen focuses only on the individual – or national – level (Jackson & Sørensen 2003). I hold by the opinion that reductionism as such may be useful for didactical purposes, but it certainly cannot account for a broader perspective on the international order. Secondly, by presenting world states in such a manner, useful individual nuances are ignored; for instance, it might be said that China does indeed have a solid economic basis (as a component of the empirical statehood criterion), but only in terms of gross national product (GNP), not in terms of GNP/ capita – viewed oftentimes as a better indicator of economic stability. Fortunately, the comprehensiveness of the entire book out of which I extracted this classification compensates for the shortcomings of this classification per se. Irrespective of its rights or wrongs, the classification did enable me to pursue a more in-depth view on the matter of the global state system, in a comparative and systemic manner, as it will be unfolded in the next sections of this article.

Structure

After synthetically presenting the main conjecture of this article, the structure of my argumentation will follow a deductive approach. I will firstly present one main theory in international relations that forms the theoretical kernel of my explorations regarding the issue of the nature of the international system nowadays. I will eliminate its limitations as far as the subject under present scrutiny is concerned by adjusting some of its assumptions with the help of two other theories in international relations. Secondly, I will try to demonstrate by using recent statistical data, as well as opinions advanced in renowned publications – be them not peer-reviewed academic journals – , such as *Times* or *The Economist*^{*} – the manner in which the empirical facts match the theoretical framework I chose in order to have the international system clarified in a more appropriate manner. Apart from drafting a conventional conclusion, I will draw the readers' attention to a recent event that will turn out adequate in either supporting or rejecting my thesis.

Conjecture

The author of this article believes that the international system is nowadays relatively rapidly shifting from unipolarity (US dominance) to diffused multipolarity[†]. Amended neorealism as main framework, and international society theory, as well as declinism, as secondary supporting theories, will hopefully demonstrate this conjecture.

^{*} My opting for popular publications, apart from the academic journals employed as references, as a source of illustrating my conjecture, is not simply a convenient approach, as some might argue. It is my belief that such renowned international publications are of paramount importance in shaping public opinion on a subject which goes far beyond academic interest, i.e. the way the international system is nowadays structured.

[†] Terms such as “unipolarity” or “diffused multipolarity” will be clarified later in this article – because they belong to a specific conceptual framework – , in spite of a possible objection that clarifying such apparently crystal clear concepts is redundant.

Theory

i. Amended Neorealism

As the main theoretical framework that would account for the declining unipolarity – accompanied with a shift towards multipolarity – in today’s international system, I opted for neorealism, as it is conceptualized by Kenneth N. Waltz (Waltz 1979). A brief presentation of the main ideas of neorealism, which will later on be correlated with empirical data, is thus necessary. Nonetheless, it should firstly be stated that neorealism is the international relations theory that *par excellence* treats international politics in terms of the international power structure. Concepts such as “power structure”, “power transition”, “poles of power” (and its corollary “polarity”) belong to the realist lexicon in international relations, and, by virtue of extension, to the neorealist one. Kenneth N. Waltz elaborates his theory of neorealism as a systemic approach to international politics. This is tantamount to saying that international politics is mostly shaped by the set of interacting units (states, organizations, etc.) taken as a whole, and less by the individual units, studied in their relative simplicity. (Waltz 1979)

As neorealist scholars of international relations all agree, the first and foremost assumption of neorealism is that the international system is an anarchic, self-help system. Waltz equates this to saying that “every unit spends a portion of its effort in providing the means of protecting itself against others”. Simply put, “the international imperative is take care of yourself!” (Waltz 1979: 107). The second assumption entertained by the neorealist school is that the international system is composed out of ready-made units, i.e. the states – all having to perform the same tasks. However, they differ in one way, namely in their relative capabilities. (Jackson & Sørensen 2003) These relative capabilities are determined by simultaneously measuring the size of a unit’s population and territory, its resource endowment, its economic capability, its military strength, as well as its political stability and competence. (Waltz 1979)

According to balance of power theories – supported by neorealists – states are unitary actors who at a minimum strive to ensure their survival, and at a maximum drive for universal domination. Neorealists believe that the international system is structurally bound to balancing: state balance against one another. More clearly put, “in international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads other states to balance against it”. (Waltz cited in Christopher 1993: 32)

The amendment to realism I chose to take into account in the theoretical framework of my essay is mainly an attack on the unilateral approach of Waltz. Explaining the international system, Stuart J. Kaufman points out (Stuart 1997), should not be based solely on the single variable (the systemic ordering principle – anarchy – and polarity) advanced by Kenneth N. Waltz. Instead, it should take into account other key causes to systems change: economic interdependence, principles of unit legitimacy (the social principles according to which states are organized), and administrative technology (how a state is administered – bureaucratically or non-bureaucratically). In addition to this, international systems should be viewed on a

broader continuum. Kaufman believes that “systems vary not just from multi- to bi- or perhaps unipolar but from extreme consolidation (imperial hegemony), through balance-of-power systems (with varying number of <poles>), to extreme fragmentation (splintering into many units with no poles at all) with many possible gradations in between” (Kaufman 1997: 174).

Out of all these theoretical pieces of criticism of the classical, Waltzian, neorealist approach, the following ideas should be extracted in order to support my conjecture. Firstly, systems allow for many possible gradations and secondly, one should lay emphasis on issues such as economic interdependence or socio-political *Dasein* of states, apart from their self-interests. Having accepted that a whole series of gradations is to be found between classical “unipolarity” and classical “multipolarity”, I should now define the terms employed in the conjecture of this essay. I view the situation of world affairs immediately after the end of the Cold War as a case of “unipolarity” – understood as hegemony of a single state, namely United States, but not absolute, imperial-like hegemony. This initial unipolarity is ever more elusive, as it is moving towards what I coined as “diffuse multipolarity”. The term “diffuse” suggests that no-clear cut opposing unit has yet defined itself as an opponent of the single hegemon; instead, there are several larger, not clearly defined units that are challenging the status-quo. More on this shall be presented in the second part of this article, when I will attempt to link the theoretical references with the factual situation as it appears at the beginning of year 2006.

ii. *International Society Theory*

Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, when commenting upon the classification I have taken as a starting point for this article, assert that international society theorists lay more emphasis on moderately substantial states and on insubstantial quasi-states, rather than on great powers or substantial states by and large. This is due to the fact that international society theorists believe that the international state system raises issues not only of international order, but also of international freedom and justice (Jackson & Sørensen 2003). Other assumption of international society theory can be extracted from works which present international relations explicitly out of an international society perspective. First and foremost, one should clarify the concept of “international society”. It seems that international society designates the international system in which multiple actors cooperate to solve problems they cannot handle on their own (environmental issues, human trafficking, international crime and terrorism, etc.) (Henderson 1998). Advocates of this view believe that the world has moved from international anarchy (the traditional neorealist depiction of the international system) to the aforementioned international society. Conway W. Henderson speaks of “the nascent international society forming and eclipsing anarchy” or of the “Grotian order of states able to recognize common interests and abide by many of the same rules” – a hybrid between the Hobbesian war of all against all and Kant’s eternal peace. (Henderson 1998: 123)

In spite the fact that this article largely abides by the neorealist paradigm (amended as shown in the previous section), there are several ideas that belong to the international society school in international relations which are valuable theoretical assets that support the

standpoint of this article. Thus, it is my belief that the de-emphasis on military force (hard power) and replacement with leadership based on soft power (usually translated in economic influence) – advocated by international society theorists – are indeed to be found in the present international system. Furthermore, I also view as valid the statement according to which “a conflict-oriented, bipolar structure has given way to a world of diversified kinds of power” (Henderson 1998: 123). Still, despite the fact that there is indeed unprecedented agreement among major states, the very fact that major global problems such as terrorism proliferate, testifies to the idea that a consistent pattern of cooperation – at least vaguely similar to the “universal society” purported by its defenders – is still lacking. All in all, it would seem that the famous “power politics” coined by Hans J. Morgenthau hasn’t eroded itself as much as international society advocates claim, despite the fact that wider consensus between major powers indeed exists – which is not to say that a balance-of-power international system has disappeared.

iii. Declinism

Normally, a power of a state can be measured through various indicators. The method of measuring relative capabilities pioneered by Waltz was further refined and turned into a relatively stable scientific method. For instance, Ray S. Cline developed the so-called “power index”, a mathematical formula for establishing the perceived power of a state. The Cline power index is to be calculated according to the following formula:

$$P_p = (C + E + M) * (S + W)$$

Perceived power = (Population & Territory {Critical Mass} + Economic Capability + Military Capability) * (Coherent Planning & National Strategy & Will)

As accurate as the Cline formula for power calculus might seem, one could point out its relative subjectivity. For instance, how can one measure coherent planning? Or how can one measure national will?

Theorists thus tried to advance a simplified method of determining the relative capability of a country. Currently, the GNP is considered to be the most reliable single power index. The reason for the ease with which scholars rely solely on economic considerations when determining the power status of a state is represented by the fungibility of power. Power, usually economic power, is convertible in other sorts of power, most often military power.* Some go even further and try to explain the twists and turns of the international system with the help of economic factors. The declinist school is renowned for this perspective. For instance, Paul Kennedy’s main thesis is that economic ascendancy leads to the rise of a great military power (a hegemon in the international system), and vice versa: economic decline is the inevitable root cause for the fall of a great power (Kennedy 1987). The explanation for this assumption goes along the following lines: a strong national economy means economic

* Both neorealists and international society theorists, such as Henderson, agree on the idea that power is convertible.

resources for persuasive diplomacy (soft power), a high level of technical endowment (including what Kaufman coined “administrative technology”), as well as the fungibility of power necessary to convert economic resources into military ones. Paul Kennedy elaborates his theory further. He invokes historical evidence when claiming that economic decline of great powers preceded their military fall. It is emphasized that economic stress becomes more severe when a state spends too much of its national revenues on military capability, especially when this overstretching of resources is due to excessive global commitments (the so-called “imperial overstretch”) (Henderson 1998).

Factual Data

i. Amended Neorealism at Work

The second section of this article is an endeavour to back up the aforementioned theoretical constructions with factual data. Where available and needed, figures and conclusions which are part and parcel of international studies and evaluations will be brought forth. Supporting commentaries from both reference literature and articles in popular, yet universally accepted as reference, publications will also constitute evidence supporting our attempt of bringing together theory and practice.

During the Cold War, bipolarity was the main feature of the international system. Universal consensus supports this claim. Stuart J. Kaufman uses the term “dual hegemony”, most probably in order to suggest that both the Soviet Union and the United States acted as hegemony in their spheres of influence (the hegemony, operating from the apex of the power hierarchy were by definition able to provide peace and stability by regulating the international system to a significant degree) (Henderson 1998).

Towards the end of the Cold War and especially after the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union, USA began to assert itself as world power. American analysts claim that the basis of this pre-eminence (asserted, according to some, from the very 60s) was three-fold: nuclear superiority, control of the world’s energy industry, strength of the dollar in international trade and finance (Toma & Gorman, 1990). Neorealists seemed to agree: “However one measures, the US is the leading country” (Waltz 1979).

Since neorealists lay great emphasis on relative capability, let us examine, in a comparative manner, how the world system nowadays looks like. Peter A. Toma and Robert F. Gorman were drawing attention, from the beginning of 1990 that all the three aforementioned factors that fuelled the American supremacy have seriously eroded. Thus, the nuclear superiority was challenged ever since the Cold War. In addition to this, US no longer control the world’s energy resources. On the contrary, it is controlling, claim the authors, less and less of the world’s gross product. The authors lay the blame on the United States’ complacency (“it was accustomed to being number one”, say Toma and Gorman), for it stood by while other countries (especially the Asian tigers) were advancing (mostly educationally and technologically). Statistics point out that the effect of this passivity was that American industry had to spend \$ 20 billion to educate and retrain its workers. From the 70s to the 90s the US share of world market in automobiles decreased from 76% to 24%, in machine tools

from 100% to 35%, in turntables from 90% to 1% and in colour TVs from 90% to 10% (Toma & Gorman, 1990). A more recent look into the decline of the US economy is presented in the *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2005*, published by the United Nations. Global external imbalances are largely due to the twin trade deficit of the US (\$ 650 billion), which amounts to over 5% of the national GDP. The American dollar is on a steady decline, reaching a new low in August 2004. United Nations recommend the correction of the US fiscal deficit and improvement in private savings as key fiscal policies to be undertaken for a redress of the American economy. UN experts warn about the “growing constraints” US is facing such as the unwinding of previous policy stimuli, higher oil prices, weak employment growth, mounting debt in the household sector and the twin deficits (United Nations Report *World Economic Situation and Prospects*, 2005). The report further states: “The United States continues to be one of the main drivers of global economic growth. [...] Consumer spending remains strong, business investment and productivity are increasing and inflation is low. Nevertheless, with interest rates moving up, fiscal stimuli waning, oil prices remaining at their increased levels and employment showing a hesitant recovery, growth in 2005 is expected to decelerate to 3%” (United Nations Report *World Economic Situation and Prospects* 2005: 9). From a military point of view, the United States remains by far the greatest military power on Earth. However, it seems that this is no longer enough to ensure unipolarity. Kenneth N. Waltz was warning ever since 1979 that military power no longer brings political control, on the one hand due to the generalized military stalemate, on the other because of the ever increasing prevalence of non-military factors in international politics (Waltz 1979). The 2003 invasion in Iraq revealed the limits of the American military power. “The 2003 invasion will go down in the textbooks for the brilliance of its execution. But despite spending \$5 billion a month, and 140,000 troops on the ground, the United States cannot ensure stability or security in Iraq”, American journalists believe (Cornwell 2006).

Despite ever more fervent domestic discontent, president George Bush Jr. announced, in the presentation of the 2007 budget, that 141 social programmes will receive lower funding or no funding at all (including Medicare and Medicaid). Conversely, the Defense Department will receive \$ 439 billion, which means a 4.8% increase when compared to the 2005 disbursement. Consequently, I hold by the opinion that the economic decline of US is likely to worsen.

In order to abide by the neorealist paradigm, we should also examine the capabilities of other states, at least from an economic and a military point of view. We restrict our approach to the two aforementioned factors, since quantifying other variables such as unit legitimacy, administrative technology (apud Kaufman) or political competence (apud Waltz) would require extensive resources – notions such as political culture, the exigencies of and criticism against multiculturalism, the clash of civilizations, and so on and so forth would have to be brought into discussion. For the sake of a multi-faceted argumentation, I will briefly point some non-economic factors that testify to the shift from unipolarity to diffuse multipolarity. First and foremost, it is suggestive that US is no longer regarded by official bodies such as the UN as the main pillar for economic growth. The *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2005* regards US in relation to China. The report designates US and China as being “the principle engines for the global economy at present”. (United Nations Report *World Economic Prospects* 2005: 11) Furthermore, it is clear now that China is well ahead of US in several

sectors, in which the latter is underperforming. One of the possible poles to challenge the US-dominated unipolarity, so as to create what I coined as “diffuse multipolarity” could be Eastern Asia. The UN report bring evidence in favour of this supposition: “Eastern Asia continued to be the most rapidly growing developing region in 2004, largely driven by China’s 9.2 per cent and the consequent expansion of intraregional trade” (United Nations Report *World Economic Prospects 2005*: 11). What’s interesting though is that Asian countries provide large part of the financing of the American twin deficit by purchasing United States government securities. The increasingly interdependent economic relations between the US and China prove that a fragmentation of the international system is gradually taking place. At the moment, the problem is that US and China are not developing a common strategy, and hence the macroeconomic imbalance, says *Time Magazine* (Time Magazine, February 2006). Diffuse multipolarity is but obvious when one looks at the economic interdependence between the two actors: “The combination of big-spending US consumers and a booming China that feeds the Western appetite for low-priced products resulted in a second consecutive year of world-wide growth, estimated at more than 4%” (Time Magazine, February 2006: 26).

Nonetheless, at least from an economic point of view, the situation isn’t heading to a reversal to bipolarity, but rather to multipolarity. The emergence of new economic world powers is now clear. The 2006 Economic Forum at Davos discussed mainly the economic boom China and India have been experiencing for some time now. “The sheer ubiquity of the Indian presence” was matched by a clear message: “India is in. And less explicitly: it’s time for the world decision makers to stop obsessing about China and take a closer look at the other emerging Asian economic heavyweight” (Time Magazine, February 2006: 26). Prospects are everything but optimistic for the US economy. Jim O’Neill, head of global economic research for Goldman Sachs, states – in an interview for *Time Magazine* – that China’s economy will be the world’s largest by 2050 (far ahead of second place USA). In the long run, China is expected to improve its GDP/ capita, too.

Europe is no longer a collection of motley states. The neorealist logic of self-help is nonetheless still in action, at least up to a certain point. For instance, the recent discussion of the EU budget can be interpreted in this manner. “In short, this budget was a characteristic exercise in national self-interest and splitting differences. For many years, the salient features of the EU have included an obsession with detail, a preference for incremental change, an inability to do things until the last minute, habit-forming dependency on France and Germany, and a commitment (sometimes wobbly) to enlargement” (The Economist, January 2006). Despite political problems of its own, the European Union, as all frames that end up by generating structures, is an organism that entails new principles of unit legitimacy or political consolidation, if one is to interpret, in a neorealist manner, the evolution of EU in the context of the international system. Kenneth N. Waltz was anticipating, ever since 1979, that challenges to unipolarity are more likely to come from supranational structures. “Only by merging and losing their political identities can middle states become superpowers”, stated Waltz (Waltz 1979: 182).

The idea of “diffuse multipolarity” can be equated with what Stuart J. Kaufman views as regionalization of the international system. Eastern Asia, the EU, not to mention the Middle

East seem to constitute power blocks that go beyond state identities. Regional subsystems increasingly autonomous from global forces are most likely to develop, thus creating a serious threat to the already declining US hegemony (Kaufman 1997: 207).

All these are of course complementary to the neorealist assumption that states necessarily balance one another. Christopher Layne presents an explicit neorealist approach to contemporary international politics. His main conjecture is that the unipolar moment is just an interlude that will give way to multipolarity in 2000 – 2010. It is argued that history proves, on the one hand, that “unipolar systems contain the seeds of their own demise because the hegemon's unbalanced power creates an environment conducive to the emergence of new great powers”, and that the entry of new power erodes the hegemon's ascendancy, and ultimately pre-eminence (Layne 1993). From a structural point of view, the neorealist approach reveals that differential growth rates (from an economic, military or technological point of view countries never grow in the same rhythm) lead to the emergence of other great powers, apart from the hegemon – which proves that unipolarity is most likely to be short-lived. Christopher Layne examines how eligible states gain relative power, and consequently advance their standing in the international system. He then adds that rising power is an incentive for rising ambition and hence for a more assertive involvement in the international community. Japan – an economic giant – is a very adequate example that supports this structural claim. As it grew from an economic point of view and reached the top hierarchy of world powers, it began taking steps to acquire a better defined political profile. It offered the world's largest economic aid program, it sent unarmed troops in the UN mission in Cambodia, it paid billions of US dollars to help with the Persian Gulf War, and is now powerfully lobbying for a permanent seat in the Security Council.

All in all, it has become quite clear how neorealist premises – amended by a broader view on systems theory in general and international systems in particular – fit the present international political landscape as a territory moving from a temporary unipolar interlude to a diffuse multipolarity.

ii. International Society Theory at Work

International society theory was laying great emphasis on international freedom and justice – as was clarified in the theoretical section of this article, putting questions of power politics in the brackets. It should be stated from the very beginning that the classical neorealist assumption that the demand of placing international interests above national ones is meaningless in an anarchic context still stands, for power politics and self-help still stand. For instance, an examination into the participation of states in the peacekeeping and peace-maintaining missions of the UN – meant to assess if the states' national interests prevail over idealistic commitments to the international community – demonstrated that it is the realist predominance of self-interest that determines states' humanitarian actions (Neack 1995).

Nonetheless, questions of international freedom and justice are nowadays part of international law. That means for instance that states which are party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment are bound by law to respect its provisions. The international community can sanction breaches of

international conventions, protocols, or covenants. International courts of justice exist and can punish individual states. Moreover, members of the international community theoretically seek the same universal aims (peace, human rights, etc.) all the more since it is now their legal obligation to do so. This means that “hard power” is most likely to be replaced by “soft power”. The previous section of this article demonstrated that, from an economic perspective (soft power), unipolarity is eroding at an escalating pace. From this standpoint, the international society theory supports the main conjecture of this essay. Should we assume that power politics is not totally by-gone, we can infer that multipolarity will gain a more precise limitation in the future; we could thus witness a reversal of the pre-1945 situation, but traditional international actors (states) are gradually replaced either by supranational entities (the EU) or by regions. Conway W. Henderson, a representative of the international society school in international relations, supports this view: “Recently, a few observers have claimed that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States again leads the world as a hegemon. This hegemony, if real, is probably a <unipolar moment> that is shifting to a multipolar structure” (Henderson 1998: 117).

iii. Declinism at Work

As the section in which I examine the practical implications of what I referred to as “amendment realist” probably made clear, the US appears to be the latest case of a declining hegemon, suffering from “imperial overstretching”. Its budget and trade deficits, its national debt, money diverted to the global strategic military system, domestic problems – such as poverty, unemployment, deteriorating infrastructure of highways and cities – they all testify to a case of declinism, as Paul Kennedy clarifies this theory. Conway W. Henderson entertains similar beliefs: “If we choose to call the US the <lone superpower> it is a diminished superpower” (Henderson 1998: 119).

Conclusion

A thorough examination of the international system demonstrates that unipolarity is gradually making room for a rather imprecise multipolarity, imprecise insofar as there are several regional actors which act as balancers to the US – up to now considered pre-eminent world power. An extended neorealist theoretical framework, aided by some considerations that belong to declinism or to international society theory, provides the theoretical structure of my assessment of the world system.

Some events that are to take place in the near future are likely to further consolidate – or, on the contrary, contradict – my conjecture. The crisis in Iran and the recent deferral of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Security Council of the United Nations could demonstrate tensions between the head of the unipolar world – US – and the rest of the world powers; Iraq reloaded holds prospects both for a humanitarian disaster and for a definite failure of the US army, at least in terms of peace-building, if not in terms of the military confrontation *per se*. At the same time, the unfolding of the crisis is likely to deepen tensions between two rival world regions – the West and the Muslim world – which, in term of relative capabilities are worthy of a closer analysis (let us not forget that assessing relative capabilities also means assessing national loyalty, political legitimacy, etc.). All in all, the international system is apparently well on its way to multipolarity.

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