1 The accommodation of rising powers in world politics

T.V. Paul

The year 2014 witnessed a dramatic upsurge of territorial challenges by Russia in Ukraine and by China in the East and South China Seas, bringing back fears of renewed great power conflicts and rivalries after two decades of relative calm. The need to understand the rising power phenomenon has become all the more urgent in today's world, as the potential for violence is high in both these theaters. 2014 also marked the 100th anniversary of the onset of World War I (WWI). The quick rise of China, a resurgent Russia, and potentially an empowered India and Brazil have brought forward the question of peaceful power transitions in the international system, reminding statesmen of the need not to repeat the mistakes of the twentieth century. China especially has been growing rapidly in both economic and military terms and is poised to replace the United States as the number one national economy in the next decade, while India is expected to reach third position in less than two decades, and possibly second by the middle of the century.[1] Even with lower growth rates than projected, these countries will still be leading economies in the decades to come. In the past, the great economic strength of rising powers led to great military strength, which encouraged them to engage in armed contest with established powers. It is yet to be seen if the current era's rising powers will follow this historical pattern. Although they are unlikely to replace the United States as the preponderant military power in the foreseeable future, it is likely that in the twenty-first century different types of power resources may be vital to claiming global leadership roles.[2] Military strength is unlikely to be the only key source of higher status, as different status markers could be

[1] National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*. Available at: www.dni.gov/index.php/about/organization/national-intelligence-council-global-trends. See also *BRICS and Beyond*, Goldman Sachs, 2007, p. 11. Available at: www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/archive/archive-pdfs/brics-book/brics-full-book.pdf.

[2] On different forms of power in the twenty-first century, see Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

used by states to claim leadership positions.[3] Going by this perspective, the accommodation of these rising powers into meaningful international roles may be necessary to obtain a peaceful international order. Even if the rising powers do not challenge the existing order through war, protracted conflicts and crises could occur, as we are already witnessing in East Asia and Ukraine. Disagreements over global governance, as well as spheres of influence, could generate much discord and uncertainty, compromising solutions to collective action problems; consider the inability of the leading states to achieve consensus on a new global free trade agreement or a climate control regime. In fact, countries like China, India, and Brazil have successfully blocked many initiatives in the trade liberalization and climate change areas – initiatives proposed by the United States and other Western countries – while Russia has successfully stopped Washington from launching military action or sanctions against Syria and Iran with UN approval.

This volume is guided by a central concern for major power accommodation and war prevention in the twenty-first century. It seeks to explore, with the aid of historic cases, whether, and when, peaceful accommodation of rising powers works against the conditions that generate intense rivalry and conflict. The central argument is that though structural conditions can lead to conflict, proper synchronization of strategies for peaceful change by established and rising powers can mitigate the possibilities of violent conflict.

What is accommodation?

Accommodation in international relations at the great power level involves mutual adaptation and acceptance by established and rising powers, and the elimination or substantial reduction of hostility between them. The process of accommodation in international politics is exceptionally complicated, as it involves status adjustment, the sharing of leadership roles through the accordance of institutional membership and privileges, and acceptance of spheres of influence: something established powers rarely offer to newcomers. Accommodation is viewed by some as the creation of "sustained peace" or "deep peace" among major power actors, akin to the "warm peace" described by Kenneth Boulding.[4] Others have categorized three types of order: "war, cold peace (stability based on competition and mutual deterrence), or warm peace (stability

[3] Deborah Welch Larson, T.V. Paul, and William C. Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," in *Status in World Politics*, eds. T.V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson and William C. Wohlforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapter 1.

[4] Kenneth E. Boulding, *Stable Peace* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 43.

based on cooperation and mutual reassurance)."[5] All of them involve some form of accommodation.

Accommodation as conceptualized in this project is more than the achievement of stability or absence of war, as unequal powers could be at peace without their status being adjusted. It is also feasible to consider accommodation among rivals as one great power viewing the other as a legitimate stakeholder and conceding to it a certain amount of global and regional power status, as well as a sphere of influence, even though they might not be close friends or allies. The accommodation of a rising power simply implies that the emerging power is given the status and perks associated with the rank of great power in the international system, which includes in many instances a recognition of its sphere of influence, or the decision not to challenge it militarily. It does not assume deep friendship or lack of competition. If competition leads to intense conflict and war, it is not a peaceful accommodation, as the rising power has not been accommodated peacefully, nor it is willing to play by mutually acceptable norms and rules.

Accommodation at the international level involves the accommodated state obtaining a larger share of global governance rights, and/or spheres of influence, and being contented with it. It is more than simple reconciliation, because temporary reconciliation need not last if the reconciled power becomes unhappy with the order. In the long run, accommodation may involve the replacement of the dominant power by the rising power, or substantial sharing of positional rights and obligations but without war and intense rivalry. In the contemporary world, accommodation has become more complicated, as smaller states are able to resist legally and militarily, in some instances through asymmetric means, the efforts by a rising power or a status quo power to maintain or redraw spheres of influence.

Accommodation of different categories of state can take place at different levels, as only a handful of countries are great power candidates at any given time. *Full accommodation* at the global level involves the recognition of a rising power's position in a leadership role in the conduct of international politics in both security and economic areas, through appropriate status recognition within global institutions and consultative mechanisms where its voice is given substantial weight among its peers. This also implies the rising power gaining acceptance for the affairs of its sphere of influence. A key example is the United Kingdom

[5] Charles A. Kupchan, "Introduction: Explaining Peaceful Power Transition," in *Power in Transition: The Peaceful Change of International Order*, eds. Charles A. Kupchan, Emanuel Adler, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Yuen Foong Khong (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2001), 6.

accommodating the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rising power here possessed many parameters of global power status and was a potential or actual global challenger to the established order. *Partial or limited accommodation* may be focused on institutional, as opposed to economic or military, reconciliation. For instance, the USSR was institutionally accommodated by the United States and its allies in the postwar era, but not economically. The Soviets adopted the same approach vis-à-vis the United States and its allies. Militarily, both were superpowers, forcing them to accommodate each other by way of their exclusive spheres of influence. But each refused to accommodate the other in economic and ideological terms, and their containment strategies precluded extensive cooperation. United States-created institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had no Soviet membership and the Soviet-sponsored Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) had no Western presence. The United States recognizing China in the 1970s and according it UN Security Council membership, as well as opening up its market to Beijing, is also an example of partial accommodation.

Non-accommodation at the global level is when a rising power with most of the material parameters of great power status is largely ignored in the conduct of international governance and is given little or no recognition at international forums or bilateral exchanges. In fact, it might be a target of sanctions, and to some extent ridicule, by the established powers, due to its current or past behavior. Defeated Germany after WWI falls into this category, as does Japan during the interwar period. The People's Republic of China (PRC) until 1972 also represents a case. *Symbolic accommodation* would constitute the giving of some measures of accommodation by an established power to a rising power. The United States' symbolic accommodation of India since 2005 constitutes such an example. Symbolic accommodation may be the precursor to substantive accommodation in the future. *Region-specific accommodation* is also possible, where a rising power is given primacy in a specific region, but not at the global level. In some sense, the rising powers of today – India, Brazil, and South Africa – constitute three examples of regional accommodation, though they would like to accrue more global recognition in key decision-making areas. Some of this may involve specific areas where the rising power has particular interests and strength. Thus, Brazil may be a good candidate for accommodation in the areas that it has most interest in; that is, global financial institutions and other UN forums, such as those dealing with climate change. Not all states have the wherewithal or the resolve to be recognized as great powers, and indeed very few

make the cut to obtain the pinnacle of leadership roles. Hence, historic accommodations may not be good examples for today's world, as some of the current aspiring countries (except China, and potentially India) do not have material or other capabilities for obtaining great power status in the next two decades. But in the longer term of three to four decades, this could change, as they make economic, technological, and military advances.

One thing is clear from international history: non-violent accommodation is a rare event, as rising powers are often not peacefully integrated by established powers. As a rising power reaches a certain capability threshold, it is often tempted to search for higher status through wars, or to alter the existing order through military conflicts and crises. However, there can be a time lag involved in a country's achieving economic wealth and expanding its larger political and military interests abroad, due largely to domestic political constraints.[6] In the past, established powers responded to rising powers' demands for status adjustment with policies such as preventive war, containment, bandwagoning, binding, engagement, and distancing/buck-passing.[7]

Theories and accommodation

Historically, wars have been the major propellants of structural change and status accommodation in the international system. Not surprisingly, dominant International Relations (IR) theories contend that major changes in the system are generally possible only through violent conflicts. For example, power transition and hegemonic stability theories contend that war is the principal agent through which systemic changes occur in international politics, whereby one global leader replaces another.[8] Gilpin, in his masterly work, argues that the fundamental nature of international politics has not changed over the millennia. Because of the changing economic and military capabilities of major states, the differential growth of power generates unevenness in the international system. The shifting balance of power weakens the existing order, and the rising powers will find it rational to contest the order militarily through expansion until the marginal costs are greater than the benefits they gain from

[6] On the US case, see Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[7] For these, see Randall L. Schweller, "Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory," in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross, eds., *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power* (London: Routledge, 1999), chapter 1.

[8] A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York, Knopf, 1958); Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke, eds., *Parity and War* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996).

such a policy.[9] Marxist and class-based theories have assigned enormous importance to imperial struggles as the cause for system-wide changes.[10] Similarly, long cycle and world system theorists believe in the necessity of war for major change to occur.[11] While many historical power transitions and accommodations in the modern international system occurred through wars and postwar settlements, which often favored the winners, will history repeat itself or will we have a more peaceful power transition in the emerging international context?

The main reason for structural theories to argue that power transitions and subsequent status accommodations of rising powers occur only through war is the notion of power structure being characterized by persistence and continuity. Changes occur only when violent tumults take place in the system that affect the power distribution among major power actors. Indeed, many transitions in the past occurred through war, as major wars provided the catalyst for new powers to emerge. Yet, war is not the only source of change in world politics, as the end of the Cold War powerfully attests. Additionally, structural theories suffer from determinism, as they do not provide much guidance for policymakers on how to avoid war and obtain peaceful change. Power transition theories also tend to focus on dyadic interactions while ignoring third parties and their role in generating great power conflicts, or preventing them as members of balancing coalitions or war alliances.

All this suggests that IR theory is weak in explaining or predicting peaceful change. Very few of the classic IR texts talk about peaceful transformation. An exception is *The Twenty Years' Crisis* by the pioneering English scholar, E.H. Carr, who argued: "The problem of 'peaceful change in national politics' is how to effect necessary and desirable changes without revolution and, in international politics, how to effect

[9] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Recently, John J. Mearsheimer picks up the same argument in his book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, updated edn. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).

[10] John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1902); Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1939); Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947).

[11] Manus I. Midlarsky, *On War: Political Violence in the International System* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); George Modelski, *Long Cycles in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1987); Karen A. Rasler and William R. Thompson, *The Great Powers and Global Struggle: 1490–1990* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War: Hegemonic Rivalry and the Fear of Decline* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). For a counter view, see Charles F. Doran, *The Politics of Assimilation: Hegemony and its Aftermath* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971).

such changes without war."[12] He exhorted Great Britain and other dominant powers of the time:

> The defence of [the] status quo is not a policy which can be lastingly successful. It will end in war as surely as rigid conservatism will end in revolution. "Resistance to aggression," however necessary as a momentary device of national policy, is no solution; for readiness to fight to prevent change is just as unmoral as readiness to fight to enforce it. To establish methods of peaceful change is therefore the fundamental problem of international morality and of international politics.[13]

In recent years, a few theorists have attempted to map out peaceful change and status accommodation. Charles Kupchan lists three conditions that characterize peaceful transition. Firstly, the "hegemon and rising challenger must engage in a sustained process of strategic restraint and mutual accommodation that ultimately enables them to view one another as benign polities." Secondly, "peaceful transition emerges from ideational contestation when hegemon and rising challenger succeed in fashioning agreement on the outlines of a new international order." And finally, "peaceful transition depends not just on the ability of the hegemon and the rising contender to forge agreement on order, but also on their ability to legitimate that order."[14] The problem is that these conditions are rather stringent, and it is unlikely they will meet the emerging dynamics between the United States and China, for instance.

More concretely, Stephen Rock hypothesizes three conditions for the emergence of peace among all categories of states: when states are "heterogeneous in the exercise of national power," "heterogeneous in their economic activities," and "homogenous in their societal attributes." These conditions imply that peace is possible (in our context, among rising and established powers) if state objectives and interests minimally collide, if they produce and export different commodities and services, and if they have somewhat similar political and social cultures, as well as ideological approaches.[15] The big challenge in an era of economic

[12] E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, reprint edn. (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 209. See also E.H. Carr, *International Relations since the Peace Treaties* (London; Macmillan, 1937). Few others during the interwar period wrote about the need for peaceful accommodations. In particular, see Frederick Sherwood Dunn, *Peaceful Change: A Study of International Procedures* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1937); C.A.W. Manning, *Peaceful Change: An International Problem*, new edn. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1972).

[13] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 222.

[14] Kupchan, "Introduction," 8–9.

[15] Stephen R. Rock, *Why Peace Breaks Out: Great Power Rapprochement in Historical Perspective* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 12–15. Scholars who work in the area of enduring rivalries also offer ideas for conditions that produce peaceful accommodation. For instance, see Paul F. Diehl and Gary Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Karen

globalization is that state interests in the political and economic realms could collide, and countries and corporations could compete in the same economic domains. Moreover, rapid wealth creation may encourage major powers to disregard the principles of free and fair trade. Great powers are generally ones with global interests, though their regional interests might be different from their global interests, and as such they may not exercise power in a heterogeneous fashion. It is also unlikely that regime compatibility among great powers is achievable, however desirable it might be. The question, then, is how to fashion an international order in which different types of rising powers and dominant actors can co-exist and reduce points of tension while recognizing each other's power and status aspirations.

Despite the occasional foray into peaceful change by a handful of scholars like the ones just listed, mainstream IR theories are yet to focus on peaceful change vigorously or offer the conditions under which a rising power is admitted to the rank of major power, even if it is a rival of the established powers. Hence, their prescriptions for peaceful change seem inadequate. In spite of this general weakness in IR, many relevant ideas for change and accommodation exist, and they can be gleaned from the core positions of these theories on relations among major power actors.

War avoidance strategies in realism

Realist theories rarely talk about peaceful power transitions or the accommodation of rising powers. There is a status quo bias in realism (and, for that matter, in strands of liberalism and constructivism as well), as scholars often unwittingly follow the political calculations of dominant states, especially those of the most powerful Anglo-Saxon countries, Great Britain and the United States, which have been the leading global powers for the past century, or more in the British case. However, the key mechanism in realism for accommodation or containment can be located in the balance of power. To realists, balance of power considerations can lead dominant powers to accommodate a rising power, as the United

Rasler, William R. Thompson, and Sumit Ganguly, *How Rivalries End* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). Some other pertinent works include: Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Rise-Kappen, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); David A. Welch, *Painful Choices: A Theory of Policy Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Benjamin Miller, *States, Nations, and the Great Powers: The Sources of Regional War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uiversity Press, 2007).

States did with China in the 1970s, and Great Britain with the United States in the late nineteenth century. In both these cases, a common enemy or potential rival was needed, against which the interests of the powers could converge. Conversely, balance of power considerations can keep a rising power at bay. For, though realism assumes that material power capabilities change among the leading actors, and that competition for power inevitably leads to conflict among rising and established powers, it has avoided the question of change without war. However, realism offers prescriptions for war avoidance among great powers that are often based on three strategies: balance of power, containment, and deterrence. Status quo states are expected to follow these strategies to prevent the rise of a challenger to the existing international order. If a challenger arises, war or threat of war may become necessary to restore the balance and peace itself. These coercive strategies assume that a threatening state can be dissuaded from starting a war if the costs of war are made higher than the benefits. When balance of power exists, stability is maintained, as no single actor will become so powerful that it engages in aggressive behavior and resorts to system-changing wars.[16]

The containment strategy is predicated on the assumption that a challenger can be restrained through different coercive mechanisms, including economic and political deprivation and military denial.[17] The logic of deterrence is that a challenging state can be prevented from initiating war if the costs of an attack are made higher than the benefits through a threat of retaliatory attack or denial of victory.[18] These strategies are meant to preserve the system and the positions of the status quo powers. They do not address the possibility that the material capacities of the dominant power might decline and that it might not be able to achieve balancing or deterrence continuously to prevent the rising power from emerging as a system-challenging lead actor.

Moreover, the single-minded pursuit of balance of power and containment, as well as deterrence, can produce vicious conflicts in the international system. Implementation of these strategies may be viewed

[16] For some very interesting chapters on the failure of balance of power, see Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Steven E. Lobell, eds., *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[17] George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 4 (July 1947), 852–68; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

[18] Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Deterrence and Defense Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983).

as highly threatening by some challengers, forcing them to engage in protracted conflicts, subsystemic wars, or preventive warfare. In fact, balance of power strategies have been blamed for causing major wars in Europe.[19] Deterrence can be perceived as provocative and aggressive by a challenger, and it may resort to a preventive strike, as with the US deterrence strategy toward Japan prior to World War II (WWII), which was seen by the latter as highly threatening.[20] Even if deterrence succeeds initially, when a challenger finds the status quo unbearable war is likely to break out. A single-minded pursuit of deterrence thus does not necessarily guarantee peaceful change, though it could buy time in terms of war avoidance. Moreover, deterrence theorists have largely refrained from discussing change in their analysis. Theories of mutual deterrence thus assume that if capabilities are maintained at sufficient levels, and threats of punishment or denial of victory are credible to opponents, the preservation of the status quo is possible.

In the post-1945 world, nuclear weapons have played a major role in realist understandings of the preservation of the status quo. There is also a belief that mutually assured destruction (MAD) has been robust and will prevent the outbreak of major cataclysmic wars, especially initiated by rising powers. However, it is still possible that rising powers will emerge without fear of being attacked by established powers under conditions of nuclear deterrence. Further, a declining power can give up its dominant status under the protection offered by nuclear weapons, as the Soviet Union did in the 1990s. This logic, however, has some problems, as it assumes that the possession of a particular weapons system can lead to peaceful change. Although it is arguable that nuclear weapons would force adversaries to behave more cautiously, it does not logically follow that nuclear opponents would inevitably settle their conflict. Given its nuclear arsenal, the Soviet Union could have continued the Cold War for much longer if it had wished to do so. In fact, some theorists during the Cold War era believed in the robustness of nuclear deterrence and the continuation of the bipolar system for a long time to come (e.g., Kenneth Waltz).[21] Probably more than nuclear deterrence, it was the fear of losing economic competitiveness that prompted the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to introduce reforms that eventually undid the USSR. The Cold War era saw high levels of conflict in the developing world, and many crises were hyped up by the superpowers in the name of

[19] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).
[20] Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1991).
[21] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), chapter eight.