

**LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

**BALANCING AMERICAN POWER:  
THE CASES OF CHINA AND RUSSIA**

By

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*To my loved ones...*

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# BALANCING AMERICAN POWER: THE CASES OF CHINA AND RUSSIA

Ali Amine Khaled

## ABSTRACT

Global political, economic and security dynamics are in flux. The purported decline of America, along with the ascension of Russia and China – among other emerging economies – is altering the rules of the international system. The theme of American decline and the rise of China and Russia as possible threats to American hegemony is a topic laden with much heated debates. America's tendency to overstretch its military and economic expansion beyond its national borders, along with the rise of dynamic and competitive economies across the world, undermined the country's global stature and unleashed a global struggle for power with the likes of China and Russia. These countries are balancing against US hegemony both regionally and internationally. This thesis examines the theme of American decline and the factors affecting this decline. It assesses the rise of China and Russia as potential competitors that can balance against American hegemony within the framework of their mutual interests and alliances.

*Keywords:* American Decline, China, Russia, Balance of Power, Hegemony

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
G-20	The Group of Twenty Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
PCGDP	Per Capita Gross Domestic Product
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction:

The global political, economic, and security structure is changing. Unipolarity is no longer possible, and perhaps unacceptable. The arguable decline of America, along with the ascension of Russia and China – among other emerging economies – is altering the rules of the international system. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century marked a significant transformation in the global distribution of world power since the end of the Cold War. The fall of the Soviet Union had paved the way for a decade of American global dominance. The United States (US) possessed enough resources that allowed it to emerge as a global hegemon and exert its power and influence internationally. Theorists argued that US hegemonic power produced significant stability in the international system (Beeson & Broome, 2010).

Mark Beeson and Andre Broome (2010) contend that the ‘hegemonic stability theory,’ influenced by Charles Kindleberger’s study of the Great Depression, deemed the presence of a hegemonic leader as necessary and beneficial to the well-being of global economic stability. However, they claim that hegemonic dominance may possibly generate global instability. They regarded US hegemony as the primary source of global economic – and one might add political and security – instability (Beeson & Broome, 2010).

The literature on hegemonic stability exposes a general tendency by any given hegemon to take advantage of its dominance. This generates a wave of resistance in which other capable states rise to challenge the hegemon's supremacy by attempting to displace it or balance against its power (Walt, 2005). Consequently, a zero-sum game of interminable power struggles arises, and eventually culminates in an unavoidable conflict that marks the rise of a new power and the downfall of another (Beeson & Broome, 2010). The notion that every hegemon will be challenged at a given point in time gives rise to the theory of balancing against power and/or threat. The presence of three global resilient opponents nowadays within the compounds of the abovementioned struggle gives rise to a security dilemma competition between them that compels them to balance against each other to ensure global dominance, maintain regional supremacy, or seek both simultaneously.

The beginning of American hegemonic decline may have been triggered by two unwinnable wars against Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 representing the pinnacle of American power under President Georges W. Bush, along with a massive economic crisis that originated in the US. Stephen Walt go as far as arguing that glimpses of resistance to American hegemony started to surface in the middle 1990s as France, Germany, and other countries expressed their anxiety vis-à-vis American unilateralism. America's tendency to overstretch its military and economic expansion beyond its national borders, along with the rise of dynamic and competitive economies – notably that of China – unsettled the country's global stature and generated a global struggle for power with the likes of China and Russia that are likely to balance against US hegemony. However, this does not necessarily imply the existence or possible emergence of a

bandwagon effect given that both states have separate regional agendas, despite shared foreign policy interests.

## **1.2. Challenges to American Hegemony:**

Addressing the theme of American decline requires an examination of the challenges affecting decline. Presently, the rise of China and Russia is regarded as a major component in studies on global challenges to American hegemony. The present struggle for power between the US, China, and Russia can be explained by Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism. Mersheimer contends that states are destined to struggle for power perpetually within the framework of an anarchic international system (Snyder, 2002). This power struggle compels states to bolster their security by continuously attempting to amplify their power.

Talks about American decline are shadowed by corroborating instances such as the Sino-Russian double veto on the Arab League's Security Council resolution on Syria. The veto takes the Security Council out of the equation and represents a drastic change of tactics by China and Russia, seeing as both countries had a tendency to tactically abstain from voting on resolutions related to the Arab-Israeli conflict and Libya (Williams, 2012). Furthermore, it indicates a balance against American power and influence that might be occurring within the Security Council and globally. Other indicators suggest that China and Russia could represent a threat to US hegemony in Asia and the Middle East.

In this respect much has been written recently about Russia's endeavor to restore its influence in the Middle East, mainly due to geopolitical, cultural, and economic

interests (Kreutz, 2002). Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his country's rejection of American unipolarity publically during his speech at the 4th Munich Security Conference in 2007. He called for the establishment of a new global security structure that balances between the interests of all (Blanche, 2010). Apparently, Russia would be merely aiming to balance and not displace the US from the Middle East as America's presence in the region arguably protects Russian interests from Al-Qaeda and its allies (Katz, 2008).

Putin's declarations, along with Russia's efforts to reassert itself in the region, indicate Moscow's willingness to recover the nation's great-power status and balance against the US (Blanche, 2010). In fact, the Russian Federation is arguably America's main geopolitical rival given its active role Syria, Iran, and the Arab-Israeli conflict (Stein, 2012). As such, we could very well be witnessing the reigniting of a new Cold War between the US and Russia (Abou Ismail, 2011). However, Roland Dannreuther contends that a return to a Cold War apparatus between the US and Russia is highly improbable given the existence of several political and cultural differences between the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia (Dannreuther, 2009).

Understanding the current nature of Russian-American relations and the challenge posed by Russia in the Middle East requires an examination of the ongoing Syrian Crisis, Russia's relations with what Talal Nizameddin called in 2008 the "Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Nexus," and the effect of Russian domestic change under Putin on foreign policy in the Middle East (Freedman, 2002). Scholars, including Boris Dolgov, highlighted the impact of the 2011 Syrian Revolution on present-day international relations, but many overlooked Russia's revival in global politics due to contemporary events such as the

European debt crisis, the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and the emphasis on America's role in the so-called "Arab Spring" (Palmer, 2011). In reality, the "Arab Spring" might have possibly provided Russia with new prospects for strengthening its influence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Baev, 2011). This thesis explores these issues and sheds the light on Russo-American relations at times during which Washington "has a distinct set of friends and foes, but Moscow has relatively good relations with all governments and most major opposition movements in the region" (Katz, 2008).

Along with Russia comes China. Both states are not bandwagoning to balance against American power, but are simply aligning on the basis of shared regional interests. The People's Republic of China has had a long history of cooperation with the Soviet Union, sustained with the Russian Federation despite times of discord between their leaders (Borodavkin, 2009). In fact, many scholars and diplomats argue that Russia and China are interdependent in terms of strengths and prosperity (Razov, 2012). While Western Christianity represented a challenge to Russia's Orthodoxy and sense of identity, China's neutrality with respect to religious identity played a constructive role in shaping Russo-Chinese relations (Curanović, 2012). Realists have argued that states will seek power constantly to reinforce their security and bolster their position within the international system. As stated by James MacHaffie, one way of achieving this objective is the recourse to alliance building. While China has not been very successful in growing long-standing alliances, it has thrived at cultivating a deep state of cooperation with Russia (MacHaffie, 2011). This, according to MacHaffie, is caused by attempts from both nations to balance against American power and threat.

Nevertheless, Walt suggests that Washington's good fortune is likely to continue due to slight advantages over others, including economic diversity and territorial security. Robert Kagan also refers to America's geopolitical position as being advantageous with relation to potential peer competitors, notably China that is surrounded by watchful neighbors (Freedland, 2012). In other words, both authors seem to be suggesting that one country alone cannot challenge the US. In that respect, the rise of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) economies could constitute a challenge to US influence around the world, while explaining America's forthcoming and unavoidable decline. Thus, the challenge to US hegemony ought to be analyzed within the framework of an alliance that has been emerging between Russia and China. Current struggles between Washington, Beijing, and Moscow revolve around economic interests linked to natural resources in areas of strategic geopolitical location such as Africa and the Middle East. Accordingly, the nature of struggles requires alliance-building in contested regions in order to gain leverage over them.

It is extremely difficult to describe the nature of current Sino-American relations. The US seems to be cautiously retracting from the Middle East and building a new strategy that focuses on reinforcing its presence in Asia in order to prevent Chinese hegemony. Sino-American relations remain very thorny and filled with suspicion. What is certain is that Russia has been regaining the prestige that once made it America's fiercest opponent, and that China is the first non-Western power – since Japan (1867-1912) – that possesses the potential to influence and/or reshape the existing global order (Chellaney, 2012).

### **1.3. Research Questions:**

Assessing America's global status today requires understanding the differences between the challenges posed by China and Russia now, and the threat posed by the Soviet Union previously. Unlike the Cold War era that necessitated active military reinforcement and large defense spending, the challenges rising from facing China and Russia today are mostly economy-oriented given the struggle to dominate areas of strategic geopolitical significance such as Syria. These areas are either rich in gas and oil, or considered fundamental to their flow through pipeline transportation. It is extremely difficult to describe the nature of current Sino-American and Russo-American relations. It is arguable that we are currently enduring the initial stages of a new cold war between the US on one side, and a Sino-Russian camp on the other. However, the idea that the notion of a new cold war is far-fetched is also plausible.

Accordingly, finding a common ground between both arguments is of extreme importance to the understanding of the current state of international affairs. It will enable diplomats and academics to forecast accurately the future of global affairs and the global power structure, which is fundamental for effective and constructive policymaking. This thesis attempts to answer two questions of significant contemporary importance: 1) is American power and influence really declining?, and 2) are China and Russia currently able to constitute a balance to US hegemony, in the Middle East and Asia respectively? The first question examines the theme of American decline and analyzes the contributing factors therein. It assesses the notions of power and influence, underlying the link between them, in order to understand America's stature within the newly emerging global

system. The second question investigates the regional political and economic factors that make China and Russia challengers to American hegemony.

#### **1.4. Methodology:**

The main questions and points of interest the thesis will address stem from a curiosity toward the modern implications of balancing on the current world order. This research gathers and analyzes relevant literature in order to respond to the abovementioned questions and gain further insight on the possible effects of balancing on the existing world order. This thesis relies on an analysis of secondary sources related to the topics of decline and balancing. It examines the cases of the US, China, and Russia in order to investigate the relation between American decline and the revival of China and Russia. Accordingly, this thesis explores the premises of decline and revival, and the challenges that both Beijing and Moscow can constitute in Asia and the Middle East.

The present research seeks to articulate several of the key notions on balancing, American decline, and the potential for Chinese and Russian challenge to American power and influence. It focuses specifically on the factors that might be contributing to America's decline, and the elements of power that could allow China and Russia to contest American hegemony regionally, and/or globally. The nature of the proposed methodology for this research provides a theory-based orienting concept that constitutes a rubric by which the topic is analyzed and interpreted. This undertaking comes at a time of multiple and intersecting global struggles affecting the existing world order. As such, its relevance is quite empirical.

Given that China and Russia are leaning toward the kind of mutual cooperation – noticeable by their synchronized stances on the Syrian Crisis – that might eventually counterbalance American power in Asia and the Middle East, observing the notion of American decline within the context of Sino-American and Russo-American relations is of significant importance to the understanding of the current status quo in global affairs. To do so, the thesis examines carefully three cases: a) The case of American decline; b) the case of Russian challenge in the Middle East; and c) The case of Chinese challenge in Asia.

### **1.5. Map of the Thesis:**

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The next chapter examines the debate on American hegemony and decline. The third chapter discusses the revival of Russia and the challenge it posed to the US in the Middle East. The fourth chapter examines the rise of China and its confrontation with the US in Asia. The fifth and final chapter spells out the theoretical findings of this thesis.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AMERICAN DECLINE

#### 2.1. Introduction:

One of the main debates of the last decade was that on American decline. The debate took, and is still taking place in tandem with the rise of the BRICS economies and the associated challenges posed by China and Russia to US hegemony. Amid talks about American decline, Stephen Walt contends that the US should readjust its foreign policy to focus less on America's "global responsibilities" and more on its "national interests". In contrast, Robert Kagan refutes arguments about American decline and emphasizes the need for America to maintain its responsibilities toward other states. Kagan believes that the main characteristics of the current world order – democracy, prosperity, and great-power peace – have depended greatly on American power and influence. Accordingly, he suggests that this international liberal order will likely falter should American power decline. However, Kagan overlooks the crucial internal problems cited by scholars who are concerned by American decline – including, but not limited to "political gridlock at home, falling education scores, lowered social mobility and most important, a ballooning deficit" (Kakutani, 2012).

Zbigniew Brzezinski was also among those who addressed the notion of American decline. He contends that current changes in the distribution of global power require an assertive and responsive American role instead of a "retreat into an ignorant garrison-state mentality or wallow in self-righteous cultural hedonism" (Brzezinski, 2012, p. 2). Brzezinski goes as far as claiming that the absence of a revitalized America

from the international community would likely stall any progress on highly important issues related to social well-being and human survival (Brzezinski, 2012). That being said, understanding whether America is declining or not requires a thorough examination of the factors that might contribute to such decline, notably the dynamics of foreign policymaking in Washington, the state of the American economy, and the rise of the BRICS economies.

This chapter investigates the debate on American hegemony and decline. It discusses the nature of threats that currently face the US, and studies the economic factor related to the debate on American decline. The chapter also examines the status of American power to determine whether the US is declining or simply strategically retreating.

## **2.2. The Nature of Threats:**

The notion of “threat” is recurrent in the shaping and assessment of American foreign policy ever since World War I, to the extent that threat is deemed crucial to the existence of America. The nature of threat has evolved over time, notably in the post-9/11 era, and Washington has continuously found itself mobilizing the American people for lengthy and costly wars – such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq under the Bush Jr. administration, and Barack Obama’s current campaign to legitimize military action in Syria. These costly wars have been deemed by academics as chief instigators of an alleged American decline. Consequently, it is important to start first with an explanation of the process of war mobilization in the US in order to realize the reason why American wars of choice affect the nation’s global stature.

Walt (2012) insists that Washington mobilizes the American people to support US “wars of choice” that do not revolve around the defense of US territory and strategic interests abroad. In “How Do you Sustain Public Support for Wars of Choice?,” Walt contends that policymakers resort to cunning tactics – threat-inflating, task-deflating, and concealing – to serve that interest, and concludes that these wars should be avoided for the sake of America. He points that prior to both World Wars, Americans supported wars only when they acknowledged the existence of a threat to vital US interests. That was also the case for the American policy of containment during the Cold War (Walt, 2012). The situation is different now, however, and Walt suggests that the US and its allies currently face non-existential threats from “minor powers”, as opposed to the kind of “imminent threat” presented by major powers such as the Soviet Union. In fact, Walt contends that the US itself constitutes an existential threat to governments that do not conform to its policies – cases in point are those of Slobodan Milošević, Muammar Gaddafi, Manuel Noriega, and Saddam Hussein.

Walt also suggests that Washington justifies military action to taxpayers by resorting to three synchronized tactics – “threat-inflations”, “task-deflation”, and “concealment”– that will undoubtedly produce negative long-term implications on the American economy and the public perception of America globally. First, policymakers employ *threat-inflation* to magnify the imminence and dangers of moderate military challenges – as in the cases of Iraq and Iran – and subsequently use *task-deflation* to downplay the cost and length of intervention. Later, policymakers turn to *concealment* to hide the outcome of wars from taxpayers. Wrongfully adopted by both the Clinton and the Bush Jr. administrations in the buildup for interventions in the Balkans, Afghanistan,

and Iraq, Barack Obama seems to be assuming the same path, but to no avail. Walt concludes that *task-deflation* and *concealment* often implicate Washington in protracted and costly commitments over “relatively minor interests” that drastically unwind public support for US policies and degrade American influence abroad. This specific outcome sets the ground for discussions on American decline and balancing against American hegemony. A less influential America allows for more influential opponents, such as China and Russia.

### **2.3. Power and Decline: Is America Declining?**

The notion of “American decline” was a recurring theme in the 2012 presidential elections. Both candidates – Barack Obama and Mitt Romney – resorted to a political dialogue aimed at convincing prospective voters about their ability to reinvigorate “American resurgence” amid fears of the irreversible downfall of US supremacy. In 2012, Walt argues that despite being unfounded, this fear has been recurring since World War II. Walt (2012) contends that American supremacy has arguably been the consequence of good fortune from which the US is still reaping the benefits. Kagan shares a similar point of view. He asserts that the US was never supreme and notes that “in every single decade since the end of World War II Americans have worried about their declining influence and looked nervously as other powers seemed to be rising at their expense” (Kakutani, 2012).

Kagan posits that talks about American decline are rooted in a “nostalgic fallacy” portraying an American golden past since World War II (Freedland, 2012). Such arguments could be drawn back to 1788 when Patrick Henry lamented the Republic’s fall

from “when the American spirit was in its youth” (Freedland, 2012). Brzezinski voices a similar argument, suggesting that the sort of periodic pessimism that is now being elicited about America’s global stature is in fact well-worn. He adds that the US proved to be resilient on several occasions, and has surmounted several periods of anxiety during which many anticipated its demise – notably under the Eisenhower administration, when the Soviets launched the Sputnik, and under the Nixon administration after the failure in Vietnam (Brzezinski, 2012). Brzezinski also notes that America remains currently unrivaled due to the inability of competitors to match its comprehensive global power. This power is composed of four dimensions: “1. global military reach; 2. global economic impact; 3. global cultural-ideological appeal; and, cumulatively as a result of the foregoing, 4. global political muscle” (Brzezinski, 1993, p. 87).

In turn, Walt points to the difficulty of measuring the national power of a given state due to the lack of a specific measurement tool. He contends that such an undertaking becomes even more difficult when one comes to assess the concept of influence. He links the notion of power to that of capability, and argues that the possession of extensive power does not necessarily enable one state to exert its influence over another. In other words, and in many situations, strong states do not possess the adequate tools needed to determine the course of events and compel weaker states to advance their strategic interests. The author postulates that fears by Americans over a decline in US supremacy in the world are unjustified as the US was never a real world hegemon. He makes the case that in some historical instances, “a combination of good fortune and skillful policy put the US in a highly unusual position of primacy” (Walt, 2012). In other words, US

supremacy had been the mere outcome of its competitors' weakness, and its arguable decline could only be a natural consequence of their recovery.

Brzezinski also contends that since the 1990s, when America had become the first real global force, power became globally dispersed. The emerging European Union (EU), along with Russia, China, India, and Japan all developed into contenders scheming for a position. Brzezinski contends that "the emergence of a volatile phenomenon: the worldwide political awakening of populations until recently politically passive or repressed" in Central and Eastern Europe and the Arab world magnifies this dispersal of power (Brzezinski, 2012, p. 26)

Conducting US foreign policy would have been fairly easy had Washington confined itself to the principle of defending the American people against significant threats and nurturing sustained economic development instead of attempting to undertake very difficult, irrational, and trivial objectives such as exporting US democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq, and pressurizing Iran into thwarting nuclear enrichment activities (Walt, 2012). Nevertheless, Walt seems to suggest that Washington's good fortune is likely to continue due to slight advantages over others, including economic diversity and territorial security. In this respect, Kagan refers to America's geopolitical position as an advantage of which its potential peer competitors, notably China – surrounded by watchful neighbors – are deprived (Freedland, 2012). Brzezinski (2012) emphasizes the indispensability of America in an increasingly unstable world, even in a global order in which it is no longer a hegemonic giant. He argues that America's role continues to be crucial to the promotion of "a larger and more vital West" (p. 4) that could embrace

Turkey and a “truly democratizing Russia” (p. 185) while simultaneously playing the balancing and conciliating role in Asia.

Walt, Kagan, and Brzezinski adopt different patterns of analysis while addressing the notion of American decline, but they seemingly agree on the idea that decline in itself is exaggerated. Using Walt’s analysis, one could make the case that the rise of the BRICS economies constitutes a challenge – but not great enough – to US influence around the world, while explaining America’s forthcoming and unavoidable decline. Accordingly, in spite of having a slight advantage over others in terms of economic diversity and territorial security, Washington’s primary quest is not to regain an unfounded and lost supremacy, but rather to find a comparative advantage that would make the US a supreme power instead. As Pankaj Mishra (2012) deems America’s decline to be preordained, a secondary quest would be seeking to create a long-lasting gap with rising competitors that would at least postpone an unavoidable decline.

### **2.3.1. The Economic Factor**

The economic factor constitutes an essential element in the analysis of American decline in the twenty-first century. Long and unnecessary wars have depleted the American economy, making it vulnerable in the face of rising economic powers such as China and Russia. Edward Luce states that current US President Barack Obama believes that the next four years will witness the revival of American economy. The author suggests that the rhetoric about America’s economic recovery hinges on “sobering assumptions” rather than certainties (Luce, 2012). The problem is that such premeditated expectations are anticipated amidst unrelenting declines in US unit labor cost and median

income. In fact, the latest *Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013* published in September by the World Economic Forum indicated a severe decline in US competitiveness for the fourth year in a row – the US is now ranked seventh by the World Economic Forum in the 2012 ranking of economic competitiveness. (Schwab, 2012).

Luce also suggests that America's share of global income has fallen from 36 per cent to 31 per cent between 1969 and 2000 – numbers cited in the International Monetary Fund's *World Economic Outlook*. During the first decade of the twenty first century, America had witnessed a further reduction of 7.9 per cent, more than what it lost in thirty-one years (Luce, 2012). When compared to another rising power and potential competitor, one can notice that China's economy was flourishing simultaneously and steadily – China accounted for 41 per cent of world income by 2012 (Luce, 2012). Referring to Arvind Subramanian, Luce suggests that at this rate China would upset American preeminence and surpass the US within twelve years. This contradicts Brzezinski's claim that America is still unrivalled at all levels.

Despite the harsh criticism directed toward the key principles of neoliberal economics, Kagan maintains that capitalism looks like it is “discrediting itself” and confirms the liberal economic order as being “in everyone's interest” (Freedland, 2012). Further evidence corroborating America's economic struggles can be taken from the debate on sequestration and its role in both US fiscal year budgets for 2013 and 2014, amid incoherent financial policies, cuts on the budget baseline, and a rise in entitlement spending that arguably pose further challenges to defense planning and spending, national security, and strategic planning (Cordesman & Shelala II, 2013). The idea of sequestration was first introduced by the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit

Control Act of 1985 under the Regan administration in order to balance the federal budget by 1991 (Cornell University Law School, 1985). Sequestration comes into play in the event of a rise in the budget deficit. Through sequestration, mandatory spending cuts are applied to the federal budget in order to reduce deficits and limit the damages that could be caused by increased annual budget deficits. Currently, the Congressional Budget Office, the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Defense, and the military have expressed concerns about potential damages to security and strategic planning in the event of cuts on defense spending (Cordesman & Shelala II, 2013).

Luce contests Kagan's notion of American exceptionalism that, according to the author, portrays decline as a matter of choice. Kagan refutes the claim that America is currently in relative decline, arguing that such a premise lacks supporting economic evidence (Kakutani, 2012). However, he asserts that certain politicians and policymakers are continuously hoping for America's decline. According to Luce, Kagan's argument is an allusion Barack Obama who negotiated a reduction in US defense budget and adopted a foreign policy of appeasement. Luce's article seems to suggest that overlooking the ominous economic facts of the past decade, and concentrating on propagating illusory statements about America's supremacy as being reliant on military superiority will only aggravate problems.

Despite divergent views about the state of America's economy, "bad governance, macroeconomic instability, and declining infrastructure" emerge as obvious defects that will likely undermine the recovery process (Luce, 2012). In this regard, Brzezinski talks about the faltering and unstable financial system that benefits "greedy Wall Street speculators" in the US (Freedland, 2012). As Jonathan Freedland asserts, Brzezinski

accentuates the need for reform to guarantee growth and to nurture the internal “social consensus and democratic stability” that is crucial for the US to be a force abroad.

Whether America is declining or not is remains difficult to assess. Certain political and economic factors might prove or disprove the claim. What is certain is that America’s role within a seemingly new emerging world order is evolving, but in what direction? After examining the notion of decline, the next section will address this question by assessing the dynamics of retreat while focusing on the Middle East as a case in point.

#### **2.4. Power and Decline: Is America Retreating?**

The literature on American decline suggests that the theme is still disputed among academic circles. The majority agrees that decline is imminent due to the rise of global competitors such as Russia, China, and other economic powerhouses. However, a select number of analysts continue to believe that America could possibly evade a looming decline by strategically readjusting its foreign policy. This is where a potential tactical retreat from regions such as the Middle East would come in handy.

Mishra argues that US involvement in the Middle East is expected to decrease in the coming years due to Washington’s irregular policies that have alienated many people in the region against it, and the downfall of its regional allies following the popular Arab uprisings. He contends that the new elected governments will likely be more responsive to popular sentiments and demands (Mishra, 2012). Walt contends that regime change in the Middle East will bring about several problems in the years to come. As proven by the experience of Afghanistan and Iraq, it will be very difficult for Washington to mend

those problems with intervention due to differences in political culture. From a defensive realist perspective, Walt suggests that in order to ensure a sound recovery, Washington ought to rethink its policies and learn from its previous failures that resulted in wasted lives and money (Walt, 2012). Russia and China have already taken advantage of America's demonized image in the Middle East by adopting a more assertive foreign policy in the region. With two double-vetoes in the United Nation's Security Council (UNSC), the Syrian crisis provides clear indications that Moscow and Beijing are capable of balancing against Washington.

Walt claims that despite its failures, the US still retains the most power globally, and will do so for many years to come. Nevertheless, its global influence is waning, forcing policymakers to adjust Washington's strategies to fit within a more modest role internationally. Accordingly, efforts should be directed toward emphasizing America's strengths instead of undermining them (Walt, 2012). However, Brzezinski argues that a policy adjustment leading to passivity and non-engagement would likely result in global anarchy and the failure of the international system to prevent conflicts due to America's unwillingness or inability to "protect states it once considered, for national interest and/or doctrinal reasons, worthy of its engagement" (Brzezinski, 2012, p. 102).

In response to this argument, scholars, including Walt, do not advocate American isolationism, but a mere adjustment of American foreign policy, along with a reprioritization of interests for the benefit of America. In other words, they advocate realism. This idea is consistent with John Mearsheimer's theory of offshore balancing – which can be mistaken for isolationism – that Walt considers a "cost-efficient way to influence geopolitics" abroad (Walt, 2011). Walt argues that, in order to work, offshore

balancing needs to be accompanied by astute diplomatic engagement in key areas, and a commitment to intervene in those areas if and when the balance of power breaks down.

However, Walt objects to Mishra's use of the word "retreat" in his article. He contends that Americans should not look at their nation's new moderate role as a "retreat" but rather as a "farsighted and voluntary adjustment to new conditions and strategic priorities" instead. Hence, Washington would not be seen as being expelled from the Middle East, but as voluntarily choosing to relocate its resources toward more constructive areas. The author suggests that assessing this adjustment as a "retreat" would only reinforce neoconservative hardline policies, waste more resources through defense spending, and obstruct the necessary phase of adjustment (Walt, 2012). Making these adjustments will necessitate a shifting of dialogue and foreign policy orientation in Washington among policymakers and scholars. In this respect, Brzezinski acknowledges America's changing role in the world and the need for policymakers to engage in a discourse with the American people on the matter – something that is yet to happen (Kakutani, 2012). The discourse, Walt observes, ought to focus less on America's global responsibilities and more on its national interests for the benefit of the American people. Therefore, discussing and shaping foreign policy would need to concentrate on the benefits it could offer the US rather than other foreign states.

America's current foreign policy tenants were established during the Cold War, when military-oriented policies and rhetoric made sense due to the nature of the confrontation with the Soviet Union. However, times have changed and the current global environment necessitates the adoption of new strategies. Nowadays, the majority of security problems stem from regional-scaled rivalries, failed and falling states, and "local

quagmires” (Walt, 2012). Accordingly, Walt advises Washington to distance itself from those security problems in order to recover faster and equip itself with the right tools to face potential rising competitors as they emerge in the near future.

Brzezinski argues that an American retreat, whether voluntary or not, will have undesirable repercussions on the rest of the world. However, the outcome of such an occurrence will not lead to the emergence of an “effective global successor” like China, but will likely initiate a “protracted phase of rather inconclusive and somewhat chaotic realignments of both global and regional power, with no grand winners and many more losers” (Kakutani, 2012). Robert Kagan goes beyond Brzezinski’s arguments adding that a dominant America is what stands between stability and the regression toward a more dangerous world (Brooks, 2007).

#### **2.4.1. Retreat or Defeat: America and the Middle East:**

While few political analysts and researchers predicted the Arab Spring, Washington was on a quest to create a pro-US ‘New Middle East’, weaker and more vulnerable to external intervention. This project constituted a military roadmap that revolves around the creation of an “arc of instability, chaos, and violence extending from Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria to Iraq, the Persian Gulf, Iran, and the borders of NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan” (Nazemroaya, 2006). The Arab uprisings have affected countries of critical import to US interests, such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and successfully pushed out regimes the US has backed for decades to secure specific economic and security interests related either to the flow of oil or Israel’s position in the region. US foreign policy has tended to be set within a frame of reference centered on a

broad sense of self-interest, oil, national security, realism/pragmatism, and democracy and human rights promotion – albeit usually only at the rhetorical level.

As part of a fundamental and visible realignment of US foreign policy in the MENA region, US support of Israel can no longer be sustained without a price or be presumed to be unconditional. In the past, US bias toward Israel was reflected in the form of ‘strategic advantage’ in weaponry and training, needless bankrolling and arming of the coercively “Jewish” state, safeguarding of Israeli immunity of international law, and half-heartedness in pressuring Israel to negotiate in earnest with the Palestinians could be written off in the past as supporting the ‘only democracy in a sea of dictatorships,’ albeit a putative and highly contested formulation. However, in the wake of the Arab uprisings, continuing this special treatment of Israel is patently unfounded in terms of proclaimed US values and principles and therefore devastatingly undermines US interests and efficacy in the region. This is due to the fact that the barrier for freedom of expression that was installed by dictatorships has been broken, and people across the region feel that they can revolt time and again when faced by policies that do not reflect their wishes and orientations.

The Arab Spring exposes the floundering state of American foreign policy, at least in the MENA region. Thomas Carothers argues that there are many reasons to expect that “US policy is unlikely to coalesce around any unified line,” (p. 5) with respect to the Arab Spring (Carothers, 2011). For Carothers (2011), US rhetoric will likely shift to support democracy but “policy on the ground will vary greatly from country to country, embodying inconsistencies that reflect clashing imperatives” (p. 5). Yet, he offers no remedy, and no critique of this sort of dangerous, albeit historical, inconsistency

in US policy. Clearly, the US needs to take an unequivocal stand in favor of the Arab Spring uprisings as democratizing movements.

Daniel Byman (2011) sees that US interests in MENA are contingent upon its relationship with Israel, and that its 'close' ties spell certain complications for Washington as it will need to respond to both the "irrational and rational concerns [that] that will drive Israeli policy" (p. 124). US support of Israel at every turn is extremely misguided and will give rise to increased antipathy toward the US and Israel; this has deleterious effects on US interests in MENA and potentially beyond should the rise of new popularly-elected Arab regimes someday politicize the flow and price of oil. Unquestioningly supporting Israel costs the US more than it benefits it – it always has, and the stakes have been appreciably raised to unaffordable heights in the context of the Arab Spring.

Mishra contends that American power in the Middle East and Southeast Asia is in decline due to the "collapse or weakening of pro-American regimes" in the region, notably in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen (Mishra, 2012). This is where one notices the slight difference with Walt's analysis that differentiates between decline of power and decline of influence. However, a shared pattern of analysis between both authors suggests that Washington's self-proclaimed moral obligation to spread democracy and freedoms has been the primary shortcoming of American foreign policy. Mishra claims that after overlooking the "political awakening of peoples" during the Cold War by over-emphasizing its attention on Communism, Washington – already facing a "deficit of trust" – need not miss the "mass longing for political transformation" in the Middle East (Mishra, 2012).

Consequently, Mishra and Walt allude to a pressing need for an American foreign policy adjustment, one that acknowledges political and cultural differences with others, especially in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. In fact, Brzezinski claims that in addition to a foreign policy adjustment, Washington needs to make many changes to its dysfunctional and paralyzed political system in case it wanted to recover and retain a dominant global stature (Freedland, 2012). In addition, Washington has to adopt a comprehensive geopolitical vision that will be receptive to changing historical contexts and challenges. As opposed to Kagan's military-oriented approach, Brzezinski remarks that cooperation is the path to adopt. He argues that only a dynamic and strategic collaboration between the US and a stable Europe could revitalize the West. This cooperation would enable the West to build a constructive partnership with a rising and self-assured East (Brzezinski, 2012).

Whereas in the past the US could posture or employ a rhetoric of pro-Israeli bias founded on the notion of shared democratic principles amid a region of autocrats, the US can no longer make such problematic and plainly fictitious claims (Byman, 2011, pp. 127-128). Arab people are dying on a daily basis in the name of democracy and legitimate, representative rule, as well as social justice, meritocracy, egalitarianism, university human dignity, and human rights – these are the very same constellations of values that, in theory, guide the US moral compass and the US must now realign to support the uprisings and put considerable pressure on Israel to either do the same and come to a final settlement on Palestinian statehood or risk remaining on the wrong side of history and becoming regarded by the US government as another apartheid South Africa.

## **2.5. Conclusion:**

Assessing the future of America's global stature must take into account the emergence of a new global structure. John Ikenberry posits that the future would bring about many challenges to the US. Instead of confronting one big threat, the US will likely face a "diffuse, shifting, and uncertain" series of security challenges, namely "collapsing nation-states, global warming, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, pandemics, energy scarcity and so on" (Brooks, 2007). Accordingly, the US would need to disregard the development of a grand strategy to cope with one enemy. Instead, Washington will have to advance and adopt a "milieu-based approach," putting itself at the center of new global multilateral institutions that would bring nations together to solve shared problems collectively (Brooks, 2007). Brzezinski corroborates this vision. He argues that the United States ought to form a large and durable geopolitical foundation that would enable constructive cooperation between nations and address the ambitions and concerns of the global population (Brzezinski, 2012).

Academics like Robert Kagan have overemphasized the military aspects of power as a tool to measure a country's health and status in terms of global influence. The problem with such an approach is that it downplays the rising financial influence of China and Russia and its implications on American power and influence. Scholars have failed to either prove or disprove the notion of American decline due to the lack of conclusive evidence. US influence seems to be declining in regions like the Middle East, but Washington still maintains a level of leverage over certain states and non-state actors. The only certainty seems to be the effect of rising economies, notably China and Russia, on America's global stature. The emergence of China and Russia as global economic, and

potentially military powerhouses, has been shifting the unipolar global structure gradually toward multipolarity. Thus, the assessment of America's current and future role in the world ought to be consistent with the new evolving global dynamics of power and influence that will be elaborated in the coming chapters.

Washington's primary post-Cold War challenge was to maintain a unipolar world order that ensures US supremacy. The US undertook constant and significant geostrategic adjustments that repositioned Washington's foreign policy, moving it from Europe to the Middle East and Asia in response to new arising challenges to its global stature (Vuving, 2007). In contrast to the Cold War, during which the nature of struggle was that of global dominance between two world powers, the current global strategic map is characterized by various struggles for global and regional dominance between more than two powers. Four strategic regions constitute the bulk of those struggles: West and Central Europe, "Central Eurasia" (former USSR), the Middle East, and East and South Asia (Vuving, 2007). The next chapters in this thesis examine the strategic contest for regional supremacy between the US and China in Asia, and that between the US and Russia in the Middle East.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHINA: A THREAT TO AMERICA?

#### 3.1. Introduction:

Describing the nature of current Sino-American relations can be a difficult task. Some have contended that the US and China could very well be embroiled in a new cold war that is still in its initial stages (Perlez, 2012). Washington's cautious and gradual retreat from the Middle East, accompanied by a measured reinforcement of its presence in Asia, may be taken as a proof of this claim. What is certain is that China can be considered the first non-Western power – since Japan (1867-1912) – that possesses the potential to influence and/or reshape the existing global order (Chellaney, 2012). Nevertheless, the notion of a new cold war between the two nations is far-fetched. Both countries are in fact economic partners and have mutually beneficial bilateral trade relations.

When it was argued that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of an era in which liberal democracy would spread globally, Brzezinski warned about the rise of possible forces of turmoil in the developing world, along with weaknesses that could damage the West's global sway (1993). He contended that China – and not Russia – was likely to take on a global leadership role. In this respect, Brzezinski underscored the importance of an American-Chinese dialogue that would diminish the likelihood of conflicts between both nations, while also being a safeguard for regional stability (Brzezinski, 2012). He warned that America's emphasis on "material wealth, on consumption and on the propagation of self-indulgence as the

definition of the good life,” along with internal political and economic problems, could jeopardize its posture as a global power (Brzezinski, 1993, p. 112).

Brzezinski argues that the world’s center of gravity is shifting from the West to the East due to America’s internal political and economic problems – unsustainable national debt, a faltering public education, and a highly partisan political process –, ill-advised foreign policy decisions, and the mounting command, by potential rivals, of what he calls “twenty-first century modernity” (Brzezinski, 2012, p. 73). Those problems constitute obstacles to America in its quest to maintain a dominant global stature. America’s current engagement in the Middle East, notably in Syria, and the active role of both China and Russia in hindering US strategies there, demonstrates Washington’s inability to conduct foreign policy unilaterally as it once did before. It also emphasizes the importance of alliance building in the struggle for power, and indicates that balancing American power will largely depend on the building of strong alliances that will provide contenders with the necessary requisites to challenge American unilateralism.

According to Brzezinski (1993), China’s imposing “imperial lineage” and ongoing strategic “tradition of carefully calibrated patience” (p. 79) have been fundamental in carving the nation’s ascension in terms of power and influence. These two factors will remain crucial to an all-encompassing growth that will allow China to challenge American hegemony, or at least be on par with America. This is only conditional to a gradual American decline and to Chinese prudence, scaled growth, and capitalization on America’s mistakes. Brzezinski claims that China explicitly accepts the dynamics of the existing international system, while implicitly expecting them to change. Change as anticipated by China will not be beneficial should the system drastically

collapse. It will be fruitful only within the framework of a “gradual redistribution of power” that will grant China more influence and international recognition (p. 79).

China is not yet ready to dethrone the US and assume the reigns of global leadership, and will not be in the foreseeable future. *A fortiori*, China will merely look to balance against, and not overthrow the US given its investments in America and the realization that a global crisis affecting America’s global primacy will reflect negatively on China’s well-being, and minimize the chances of confrontation. It is notable to mention that China currently projects an appealing image through its outstanding Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annual growth rate, one that gives it a substantial competitive edge in Latin America and Africa (Brzezinski, 1993, p. 81). Accordingly, the key issue to be monitored is whether China can and will take advantage of the existing status quo to balance, along with Russia and other allies, against the US and its allies.

This chapter evaluates Chinese power and global status to understand whether China can balance American power or not yet. It starts by assessing the tenants of China’s power that lie in prudence and economic growth. Then, it moves to address the Sino-American confrontation in the Asia-Pacific to appraise the prospects for war between China and the US. The chapter also talks about the importance of alliance building to China as a tactic to balance American power.

### **3.2. Assessing China’s Power:**

“Be not afraid of growing slowly; be afraid only of standing still:” a Chinese proverb that depicts the ideology that is currently driving China’s ascension to power. China has been steadily growing in wealth and power, which, as Walt claims, necessitates

an accurate, broad, and genuine assessment by diplomats, academics, and independent scholars in the US. An accurate assessment of China's power by policymakers in Washington will prevent the US from underestimating China, while also precluding the inflation of its threat and the overstatement of its military capabilities (Walt, 2012). Walt adds that exaggerating Chinese power could be detrimental to the US economy as it might result in unnecessary defense spending to protect its Asian allies and ensure superiority over China. Adversely, Dan Blumenthal contends that deterrence, by highlighting military power, is the only way for the US to keep China at bay. Blumenthal believes that America's leaders should engage in what Walt calls threat-inflation and task-deflation. These two notions imply that the US would be buying peace by making the case that greater defense spending and military presence in Asia will avert a potential conflict that could be more costly to Washington (Blumenthal, 2012).

### **3.2.1. Elements of Power – Prudence and Economic Growth:**

Assessing China's power requires examining thoroughly two elements that the nation's leadership adopts: strategic prudence and long-term planning. Brzezinski (1993) notes that the leadership in China has been careful about exhibiting excitement about, and claims to global leadership. Chinese leaders seem to be convinced that America's decline and China's rise are inevitable, but need to unfold progressively. Brzezinski mentions that the guiding principle that is currently shaping policies in China is based on Deng Xiaoping's following statement:

Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile, and never claim leadership (p. 81).

Thus, Beijing will be focusing on growing economically, translating economic power into political influence abroad, and waiting for Washington to commit fatal mistakes in order to capitalize on them. This explains China's inconspicuous policy orientation regarding the current Syrian crisis on which it adopts a clear stance but relies on Russia to convey it. It also emphasizes the importance of alliance-building in balancing American power and influence. If true, this line of analysis posits that alliance-building is the short-term strategy to balance American power and influence in areas of strategic geopolitical significance. In turn, this will constitute a strong foundation for toppling America and assuming global leadership in the future, in what Brzezinski thinks to be the continuation of China's "impressive imperial lineage" (Brzezinski, 1993, p. 79).

Understanding China's rising potential in a new global order necessitates an examination of its engagement in the global political economy and the transition from socialism to a form of Chinese capitalism. As Shaun Breslin (2007) states, China's economic strength will allow it to surpass the US in the foreseeable future. Being the second largest economy and the fourth largest trader globally, and possessing considerable amounts of foreign currency reserves, China imposes itself as a force with substantial weight in the international community.

The transition from radical totalitarianism to nationalistic authoritarianism proved to be a turning point for China, and translated into remarkable economic growth and success (Brzezinski, 1993). The transition to capitalism has evolved through three stages: policy reform, abandonment of the old system, and a process of macroeconomic control over development issues (Breslin, 2007). The transition began in 1978 when the nation's leadership sought to refurbish the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) via a process of re-

legitimization. The reform concentrated on important issues related to ideology, economic performance, and stability. It reaffirmed Chinese nationalism, advocated for capital accumulation and economic growth, and reassured political stability through CCP rule. Then, between 1984 and 1988, decisions to reform the economic configuration and to expand the productive force allowed for the emergence of legalized non-state actors and the privatization of numerous state-owned enterprises, which catalyzed the economy and capitalized economic growth (Breslin, 2007).

China's national wealth has risen along with significant investments in regions like Latin America and Africa. For instance, trade between China and Africa achieved a thousand (1000) percent growth, climbing from ten (10) billion to a hundred and seven (107) billion dollars between 2000 and 2008 (Brzezinski, 1993, p. 81). In 2005, China's economy grew by almost 10 percent, achieving a GDP of \$2.26 trillion (Wyne, 2006). However, assessing China's potential to challenge American dominance can only be measured accurately if these investments are successfully translated into political and military influence. China's global economic expansion could be used to reinforce the nation's army, which would constitute a threat to the US. This gives rise to a debate about containing or engaging China. Engagement remains the most probable strategy to be adopted as a special task force required to assess China's military power determined that "the balance between the US and China, both globally and in Asia, is likely to remain decisively in America's favor beyond the next twenty years" (Wyne, 2006, p. 78).

China's economic reforms and the resulting success revolve around three elements: fiscal reforms to balance local, central, and share taxes; creating additional budget revenues through taxes and extra system revenues; and increasing financial

autonomy in certain sectors, which generates significant economic development. The success of economic reforms was made possible by joint political and social reforms locally that paved the way for system democratization and social flexibility (Breslin, 2007). Local reforms were accompanied by less isolationism and more gradual engagement globally to achieve international economic integration. The country's admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 allowed for further improvements on existing reforms, and prompted China's leadership to encourage trade and investment when deemed profitable domestically, and restrain them when regarded as potentially harmful to its constituencies. Prior to being admitted to the WTO, China gradually integrated into the international economy through different phases that included the establishment of restricted Export Processing Zones, the adoption of the "twenty-two regulations" that created an enabling environment for foreign investments, and the reception of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs). As a result, China established itself as a chief actor on the global stage (Breslin, 2007).

However, this transition generated negative social repercussions that could obstruct China's ascension to power. The transition into a Chinese form of capitalism has generated social inequalities between classes, as a result of which the new middle class has benefited from increased prosperity and access to global information. It was perceived as a way of creating "a new capitalist ruling class in China which exploits the Chinese workers and farmers" (Breslin, 2007, p. 90). Despite China's high GDP scores, the country's per capita GDP (PCGDP) remains substantially low (Wyne, 2006). Nevertheless, this incites new political and social expectations, generates animosity toward prevailing impediments to political rights, and encourages political

nonconformism. However, these are issues that the Chinese leadership can address with tranquility as China slowly but steadily ascends to power. This process is starting to take shape as semiofficial Chinese commentators began to contest American unilateralism and the legitimacy of a currently failing status quo that is based on the American principles and culture. Those commentators suggest that China initiates a calculated campaign to promote the Chinese model based on “harmony” globally. This concept would depict China’s peaceful rise and propagate “the concepts of justice, win-win, and joint development” (Brzezinski, 1993, p. 83).

### **3.2.2. Sino-American Confrontation in the Asia-Pacific:**

China currently faces a confrontation with Japan in the East China Sea, over the Senkaku Islands – seized by Japan in 1895 after a war with China. After being administered for over twenty-seven years by the US, the islands were reacquired by Japan, with ownership going to a private family. In 2012, the Japanese national government bought the islands, eliciting much discontent in China and inflating the prospect of a military confrontation between the two states (Walt, 2012).

Jane Perlez asserts that diplomatic and academic circles around the world acknowledge that the US is contending with an extremely confident China. The confrontation between the two nations comes amid rising skepticism from both countries about a potential conflict of interests in Asia – notably with regard to Japan over the Senkaku islands, considered by China as “territorial imperatives” (Perlez, 2012). The author reports that China’s leader Xi Jinping’s background and close ties to the country’s rapidly developing army could steer Sino-American relations toward a more

confrontational path. Perlez suggests that China could push for greater integration with Taiwan – a policy that Taiwan rejects – and emphasize on fortifying the army to safeguard its interests in Asia and abroad. In return, America’s allies in Asia – notably Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore, and India – expect the US to increase its military presence in the region, as promised by Barack Obama, despite doubts about its ability to do so.

The situation presents the US with a delicate problem as it would be expected to stand by its Japanese ally in case of a confrontation with China. Furthermore, Taiwan’s siding with China amplifies Washington’s uncertainties and ambiguities, leaving it with an uncertain stance on the matter. Walt suggests that Japan offers to sell the islands to China to test its resolve and intentions. Thus, if China refuses to buy, Japan and its allies would emerge from the dispute as the “reasonable party” (Walt, 2012). Walt adds that as China’s power rises, Beijing will be looking to depict the US and its regional allies as the primary source of instability in East and Southeast Asia. Consequently, it will be unlikely that other states join Washington’s efforts of balancing China. If China were to be perceived as belligerent, the US would find it easy to preserve its Asian partnerships and foster cooperation between Eastern and Southeastern Asian states. However, security competition in East Asia will continue to increase as the dispute will unlikely be resolved by bargaining.

Along the same lines, Jin Canrong suggests that “China should shoulder some responsibility for the United States and the United States should share power with China” (Perlez, 2012). In response, Walt contends that the US will be unable to preclude China’s expanding influence as its power rises. Instead, he suggests that a “smart great power”

such as the US should “try to maneuver potential adversaries [like China] into taking on costly burdens that bring few benefits” (Walt, 2012). Walt contends that several factors will determine the outcome of the Sino-American rivalry. He argues that the country that will benefit the most is the one that will best manage its economy – that being the primary source of national power. Other decisive factors will be the ability to gain the support of other important countries, engage in costly missions to defend allies that do not offer much in terms of geopolitical and strategic gains, and identify a crisis before being affected by it.

Going back to Walt’s arguments about the interrelation between the notion of threat and foreign policymaking in the US, current talks about China’s military threat to the US and the development in Chinese weapon technology are arguably part of threat inflation about China. Considering the present military status quo, one can deduce that America’s threat to Chinese territory far exceeds the threat that China could constitute to American soil (Walt, 2012). A logical argument stipulates that more advanced US military capabilities concern China and drive it to modernize its force with the aim of preserving the capacity to deter and overcome US defenses. Such developments might be wrongfully used by “hawks [...] to portray China as a rising revisionist threat” (Walt, 2012). He maintains that China’s military development is guided by the same premises that prompted the US to establish a “strategic triad” for deterrent stability in the 1950s.

### **3.3. Does Confrontation Mean War?**

As things stand, it seems that the world could be heading toward an inevitable security competition between the US and China if the latter’s economy keeps growing.

Walt contends that pursuing and enhancing strategic missile defenses is not the optimal approach for the US to adopt to contain Chinese nuclear modernization. Such a plan will be strategically obsolete and economically costly. Instead of enhancing military capabilities to deter China, policymakers in Washington should establish a negotiating framework that will create and execute regulations similar to those that slashed US and Russian arsenals. A diplomatic maneuver will decelerate, and potentially terminate China's quest to acquire second-strike capabilities that enable its military to retaliate against any potential first strike by the US (Walt, 2012).

While Walt promotes diplomacy as a means of appeasing Sino-American confrontations, Bonnie Glaser affirms the need for Washington to bolster its leadership in the Asia-Pacific region in order to sustain peace and stability and safeguard its interests there. Glaser suggests that reviving the American economy would be the elemental measure that Washington should adopt to achieve the aforementioned goals (Glaser B. S., 2012). She argues that China has historically exploited American weaknesses. Glaser (2012) further contends that:

Historically, the Chinese have taken advantage of perceived American weakness and shifts in the global balance of power. In 1974 China seized the Paracel Islands from Saigon just after the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Treaty, which signaled the US withdrawal from the region. When the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev met one of Deng Xiaoping's "three obstacles" requirements for better ties and withdrew from Can Ranh Bay, Vietnam, in 1988, China snatched seven of the Spratly Islands from Hanoi. Two decades later, as the United States-Philippines base agreement was terminated, China grabbed Mischief Reef from Manila.

Glaser suggests that Beijing currently bases its assertive policies toward its neighbors in the region on the belief that America has already started to decline and that

the tide is shifting in China's favor. She adds that the US could prevent this "miscalculation" by assertively balancing against China and assuring its allies about Washington's capacity to safeguard peace in the Asia-Pacific region.

In this regard, both the US and China have ample reasons for concern. On the one hand, Washington's main objective is to democratize China and prevent it from dominating Asia. On the other hand, China's rising power is conducive to growing regional and global ambitions (Blumenthal, 2012). However, Walt suggests that states cannot build their policies on the assumption that others will remain benevolent. Crisis and conflict prevention begins with the development of self-defense strategies by states to protect national territory and interests. China is presently adopting this path by translating some of its mounting economic wealth into military power in an attempt to "create a more favorable security environment in its neighborhood" – a similar strategy to America's "Monroe Doctrine" (Walt, 2012). Brahma Chellaney also argues that China's military preemption – since 1950 – for the sake of "strategic defense" elicits significant security concerns in Asia. He notes that China's military interventions were performed in times during which the country was "poor" and "internally troubled" (Chellaney, 2012). Hence, the author suggests that fears for security troubles in Asia should be mounting now that China is prospering economically. However, he adds that the multiplicity of powers in Asia will likely keep China's "expansionist impulses" in check.

Preserving Chinese security in Asia would logically require China to forestall a bulky American military presence in its environs by attempting to cast US forces out of the Asia-Pacific region (Walt, 2012). In that event, an American retreat from the region would be a strategic defeat for America, one that would grant China a growing influence

globally. To hedge against a rising China, Washington is looking to fashion new Asian and international alliances, while consolidating existing ones. Obama duly affirmed America's determination to maintain its presence as a power in the Asia-Pacific region for many years to come (Feng, 2012). Walt suggests that this strategic geopolitical confrontation will likely increase the potential of conflict in the region. China's neighbors will seemingly reject its "benevolent hegemony" and ally with the US (2012). Chellaney's analysis validates this argument as he observes that Asian states will be compelled to align with the US if China were to pursue an intimidating foreign policy (Chellaney, 2012). Moreover, Glaser argues that China's neighboring countries will likely be absorbed into its circle of influence should Washington fail to take action and rebalance against China in the Asia-Pacific region (Glaser B. S., 2012).

Along the same lines, Zhu Feng maintains that talking about balancing against China as a new US strategy in the Asia-Pacific region is premature. However, he notes that this approach explicitly indicates a desire by Washington to divert its attention cautiously away from Europe and the Middle East to focus on Asia (Feng, 2012). Feng adds that Washington would initiate a concrete military restructuring phase in the region that would revolve around "setting Darwin Port in Australia as the new submarine corps base, rotating military presence to the Philippines, ushering in the Pentagon's global security programs that very specifically target China" (Feng, 2012). Christopher Hill provides a similar argument. He argues that the Obama administration has been turning its attention toward the Asia-Pacific region (Hill, 2011). Hill contends that exiting from the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq ought to be accompanied simultaneously with a consistently assertive American policy in Asia, sensible enough to reassure Beijing of

Washington's reluctance to induce a Sino-American confrontation that would cost the US dearly.

Nevertheless, Walt contends that existing economic ties between China and the US will confine the rivalry to certain appeasing boundaries. These boundaries will eliminate the tensions and decrease the chances for war between both states, and will ensure that hostilities will not lead to an undesired confrontation between the US and China. As Feng argues, the Sino-American relationship is profitable for both countries no matter how complex it can be (Feng, 2012). However, unlike the self-sufficient Soviet Union, China depends on raw materials and overseas markets heavily, which will possibly compel it to secure global alliances and protect its sea lines of communication (Walt, 2012).

The above analysis suggests that the chances for a military confrontation between the US and China are very slim. Walt posits that the potential for a Sino-American war will depend on the wisdom of leaders in Washington and Beijing. Prudence and perception will preserve peace and increase the likelihood of cooperation between the US and China. Feng adds that the two global powers are unlikely to confront each other in a "new cold war". He argues that China has not reached the "great power" status yet, and should engage in a measured process of learning the tools to become one. A significant disproportion of power between the US and China still exists, despite recent Chinese military and economic developments.

Tensions between the two countries will certainly rise in the future, but the relationship will probably remain manageable. Feng asserts that competition has proven to be beneficial for the US and China. Several instances in the past indicate an orientation

by both countries toward handling rather than escalating conflicts, while constructively reacting to thorny issues (Feng, 2012). Blumenthal suggests that in spite of having conflicting interests, both sides are reluctant to transform strategic competition into conflict. Managing the rivalry constructively would require Washington and Beijing to recognize their differences and focus on their mutual interests (Blumenthal, 2012). It is in the best interest of the US and its Asian allies to seek and sustain constructive relations with China (Hill, 2011).

### **3.4. Balancing through Alliance Building:**

Throughout history, the continuous presence of a hegemonic state led to the emergence of what Ali Wyne calls the hegemonic continuum theory. This theory posits that the international system will always be influenced by one superpower with considerable military, economic, and political power until supplanted by a state or coalition of states (Wyne, 2006). During the Cold War, alliance-building was one of the decisive factors that determined the outcome of the Russo-American confrontation. The current assessment of confrontation as a possible outcome of bipolarity suggests that alliance building and polarization will once again be crucial in tipping a camp over another. Thus, balancing American power cannot be achieved by a single state alone, and has to be assessed within the framework of a strong alliance of states. In that regard, Brzezinski (1993) claims that a weakening America is unlikely to be balanced by “a single preeminent” (p. 75) power. He suggests that the faltering of American hegemony will likely produce a phase of “realignments of both global and regional power” (p. 75). This statement reflects the magnitude of alliance building in future power contests, and

the emergence of polarized camps based on geological interests. These alliances will provide global powers like China and Russia with enough leverage and the “requisite combination of economic, financial, technological, and military power” (p. 77) to balance against the US in a new world order.

A key debate has emerged recently about the effect of a possible Sino-American confrontation in Asia, and the role of alliances within Asia in determining the outcome of a conflict. Both Washington and Beijing have close Asian allies, but their role in the event of a confrontation, along with their willingness to be involved in case it arises are questionable and different from other areas such as the Middle East. While the Middle East provides a fertile ground for alliance building based on geopolitics and state policies supporting or resisting American strategies in the region, Asia has been fostering healthy inter-state relations grounded in economic development and collaboration. What this means is that despite America’s shift toward Asia, China will seek to make the Sino-American confrontation contested outside of Asia, in regions like the Middle East where conflicts and struggles for domination of natural resources have been ongoing for a considerable amount of time.

In recent years, the need for consensual stability in East Asia has been discussed extensively throughout the region due to constant diplomatic quarrels and the rise of nationalism and military spending by states. However, the nature and premises of stability are yet to be determined. In this respect, the principle of democratic peace – or *Pax Democratica* – has been the trend that the US and Europe have adopted – notably after World War II – as a guiding principle of foreign policy and integration. This Kantian “liberal” perception of international relations relies on three essential

components: political democratization, deep economic interdependence between states, and the presence of reliable institutions allowing multilateral state interaction. It is difficult to presume that this principle could be implemented in East Asia due to the region's wide array of political systems, as well as differences in country sizes and degree of development (Young-kwan, 2011), but an Asian version of it has emerged in the form of a *Pax Pacifica*.

An analysis of the relations between East Asian countries in the past thirty years suggests that the establishment of a *Pax Pacifica* based on economic integration and collaboration could constitute the backbone of consensual stability not only in East Asia, but in Asia as a whole. In fact, economic collaboration has proven to be fruitful in Asia, despite political rifts between East Asian states (Young-kwan, 2011). When completely and successfully applied in the region, one could make the case that a *Pax Pacifica* could bridge the differences with the US and Europe, and eventually generate what Henry Lambert called a *Pax Economica*, the sort of peace that would abolish international conflicts.

Kevin Rudd acknowledges that the confrontation between the US and China will have significant repercussions on Asia's future. He argues that this status quo will not necessarily imply that Asia will become a "Sino-American duopoly," particularly with the emergence of dynamic economies and the expansion of free-trade agreements in the region (Rudd, 2012). To support his argument, Rudd highlights the rising dynamic economic power of Asian countries – like India, South Korea, Indonesia, and Australia – that favor open-economy politics. He notes that the combined gross domestic product of Asian countries – excluding China – is significantly higher than that of China, and

relatively proportionate to that of the US. Accordingly, one deduces that Asian countries retain the capability of detaching themselves politically from potential Chinese and American orbits, and sustaining themselves economically should a Sino-American conflict erupt in the region.

Despite the region's territorial disputes and security disagreements, there seems to be a widespread desire among Asian countries to reinforce national sovereignty and institutionalize cooperation (Rudd, 2012). Unlike earlier times when Japan ruled over Asia unopposed, several powers exist, and need to coexist in Asia today – Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, India, and Indonesia, in addition to China (Chellaney, 2012). Economic and security collaboration could become a viable tool to circumvent a potential rift that could possibly polarize Asia into Chinese and American blocs. The author contends that the establishment of the Group of Twenty Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (G-20), along with the East Asia Summit that took place in 2011, ought to be the foundation for a global reconciliation of interests. The inclusion of Asian countries, especially China, in deliberations about international financial matters during the summit proved to be constructive in terms of accelerating the global economy's recovery (Rudd, 2012). This contradicts Brzezinski's claim that cooperation in several regions, including Asia, will decline, and that states such as Japan and India will consider increasing their political and military cooperation with Europe and the US to hedge against China (Brzezinski, 1993, p. 77).

In recent years, China has been taking firm steps toward global inclusion by enhancing its global leverage through cooperation with the rising BRICS economies. The international community – and above all the US – is in dire need for cooperation with

China and an economically healthy Asia due to the poor state of the global economy. Rudd suggests that policymakers today should contemplate the establishment of a “*Pax Pacifica*,” a sort of peace that will acknowledge the existence of US and Chinese power, and revolve around common security principles. In that event, *Pax Pacifica* would constitute a safeguard for the region should Sino-American relations deteriorate (Rudd, 2012).

### **3.5. Conclusion:**

China has been ascending to power due to the prudence of its leadership, a focus on economic growth, and strategic alliance building. Chinese prudence and patience in defining and applying policies have made it a force to be reckoned with, at least economically. Facts prove that for the time being, the US and China are too tied to clash, however. China’s admission to the WTO has generated several trading disputes with the US and the EU. Nevertheless, the fact remains that China constitutes a large market for American and European investments (Breslin, 2007). Any deterioration in relations between both nations therefore remains a normal reflection of foreign policy conduction in international relations, as well as the pursuit of interests in regions of geostrategic significance in terms of richness in natural resources. Asian countries have proved to be resilient to extreme polarization and conflicts due to their focus on collaboration and economic growth, and forced both the US and China to look elsewhere for building alliances.

Balancing American power will require China to foster constructive alliances with other influential states such as Russia and Iran. It will also require Beijing to capitalize on

American mistakes and maintain scaled economic growth. Change in the international structure of power is already being felt, but comprehensive redistribution and balancing of power will necessitate more time to materialize as China is not ready to challenge American by itself. In turn, America has to assess Chinese power thoroughly to neither overestimate, nor underestimate it. Overestimating China's power will reflect negatively on America's economy by prompting unnecessary defense spending, while underestimating it will allow Beijing to achieve greater economic growth and translate it into military power and political influence abroad.

The orientation of Asian states toward collaboration, and their rejection of polarization, generates two outcomes. On the one hand, they remove Asian allies from what can be called the "Asian equation" and make it very unlikely for them to be involved in any potential struggle between the US and China. On the other hand, they leave both Beijing and Washington in the hunt for global allies to balance against each other. This matter will be more tangible in conflicts that transcend Asian borders. A case in point would be the Syrian crisis in the Middle East, which brings Russia into play. While US attempts to build an alliance that will support its anti-Syrian regime policies and facilitate its political and military maneuvers are obvious, China does not seem to be dissociating from Russia in its support for a camp that rejects US interventionism and seeks to tame American power and influence in Syria and the region. This theme will be addressed thoroughly in the following chapter that evaluates Russia's resurgence and its relations with China in terms of balancing American power.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE RESURGENCE OF RUSSIA

### 4.1. Introduction:

While the fall of the Soviet Union has undermined Moscow's influence in regional and global affairs, Russia is currently seeking to revive the status it once had and retake a dominant position in the emerging international system. Historically, Russia attempted to dominate areas of direct interest such as Eurasia and certain areas in the greater Middle East. It is currently regaining its great power status, at least at a regional level, and is attempting to preserve the security and prosperity of geographically close territories in Asia and the Muslim world (Tsygankov, 2010). Despite not possessing the adequate military and economic tools to make it a global power, Russia is establishing partnerships with other states, namely China and Iran, to be able to balance American power within the framework of alliances.

Understanding Russian foreign policy requires an examination of the country's self-identification process that is historically based on what Alicja Curanovic calls "the West-East axis". Curanovic argues that Russia's policies toward the West and the East are driven by two important factors: identity and fear. She adds that the West and the East have unevenly influenced Russian self-identification. While "the West was a dominating concept in the self-narration of Russians, the East was mostly a function of the interaction between Russia and the West" (Curanović, 2012, p. 2). Russia's relations with both the West and the East have been conditioned by religion, an essential factor in the shaping of the nation's identity and perception of uniqueness. Curanovic posits that while Western

Christianity represented a challenge to Russian Orthodox rudiments and strained relations with the West, China's neutrality in religious identity paved the way for pragmatic relations between Moscow and Beijing. Thus, preserving Russia's distinguished identity and self-perception is considered a main tenant of Moscow's foreign policy at large.

The main objective of post-Cold War US strategy has been to maintain the tenants of a unipolar global order dominated by Washington. However, the current global structure is best described not as unipolar, but as a multilateral world structure with the US as a hegemon (MacHaffie, 2011). In a multipolar global structure with a hegemon, it is possible and likely that a state, or group of states, will emerge to compete or balance against the existing hegemon. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the end of the Cold War and the confrontation with the Soviet Union required Washington to reposition its foreign policy, shifting its geostrategic attention from Europe to the Middle East and Asia. Undertaking this shift meant facing new challenges for global and regional preeminence, driven by struggles to dominate the sources and flow of natural resources (Vuving, 2007). From a defensive realist theoretical framework, balancing power and balancing threat are two major reasons that drive states to form alliances. Being a powerful state and a powerful threat, the US provides both Russia and China with an incentive to align with each other.

While the previous chapter focused on the rise of China and its role in balancing American power, this chapter examines the rise of Russia and the elements of foreign policy that compel Moscow to build an alliance with China to balance American power. The chapter will first assess the nature of Sino-Russian relations and the overlapping security and economic interests that enable mutual cooperation between Moscow and

Beijing. It will then evaluate Russian interests in the Middle East by focusing on relations with Iran and Syria to understand the region's strategic importance to Russia in terms of balancing American power and influence.

#### **4.2. Domestic Struggles and Foreign Policy:**

A potent foreign policy is not always a reflection of a state's domestic capabilities. Despite having an active foreign policy that, along with China, balanced against American influence and hegemony in the Middle East, Putin is facing a number of domestic struggles. Lilia Shevtsova suggests that Russia's personalized power system that was shaped by Stalin and endured several "political plastic surgeries" under succeeding leaders until Putin, is already beginning to decay (Shevtsova, 2012). Decay, according to Shevtsova, is an outcome of the lack of structural changes within the system that was propagated by succeeding ruling elites that created an illusion of change through shammed elections. Justifying a complete control over society by portraying the outside world as hostile is no longer a viable strategy. The standoff between Putin's regime and the population comes at a critical time for Russia. Domestic struggles could theoretically hamper Putin's aspirations to reestablish Russia as a global power. However, Moscow's regional alliances with states like China, Iran, and Syria, are successfully allowing the regime to separate domestic troubles from foreign policy ambitions. Most importantly, Moscow's alliances constitute a support for Putin to rest on and keep the domestic front in check, while maneuvering suavely internationally.

Alliances have constantly played a significant role in states obtaining and preserving power, security, and status globally and domestically (MacHaffie, 2011). In

this respect, Moscow's assertive foreign policy and its strategic alliances with China, Iran, and Syria, are overshadowing domestic struggles that threaten to undermine Russia's resurgence. Thus, Russian foreign policy needs to be considered as a major strength for Moscow. Russia is gradually recovering the elements of power that reestablish it as a key regional and global actor. This allows the Kremlin to conduct a more assertive foreign policy that pursues great power ambitions. Russia's objective remains to recuperate the capabilities of a great power. Reaching this goal requires achieving economic recovery, larger integration in the international economy, and the creation of "soft security coalitions in Europe and Eurasia" (Tsygankov, 2010). Moscow understands that, to be engaged globally, it has to develop the military and economic capabilities of great powers to be able to survive among them. These capabilities will allow Russia to secure its borders, protect its sovereignty, and address challenges in regions such as Eurasia, central Asia, and the Middle East. Russia will have to exploit its advantages in sectors such as energy, military affairs, and membership in international organizations. The Kremlin partially overcame problems generated by the Soviet disintegration, such as loss of territory and a grave economic breakdown, through the development of a long term foreign policy aimed at recovering and preserving Russia's great power status and influence in global affairs (Tsygankov, 2010).

Russia's recovery takes three important dimensions: economic recovery, social recovery, and capitalization on significant power resources. First, and since the late 1990s, Russia began to recover its economic power with significant increases in its global share of GDP and GDP per capita (Young, 2010). Up until 2007, Russia has achieved economic growth at a continuous rate of about 7 percent a year, and the size of the

economy grew from \$200 billion to \$1.3 trillion between 1999 and 2007 (Tsygankov, 2010, p. 45). Second, the social aspect of recovery is reflected by the growth of the middle class to constitute 25 percent of the Russian population in 2008 (Middle class grows atop, 2008). This aspect is of foremost importance as it prevents internal destabilization and allows Russia to conduct an active foreign policy (Tsygankov, 2010). Third, recovery is also based on Russia's oil and gas reserves. In 2006, it was reported that Russia possessed roughly 34 percent of the world's gas reserves, and 13 percent of its oil reserves, and produced 12 percent of the world's prime energy resources (Arbatov, Belova, & Feygin, 2006). Increases in the prices of gas and oil grant Russia substantial power due to high demand in markets such as Europe.

The recovery of state and power capabilities allows Moscow to conduct an assertive foreign policy. For example, the leadership in Moscow successfully engaged influential states such as China and Iran on issues of common concern, namely security in Central Asia and areas adjacent to Russia, and challenges posed by Islamist fundamentalism. Moscow cooperated with the US against the Taliban and in the war against Islamist fundamentalism (Kreutz, Winter 2002, p. 54). Russia has never been colonized by a Western power and maintains a political and spiritual independence from the West (Poe, 2003). This sense of independence has allowed Russia to preserve its ambition for regional and global influence. Being a large country with vast borders and abundant natural resources that create vulnerability due to multiple security challenges, Russia developed a greatly centralized political system that enables prompt response to foreign threats (Tsygankov, 2010).

The Kremlin has been able to challenge great powers such as the US to acknowledge Russia's resurgence and influence in global affairs. This can be deduced from Russia's role in the ongoing Syrian crisis in which it still manages to contain American ambitions and sustain the Assad regime. Furthermore, at the top of Putin's assertive foreign policy agenda is the exploitation of growing energy prices and the capitalization on Russia's natural gas and oil reserves to advance a plan for international economic expansion. In order to reinforce sovereignty and independence in Russia, expansion will be selective and managed by a strong nationalistic leadership (Tsygankov, 2010, p. 46). Accordingly, the Kremlin has engaged in long-term contracts with European markets that constitute 50 percent of Russia's foreign trade, and increased its arms sales abroad to states such as China, India, Venezuela, Algeria, Syria, and Malaysia (Tsygankov, 2010, p. 47).

#### **4.3. The Sino-Russian Alliance:**

Relations between Russia and China go back to 1689, when they signed the Treaty of Nerchinsk that delineated the borders between the two states. Other treaties followed in 1727 and 1858 that further delineated borders and allowed Russia to open a language school in the Chinese capital. Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Moscow showed signs of sympathy toward states they considered victims of Western imperialism, and China was one of them. Later in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party was established. It was supported by the Soviet Union intellectually and militarily during its internal conflict with the Chinese Nationalists. A Russo-Chinese split emerged under

the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev due to the latter's attempts to de-Stalinize the Soviet Union, and his policy of rapprochement toward the US.

Despite concerns about this rapprochement, China's main concern was de-Stalinization as Mao favored an ideology of pure socialism over Khrushchev's international socialism. Khrushchev alienated China by, for example, denying it nuclear technology due to fears from the emergence of a powerful Chinese leadership, driven by a strong army and ideology. The split continued under that of Leonid Brezhnev due to disagreements about the demarcation of borders and Russian fears for Chinese mass migration to the scarcely populated Russian Far East region, rich with natural and energy resources. However, positive relations resumed between Russia and China after the end of the Cold War, mainly due to China's economic revival, and are currently still developing on security and economic levels (MacHaffie, 2011).

Moscow perceives and defines its enemies, friends, policies, and national interests as largely based on the notion of fear. Russian foreign policy has been affected by deep-rooted anti-Western sentiment and fear of the West. Having focused on fear of the West, the process of self-identification in Russia has created a social anxiety that vilifies the US, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and other political groups in Western countries. In recent years, fear of Islamic fundamentalism has emerged as a primary concern for Russian society and policymakers. China, on the other hand, was never really considered to be a source of threat (Curanović, 2012).

As mentioned in the first and third chapters, balancing American power needs to be examined within the framework of international and regional alliances. Consequently, the focus in the thesis is on China and Russia as rising powers capable of disrupting

America's unipolarity. They have overlapping security and economic interests, such as maintaining stability in Central Asia due to the vitality of energy supplies to their economies, and fighting against ethnic separatism supported by Islamic fundamentalism (Weitz, 2012, p. 72). While China is heading toward more influence in the global economy, Russia is still struggling to properly recover and gain stability (Curanović, p. 2). Richard Weitz considers that China's gradual military expansion, and its economic infiltration into Central Asia, along with Russia's political disorders and dependence on a mono-economy of energy, can destabilize Sino-Russian relations (Weitz, 2012, p. 71).

It is gradually becoming apparent that no one state can stand and dominate the international system. The US has looked to strengthen its position by forming a strong alliance through the NATO, and Russia and China seem to be adopting the same path by building economic and security partnerships among each other, and with other peer states. However, both Russia and China share joint interests and objectives in the sphere of international relations. Attaining those objectives requires collaboration between Moscow and Beijing, allowing them to complement each other in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Russia and China are aligning with each other due to shared interests. Beyond being neighbors with shared borders, they both qualify as great powers with large militaries, both have similar regimes, and frequently find themselves in conflict with the US (MacHaffie, 2011).

Russia and China have previously signed a number of economic and political agreements. They agreed to expand their joint military collaboration. These agreements reflect a unified stance by Moscow and Beijing on several key issues like Asia-Pacific security, Iran's nuclear program, and the ongoing Syrian crisis, which suggests that

Russo-Chinese relations are at their peak (Weitz, 2012, p. 71). Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia and China have worked closely to overcome existing tensions. Moscow and Beijing have improved their relations gradually by settling border disputes, establishing a framework for cross-border cooperation, and worked jointly to control illegal migration (Curanović, p. 2). Beyond shared economic interests related to ensuring primacy over the production and flow of natural resources, Moscow and Beijing have continuously affirmed their desire to strengthen the rule of law globally, theoretically at least, and promote equality and multilateralism between states (Razov, 2012). Those components explain their involvement – covertly in the case of China – in the Middle East generally, and their close ties with Iran and Syria.

#### **4.3.1. The Premises of Alliance:**

One of the major premises of realism in international relations is that states seek to obtain power in order to defend their interests and security in the global system. MacHaffie posits that alliance-building is an effective way for major powers to pursue this goal (MacHaffie, 2011). As established in the third chapter of the thesis, China currently stands as an influential power globally. Despite not fostering enduring alliances in the past, MacHaffie argues that China has deepened its cooperation with Russia. From a structural and defensive realist approach, Russia and China are likely to form a military alliance to balance against the US as a powerful state and a potential threat to their interests in their respective spheres of influence.

Whether the US constitutes an actual military threat to both Russia and China is irrelevant. The Sinno-Russian vision is based on the perception that US military strength

and policies to promote democracy constitutes a threat to established norms and traditions in both countries. Therefore, both Russia and China need each other as allies to counter American influence in their areas of interest such as the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. For example, Central Asia is a region of foremost geostrategic importance to both Russia and China. Both countries share commercial, national security, and geopolitical interests in that region, and cooperate together to prevent other great powers from meddling in Central Asian affairs (Chen, 2012).

Russian and Chinese interest in Central Asia stems from the region's abundance in natural resources. Russia has traditionally considered Central Asia as a sphere of influence, essential to balance against the US and other European powers, notably after the 9/11 attacks, when the US sought to strengthen its military presence in Central Asia. In turn, China's dependence on foreign countries in term of energy supply has increased significantly in recent years, making energy protection in Central Asia a strategic choice for China. Russia accepted the diffusion of Chinese capital in Central Asia, considering China as a valuable ally to balance against American influence in the region. Both nations institutionalized cooperation by launching the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a regional cooperation and safety framework (Chen, 2012).

#### **4.4. Russia and the Middle East:**

Addressing the theme of the thesis requires a narrower understanding of Russian foreign policy that concentrates on a specific region like the Middle East. Russia's engagement in the Middle East is driven by three dimensions that pertain to Moscow's domestic and international challenges. The first basis of intervention is domestic. It

revolves around the need to respond to dangers posed by the threat of secessionism in the North Caucasus and the repercussions that might arise from a possible radicalization of Russian Muslims. The second basis of intervention relates to economic interests in the region. Economic interests in the Middle East focus on established partnerships with Iran and Syria, but also aim to create and strengthen trading relations with America's allies in the region. The final dimension of intervention is conditioned by geopolitical factors that include Moscow's competition with the West and its desire to reassert itself internationally as a dependable great power that supports and sustains international norms and laws (Dannreuther, 2009).

#### **4.4.1. Premises of Russian Interest in the Middle East:**

Throughout history, the quest for warm water ports has been a trend in the shaping of Russian foreign policy, namely in regions such as the Middle East. Russia's policy toward, and its links with, the region and the Islamic world, can be traced back to 1677 when, and until 1917, consecutive Russian Tsars fought several wars with the Ottoman Empire to control the Black Sea and Caucasus areas. In fact, Russia has long been involved in the Middle East and fostered better relations with Arabs than other Western countries did (Kreutz, 2002). As Andrej Kreutz posits, Russia is currently an independent and meaningful player in the Middle East, with interest in the broad Middle East region that includes Turkey, Iran, the Arab world, Israel, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia. Russia's interests stem from the geographical proximity of the Middle East to its southern border. This factor is of utter importance to Russia as Moscow considers that any disturbances in the region, notably those caused by Islamist radicalism and Saudi

support for rebels in the Northern Caucasus and Uzbekistan, are capable of causing domestic problems in the Russian Federation. Russia finds more reasons for concern due to America's great presence in the greater Middle East and its human, military, and financial investments in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Georgia (Kreutz, 2002).

Russia's interest in the Middle East is also driven by economic factors. The USSR was one of the major arms suppliers to Arab states in exchange of political and ideological preeminence in the 1970s and 1980s. Now, Russia aims to make profit from arms sales to the Middle East, and control over the oil in the Caspian Sea and its transportation to the West. Despite the end of the Cold War, geopolitical competition in the greater Middle East area has not ended and is largely driven by attempts to control natural gas and petroleum industries (Barylski, 1995). For that reason, Russian policymakers seek to develop better relations and foster cooperation with geographically neighboring oil-producing Arab countries. Attempting to exert and maintain influence in the region is driven by competition with the US which has substantial regional presence in the development of natural gas and petroleum industries (Zoellick & Zelikov, 2000, pp. 74-75). Fostering partnerships with oil-producing Arab countries represents an attempt to find alternatives for Western clients and economic partners by establishing additional networks of customers for Russian industry. Accordingly, Moscow seeks to magnify commercial gains by sustaining trade with Iran, developing commerce with Kuwait and other Gulf countries, and supporting and protecting Iraq (Kreutz, 2002, pp. 54-55).

Beyond political and economic interests in the Middle East, cultural factors affect Russia's policies in the region. Despite being mainly Eastern Orthodox, fifteen percent of Russia's population consists of Muslims that diverge from other Russians in terms of religious traditions, social culture, and political attitudes. This is of particular relevance to Russian policymaking due to the conflict in Chechnya and continuous terrorist attacks on Russian territory by Islamist radicals.

Russia's political, economic, and cultural interests in the Middle East require alliance building and the development of perceptive policies. Pavel Baev argues that the uprisings in the MENA have affected Russia's policy orientation, and created new opportunities for increasing and consolidating its influence in the region (Baev, 2011). Russia reacts to any event that could constitute a threat to its national security and interests. Whereas Russia was indifferent toward NATO intervention in Libya against Qaddafi, its stance on the Syrian crisis was different. As revolutions have the tendency to spread in waves, and given American and Saudi intervention in Syria, Russia fears that the trend might spread toward the Caucasus and Central Asia. Several states in both areas share similar characteristics to Arab autocracies and are vulnerable and prone to regime change (Baev, 2011, p. 16). Therefore, Russian anxiety about instability in the region spilling over to neighboring regions justifies Putin's assertive policy toward Syria. Policy success in Syria would grant Moscow more influence in the greater Middle East. Russia's leadership developed its policies in the MENA region in synchrony with China as it shares security concerns with Russia. Russian and Chinese foreign policy coordination has been reflected in the United Nations as they constantly vetoed Western efforts to inflict sanctions on anti-Western regimes. Most notable is the Russo-Chinese common

view on Iran's nuclear program and rejection of Western involvement in the Syrian crisis (Weitz, 2012, p. 73).

#### **4.4.2. Russian Policy toward Iran:**

Since assuming power, Putin has made the Middle East an area of central and increasing focus in his foreign policy strategies. In 2000, Putin declared that his policy strategy toward the Middle East will revolve around restoring and strengthening Russia's position in the region, particularly its economic posture (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, 2000). Putin's attention to the region is driven by his ambitions to balance American power, notably through strong alliances with Iran and Syria, and cope with the Chechen threat and Islamist terrorism at home. Putin's regime considers the conflict with Chechnya a significant threat to Russian security and territorial integrity given the Chechen leadership's infiltration by foreign jihadists (Khrestin & Elliott, 2007). As noted by Igor Khrestin and John Elliott, Putin's stance on Islamist terrorism unfolds into several stages that include cooperation with the US on the broader war on terror, Putin's request to join the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in which Russia was granted observer status, and alliance building with Iran.

Moscow's consistent attempts to support Tehran and develop its relations with succeeding Iranian leaders aim at achieving three objectives related to preventing threats and pursuing interests: upsetting Washington, advancing and protecting Russian influence in the Middle East and Syria, and addressing the threat of Islamist terrorism at home. Russo-Iranian relations started to develop in 1989 and resulted in several military and energy deals that saw Russian companies build two nuclear reactors at Bushehr

(Khrestin & Elliott, 2007). Iran's nuclear program is not a source of problems between Iran and the US, but between Russia and the US as well. Divergence in policy toward Iran dates back to the Yeltsin presidency when Russian and the US were cooperating in different areas except in Iran to whom Moscow the primary supplier of arms and nuclear technology, against Washington's will (Freedman, 2003, p. 74). Russia and Iran have strongly established roots of regional and global bilateral cooperation related to mutual interests. Regional cooperation included joint attempts to sustain the cease fire in Tajikistan, support the Northern Alliance in battles against the Taliban in Afghanistan, and backing Armenia against Azerbaijan in order to prevent the latter from gaining influence in the Transcaucasia. Globally, both Iran and Russia allied against American unipolarity (Freedman, 2003). Despite having bumpy relations at times such as Russia's invasion of Chechnya under Putin, Tehran downplayed problems due to the need to preserve its alliance with Moscow to counterbalance Washington diplomatically.

Despite accusations alleging that Iran's nuclear program was primarily military, Russia's foreign ministry has persistently maintained that the program was and still is conducted in line with established international norms. Putin has established energy trade with Iran, supported Tehran's nuclear ambitions, and shielded the Iranian government from Western pressure. Fostering good relations with Iran is Putin's strategy to keep it from interfering in Chechnya and other Islamist matters that are considered to be threats to Russia. The agreement between Moscow and Tehran on this issue is of high significance due to Iran's geographical proximity to troubled areas in Russia's south. In this regard, it is notable to mention that Syria also supported Russia's stance against Islamist fundamentalism diplomatically in 2005 by welcoming the election of pro-Putin

Alu Alkhanov as president of Chechnya (Khrestin & Elliott, 2007). Iran has long cooperated with Russia to develop a sustainable energy strategy that would establish it as a valued regional actor. This undertaking faces several obstacles related to differences in opinions between Moscow and Tehran on issues related to Islamic institutionalism and ethnical and racial differences in Central Asia and Caucasia. However, attempts by Europe and the US to disrupt Russo-Iranian collaboration in the field of energy and economy resources in the Middle East establishes the ground for more cooperation to frustrate Euro-American attempts to dominate an area of high geopolitical significance (Simbar, 2011).

Cooperation between Russia and Iran, joined by China, extends to the ongoing Syrian crisis. Russia and China vetoed resolutions in the Security Council on Syria that requested immediate action to topple the Assad regime. Efforts to overthrow the Assad regime by the US and its European and Arab allies are aimed at breaking the rejectionist camp by defanging Iran's most active ally outside Venezuela (Williams, 2012). Washington's quest to create a pro-US 'New Middle East', weaker and more vulnerable to external intervention justifies its policy toward the Syrian crisis. This 'New Middle East' project intensified rejectionism from Iran, Syria, Hamas in Palestine, and most importantly Hezbollah in Lebanon. This project reflects a shift in US foreign policy in the region that coincides with that of Israel. Both Rice and Olmert had publically revealed, in 2006, American-Israeli intentions to launch a 'New Middle East' project. This project constituted a "military roadmap" that consists of the creation of an "arc of instability, chaos, and violence extending from Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria to Iraq, the Persian Gulf, Iran, and the borders of NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan" (Nazemroaya, 2006). US

Army Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Peters contended that redesigning the Middle East's borders would constitute an essential solution to the region's problems, as seen by Washington, adding that the process could consist of necessary pains for the people of the Middle East (Peters, 2006).

Regional power and politics are now focused on the Persian Gulf due to Iran's ascendance in terms of power and influence in the Middle East. The threat of confrontation between the US and Iran magnifies the importance of Iran's non-state allies (Fischer, 2008). Hezbollah's close ties with Iran and Syria grant Lebanon the upper hand in strategic issues related to the broader Arab Israeli conflict and the Palestine cause. Also, Israel itself has always been anxious about Hezbollah's alliance with Syria and Iran. The Lebanese resistance has enhanced the "spirit of resistance" in the Middle East, while exposing Israel's military shortcomings following both military defeats in May 2000 and July 2006 (Baroud, 2006). This status quo makes Washington's political maneuvers nearly impossible without appeasing Iran and its allies, particularly Syria and Hezbollah. Israel has never hidden its solid alliance with Washington. Shabtai Shavit, a national security advisor to the Knesset, affirmed the contiguity of US and Israeli interests (Buncombe, 2006). Those specific interests revolve around a strategic objective to break up the Syria-Lebanon front and reduce Iran's influence as reflected by its alliance with Hezbollah (Baroud, 2006).

Accordingly, Washington's intervention in the Syrian conflict is motivated by its desire to undermine Iran by toppling its most significant ally in the Arab region, which would also have repercussions on Hezbollah in Lebanon (Margolis, 2012). The US and its allies have been feeding rebels in Syria with arms, money, intelligence information,

and diplomatic support to topple the Assad regime. Behind America's intervention in the Syrian lies influence from Israel, a state that has considerable political pressure on Washington's policies in the Middle East. Israeli leaders consider that a destabilized Syria is a source of many benefits to Israel. They believe that toppling Assad would significantly undermine Iran, their main regional rival, frustrate Syrian efforts to regain the Golan Heights, and finally cripple Hezbollah and Palestinian resistance factions (Margolis, 2012). This magnifies dissension between Russia, China, and Iran on one hand, and the US and its Western European allies on the other (Watts, 2012).

#### **4.4.3. Russian Policy toward Syria:**

Russia and Syria have long been trading partners, with ties that date back to the Soviet era, establishing a sustained military and economic alliance. China can also have a significant role in the process, being one of Syria's largest trading partners (Zakaria, 2012). While Zakaria argues that Russia's economic and political alliance with Syria is weak and limited, it is noteworthy to mention that Syria constitutes a highly important asset to Russia's current foreign policy due to its geostrategic significance in relation to oil and gas routes. This argument is demonstrated by Moscow's stance during the Syrian crisis, which resulted in two vetoes in the Security Council, preventing action against the Assad regime.

Russia remains Syria's largest arms provider. Russia's involvement in the Middle East, and Syria specifically, goes beyond trade partnerships. It is based on the rise of fundamentalist multinational jihadi groups and Russia's desire to promote and protect its interests in the region. The Syrian crisis embodies Moscow's quintessential fears of

Islamic radicalism that has emerged among armed rebels, given its continuous struggles with fundamentalist groups in border areas and southern regions (Zakaria, 2012). Should it want to persuade Moscow to abandon Assad, Washington needs to address those fears tangibly. The conflict in Syria and Russia's intervention in the crisis underlie Moscow's belief that events in the Middle East and the Gulf have repercussions on Russia and its immediate neighbors. The leadership in Moscow believes that certain Middle Eastern states, namely Saudi Arabia, have an undeniable influence on, and role in promoting Islamic radicalization in the Caucasus (Kreutz, 2002, p. 52).

Saudi support for "Wahhabite" rebels in the Northern Caucasus and Uzbekistan's Ferghana valley has deteriorated relations between Moscow and Riyadh (Gresh, 1998). Despite official denial by Saudi Arabia of intervention in the crisis, Moscow believes that the source of problems in Chechnya lies in the presence among rebels of radicalized mercenaries from Arab countries, fighting for power and money (Kreutz, 2002, p. 53). Moscow and Riyadh remain tacit allies as they both seek to maintain high world oil prices, but Russia retains reservations against Saudi Arabia as it considers it a chief funder for Chechen rebels (Freedman, 2003). Thus, Russia's intervention in the Syrian crisis indicates a broader struggle with Saudi Arabia and other states that, according to Russian authorities, support Islamist radicals that threaten Russian national security and sovereignty.

The crisis in Syria cannot be brought to an end without a negotiated agreement that includes Russia and China. Adopting a path that favors the triumph of armed rebels in Syria will further alienate Moscow and Beijing against Washington, and possibly produce a phase of instability that resembles the current situation in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The current crisis poses several concerns and challenges related to the capability of the Syrian opposition to govern, establish security, and prevent sectarian retaliations in Syria. Involving Russia in a negotiated solution to the crisis will address these challenges due to friendly relations with the Assad regime, and Moscow's eagerness to preserve and develop its military and commercial dealings with Syria (Simes & Saunders , 2012).

Furthermore, the development and implementation of Russian foreign policy in recent years has revolved around principles of soft power and human security. Russian diplomats have constantly argued against the use of military coercion in foreign policy, favoring soft power methods as ultimate tools to pursue and protect national interests (Solovyev, 2011). Like any influential power, Russia's political dialogue is based on self-interests and can be duplicitous. In spite of acting coercively in areas of direct influence such as the Baltics where its interests are threatened, Moscow favors a multilateral global system in which the UN and the Security Council preserve world peace and a balance of power internationally (Curanović, 2012, p. 2). Russia's keenness for diplomacy should therefore be explored fully by the US in Syria and other regions of conflict such as the Caucasus.

Moscow is known to be skeptical about US activity in the Middle East and the post-Soviet region. In 2007, Vladimir Putin explicitly criticized the *Pax Americana* by describing it as a threat to global peace. He asserted that this threat needs to be balanced by cooperation between Russia, China, and India (Curanović, 2012, p. 3). In September 2013, Putin addressed the American people and their leaders directly through an op-ed in the New York Times. His letter expressed frustration with American policies in the Middle East, namely Syria, but also revealed anxiety about threats to Russian national

security as a result of such policies. Putin stated that international security has to, and can only be preserved by the United Nations Security Council (Putin, 2013). He attacked the US for acting unilaterally, and implicitly warned Washington against bypassing UN regulations to take military action in Syria without authorization from the Security Council. Putin's concern about the conflict spreading beyond Syria's border as a result of a potential US military strike exceeds that about attempts to resolve Iran's nuclear problem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It exposes Russian fears of instability in the region that could affect Russia directly. Putin's main fear is driven by the presence of radicalized al-Qaeda, Islamist fundamentalists, and Arab mercenaries fighting in Syria, and who could be manipulated into attacking Russian territory.

Russia's confrontation with the US is not limited to the Middle East, and extends to the Caucasus. This confrontation draws back to the armed conflict between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia in 2008, after Washington helped overthrow the existing Georgian government to establish a US-backed administration led by Mikhail Shakashvili (Margolis, 2012). A similar pattern emerged again in the Caucasus due to the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, with both countries being backed by Washington and Moscow respectively. As Eric Margolis reports, Russo-American relations are further deteriorated by US plans to install a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe (Margolis, 2012).

#### **4.5. Conclusion:**

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, newly independent central Asian countries started to receive considerable attention from great powers due to their

geostrategic position and abundance in energy and resource reserves. As neighboring countries with considerable interest in the region, Russia and China developed commercial and national security partnerships to prevent other great powers from wielding leverage over Central Asia (Chen, 2012). These partnerships were further strengthened by the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that reveals the shared interests of Russia and China to preserve security in Central Asia, cooperate in mutual defense strategies, and expand mutual energy cooperation in the region.

States do not need to be in harmony on every level to become allies, and previous tensions between Russia and China do not prevent the formation of an alliance between them. Moscow and Beijing share mutual geopolitical and economic interests, and under the leadership of Putin, Sino-Russian relations will continue to develop moderately as the Russian president is keen to preserve strong relations with Beijing. The Russia government will seek to attract Chinese investment to vitalize and improve the Russian economy.

Beyond building partnerships with China to balance American power and threat in Asia, Russia also focuses on alliance building in the Middle East. Russia's intervention in the Middle East goes beyond mere geopolitical interests and competition over natural resources. This intervention comes as a result of a broad strategic framework that has three dimensions. The first dimension is related to Russia's domestic political context and the threat posed by separatism and terrorism. By intervening in the Middle East, Moscow intends to stabilize the Russian domestic front by thwarting the threat of secessionism arising from the North Caucasus, and reduce the effect of Islamist radicalization on its Muslim population. The second dimension relates to economic interests that are deemed

essential to the reestablishment Russia's great power status. To serve this purpose, Russia focuses on energy trade with Iran, fostering strong relations with Syria to protect its domestic front, as well as economic and political relations with pro-Western countries like Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia (Dannreuther, 2012, p. 558). The third dimension revolves around geopolitical interests in the region. Russia's alliances in the Middle East provide Moscow with leverage to balance American power and prevent Western hostile policies toward Russia. Most importantly, Moscow looks at preserving its influence as a key player in the Middle East by helping Assad survive, and having a say in a possible post-Assad Syria. It is important to mention that Moscow's resurgence in the Middle East was and is still facilitated by imbalanced US policies in the region.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## CONCLUSION

### **5.1. General Findings:**

At times of global political, economic, and security changes, in which unipolarity is no longer possible, this thesis examined the theme of American decline and the rise of China and Russia as potential competitors from a defensive realist theoretical framework. It concluded that one power alone cannot disrupt American hegemony. American dominance can only be unsettled by a coalition of powerful and influential states, and hence this thesis focused on China and Russia as America's main competitors. It argued that despite America's decline in terms of economy and influence, China and Russia alone are not ready to displace it and assume the title of competitors. They are both capable of balancing American influence regionally in areas of political and economic interest, such as Central Asia and the Middle East, and within the framework of strategic geopolitical alliances. Hegemony as witnessed since the end of the Cold War is no longer applicable globally. The theory that every hegemon will ultimately be challenged is currently materializing as other global actors are emerging to balance against power, threat, or both simultaneously. Accordingly, discourse in the realm of international affairs is shifting away from hegemony toward multipolarity and the need for collaboration between the US and other emerging powers such as China and Russia.

Successive wars against Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 respectively have triggered American decline. Both wars were followed by a devastating economic crisis

that started in the US and spread across the world. The crisis proved to be most damaging to the American economy due to large defense spending to finance wars and other covert interventions abroad. The thesis found that American decline can neither be proved nor disproved due to the lack of conclusive evidence. However, it showed that American influence is gradually decreasing in regions such as the Middle East. It determined that the US does possess the tools to act unilaterally anymore. In order to preserve a respectable global status, leaders in Washington should develop new strategies that reposition American foreign policy to fit with emerging global dynamics. America's new foreign policy should disregard coercion as a means of pursuing interests, and rather aim to foster collaboration with emerging powers through global multilateral institutions.

America's economic troubles coincided with China's economic growth. At a time when the US was waging wars, China was developing prudent long-term policies that allowed for steady growth in terms of wealth and power, and established it as a player with substantial international influence. Chinese policies revolve around two convictions. First, they acknowledge that at this point in time China cannot challenge American hegemony alone. Second, they believe that American decline is inevitable, which requires patience and the development of strategic alliances that would fill the void when American hegemony crumbles. Accordingly, China will focus its attention on ensuring continuous economic growth. It will look to translate growth into political and military power, and wait to capitalize on America's mistakes. China will also seek to balance American threat and influence through alliance-building in areas of geopolitical significance. Washington is currently redirecting its attention from the Middle East toward Asia. The thesis determined that the US cannot contain or deter China by

aggression and coercion. It can only do so by reviving its economy and developing frameworks for negotiations based on shared interests and existing economic relations, while preserving self-defense strategies as potential deterrence methods.

Balancing against America prompts China to develop alliances with states such as Russia and Iran that reject US hegemony and seek to tame its power and influence, at least regionally. Russia is working toward reviving its global power status, more so under the leadership of Putin. By fostering relations with China and Iran, it is looking to preserve its interests and influence in Central Asia and the Middle East, and protect its national security from Islamist fundamentalism. Despite domestic struggles in Russia that could undermine the Kremlin's ambitions to revive the state as an influential actor internationally and regionally, Putin seems to be succeeding in containing domestic struggles by leading an active foreign policy. Russia is steadily recovering the elements of power that characterize and fit the ambitions of great powers through economic and military recovery, greater integration in the international economy, and strategic alliance-building.

Unlike its stance toward the West, Russia has never considered China as a substantial source of threat. Despite tensions in past relations, both Moscow and Beijing share intersecting economic and security interests related to natural resources, maintaining stability in Central Asia, and suppressing ethnic separatism. The thesis established that both states are likely to ally to balance against US power and threat to their interests in their respective spheres of influence. Security and economic cooperation between Russia and China allows them to capitalize on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. But beyond this, both states share a rhetoric that reveals a greater ambition

to consolidate the rule of international law, and promote multilateralism and greater equality among states. Russian and Chinese interests in Central Asia are based on the region's abundance in natural resources. Dominating the region will allow them to ward off US and European attempts to stop their economic progress. The area is of foremost significance to China due to its dependence on foreign sources of energy supply.

In the Middle East, Russia's alliance with Iran and intervention in Syria comes as a direct response to the threat of radical Islamists backed by the US and its allies, namely Saudi Arabia. They represent Moscow's attempt to assert itself as an influential power in the region and protect its domestic front from foreign threats. This is the underlying factor behind Russia's continuous attempts to foster good relations with states such as Iran, Turkey, Israel, Kuwait, and other oil-producing Arab countries. Furthermore, the Middle East provides Russia with ample resources through arms trade, with states such as Iran and Syria, which provide considerable support to the Russian economy.

## **5.2. From Pax Pacifica to Pax Economica:**

Sino-American relations look to be heading toward normalization in Asia. Several encouraging signs indicate that Asian countries will rebuff divergence in favor of cooperation. China, Japan, and South Korea have agreed to initiate negotiations about a trilateral free-trade agreement later in 2012. That agreement will represent a qualitative leap for Asia, as it will institutionalize economic cooperation in the region. If successfully concluded, such an agreement – comprising the world's second, third, and twelfth largest economies – will put Northeast Asia on par with, if not above, the EU and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The agreement will present a

higher degree of regional economic integration and could potentially prove to be of greater importance to the global economy (Young-kwan, 2012). The establishment of a trilateral agreement between China, Japan, and South Korea is likely to produce a momentum effect that could eventually incorporate the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other countries – Australia, New Zealand, and India – into the group.

This agreement will likely relax Sino-American tensions by enhancing economic cooperation between the US and Asia. In response to such an agreement, Washington would attempt to improve the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), and seek to promote a unified Asia-Pacific economic community by urging Japan to join the TPP. It is unlikely that Japan will decline Washington's request due to strategic motives. Hence, Japan and South Korea will likely attempt to find or create channels to connect a "Sino-centric Asia and a US-centered Pacific" (Young-kwan, 2012). The fulfillment of regional integration and economic cooperation could in theory stabilize political disputes among Asian countries, and translate into a form of international integration, on the basis of economic cooperation, establishing peace and soothing Sino-American political tensions. However, building a framework for regional and international peace – starting from a *Pax Pacifica* and leading to a *Pax Economica* – will likely be a lengthy process, and will necessitate the presence of respected visionaries, as well as extensive political support from all states. The momentum for regional and international peace will only be possible through the creation of small functional institutions that will constitute the backbone of a global institution for cooperation in the future.

This, however, remains a theory to be tested. Despite Asia's remarkable speed and scale of economic development, many serious challenges could possibly hinder the region's success. Those challenges are often overlooked due to the concentration on economic troubles in the US and Europe (Chellaney, 2012). Asia must handle several obstacles revolving around territorial and maritime disputes, overzealous nationalism, rising religious extremism, historically-rooted conflicts, and aggressive resource competition over water and energy. Asia's political integration and the creation of a security framework have been shadowed by economic integration. Accordingly, political and economic integration would be two interdependent processes that ought to be addressed jointly within a comprehensive framework for integration. Asia could unite and mold a new world order only if it combines its Western-oriented economic values with Western political values (Chellaney, 2012).

### **5.3. A Look at the Future:**

Russia's assertive stance in the Syrian crisis, and its support to the Assad regime, indicates that American influence in the region may be gradually declining. Moscow's policy in Syria is driven by its desire to advance and protect Russian influence and interests in the Middle East. These interests are related to natural gas and oil resources, as well as fighting Islamist fundamentalist to ensure the protection of Russian national security.

President George W. Bush's greatest achievement in terms of US Middle East policy was destabilizing the region. However, Washington's assumed outcome of a pro-Western Middle East is yet to be attained. A newer Middle East is currently emerging,

one that appears to be more responsive to popular demands for reform. However, it is also marked by a decline in the permeability of Arab politics to transnational political influences. This leaves room for large influence from international actors, such as the US and Russia, who will likely play a substantial role in determining the future of the region. Both Washington and Russia will jointly tailor the new Middle East to fit their interests, with an upper hand for the latter. The current status quo in the Middle East is a clear reflection of US limitations and Russian gains in terms of power and influence in the region. Popular uprisings across the Middle East produced serious complications for US diplomacy, altered US foreign policy priorities, and temporarily impeded the implementation of the ‘New Middle East’ project.

Washington will undoubtedly make certain concessions with regard to previous taboos – such as its position toward Islamists – at the benefit of preserving its interests. Washington could arguably be attempting to promote and produce a new form of “Arab moderation” in which new regimes would be more reflective of popular demands for reform, but still dependent on US foreign political, economic, and security agendas. In turn, Moscow will look to support the Assad regime, and ensure to play in role in determining the outcome of a post-Assad Syria should Assad be toppled. It will also seek to strengthen its alliance with Iran, and foster new alliances with oil-producing Arab countries that would be beneficial economically in terms of energy trade, and politically in terms of warding off the threat of Islamist terrorism.

Despite tensions between the US and China on one hand, and the US and Russia on the other, the world seems to be heading toward multipolarity and collaboration. New global dynamics of power are emerging, and states are acknowledging that preserving

their interests can no longer be achieved by aggression and coercion. The economic crisis is compelling states to reduce defense spending and focus on collaboration to resolve matters related to shared geostrategic interests. History always repeats itself. Therefore, what is likely to happen in the near future is the elaboration by great powers of new settlements, similar to Sykes-Picot and Yalta agreements, to reorganize certain geographical areas such as the Middle East, not geographically, but in terms of spheres of influence.

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