

China and the BRICs: A Real (but Limited) Partnership in a Unipolar World*

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Although Chinese leaders and analysts believe it is too early to judge the U.S. to be in fundamental decline, they do recognize that “newly emerging powers” (xinxing daguo) are an increasingly important force in international politics. In the past couple of years, the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) have transformed themselves from an abstract notion into a more formal political grouping. For China, besides helping to minimize dependence on the U.S. and possibly to constrain American unilateralism, BRIC cooperation serves several other functions. China also benefits from this cooperation by stabilizing its international environment, helping other developing countries, strengthening its identity as a developing country, coordinating its position with other BRICs to maximize leverage, and hiding in a group to avoid negative attention. This recent cooperation and interaction with the BRICs has been important, but the space for future BRIC cooperation is limited by fundamental differences among the BRICs, the continued importance of the U.S. for each of the BRICs, and intra-BRIC competition. To date, there is little evidence that China and the BRICs are trying to overthrow the existing international order. Instead, China has accepted and joined the existing order, and has been working together with other powers to reform its shortcomings. Although this negotiation is in its early stages and will likely be difficult, the willingness of China and the BRICs to work within the system and the openness of western countries to meet some of their demands makes it much less likely that China and other rising powers will try to overthrow the order.

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Even before the current global economic crisis, but much more after its onset, analysts and observers have predicted a decline in American power and a return to a multipolar world. Whether one prefers the phrase “non-polarity,” “post-American world,” or “rise of the rest,” the common picture which emerges is one of decreased U.S. power and influence and increased power and influence for the newly emerging powers.¹ The prediction of Goldman Sachs economists that the BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) will surpass the G7 economies before the middle of this century shows how significant and fundamental this shift in the distribution of power is likely to be.²

Although there seems to be broad consensus about the probable changes in power dynamics, there is much less agreement about how the process will unfold. Will any individual rising power, such as China, decide to boldly challenge the existing order and try to overthrow it? As other rising powers, such as the BRICs, become more powerful, will they unite to challenge the United States collectively? With many of these rising powers located in Asia, will they threaten each other and end up in rivalry and conflict among themselves? Will the rising powers use their increased power and influence to safeguard the international order and behave according to former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's vision of a “responsible stakeholder?” Or, relatedly, will the rising powers behave as true partners in Secretary of State Clinton's vision of a “multi-partner world” in which countries cooperate to overcome “collective action problems” and effectively address global problems?

This article examines China's recent cooperation with the BRICs to better understand its emergence and implications, and also to provide some initial insight into how this process of shifting power might unfold. Although Chinese leaders and analysts believe it is too early to judge the U.S. to be in fundamental decline, they do recognize that “newly emerging powers” (*xinxing daguo*) are an increasingly important force in international politics. Under enduring unipolarity, structural constraints incentivize China to cooperate with the U.S. and make sure that a rising China is not perceived to be fundamentally challenging

1. For an excellent review of these arguments, see Christopher Layne, “The Waning of U.S. Hegemony: Myth or Reality?” *International Security* 34 (Summer 2009): 147–72.

2. See Cynthia Roberts, “Introduction,” *Polity* 42 (January 2010): 1, note 1.

American interests. Despite these constraints, in the past couple of years, the BRICs have transformed themselves from an abstract notion into a more formal political grouping, which has included official BRIC summits and joint communiqués.

China's cooperation with the BRICs, and BRIC cooperation more generally, should not be seen as solely a response to U.S. power. For China, besides helping to minimize dependence on the U.S. and possibly to constrain American unilateralism, BRIC cooperation serves several other functions. China also benefits from this cooperation by stabilizing its international environment, helping other developing countries, strengthening its identity as a developing country, coordinating its position with other BRICs to maximize leverage, and hiding in a group to avoid negative attention. Although this recent cooperation and interaction with the BRICs has been important, the space for future BRIC cooperation is limited by fundamental differences among the BRICs, the continued importance of the U.S. for each of the BRICs, and intra-BRIC competition. Not only is there little evidence that China has cooperated with the BRICs in an effort to hard balance against the United States, but any attempt to move the BRICs in such a direction would likely lead to its collapse.

Given instability that rising powers have provoked in recent history, many are worried that a rising China, either by itself or in cooperation with others, will try to overthrow the international order. There is little evidence to support these fears to date; as China has become more powerful it has become more integrated with and more accepting of the international order. In general, China has been very satisfied with the international order and come to recognize itself as a major beneficiary of that order. There are aspects of the order that it would like to see changed, but China has adopted a strategy of trying to participate and fix these defects from the inside. Although China and the BRICs have recently been more assertive in challenging the dollar and pushing to make international institutions more inclusive, these examples do not suggest that as China and the BRICs get more powerful they will try to overthrow the order. On the issue of representativeness, the western countries have shown a willingness to compromise and meet the demands of China and the BRICs. Although this negotiation is in its early stages and will likely be difficult, the willingness of China and the BRICs to work within the system and the openness of western countries to meet some of their demands makes it much less likely that China and other rising powers will try to overthrow the order.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I will explore the structural constraints of unipolarity and how they shape China's foreign policy. Second, I will explain how China has benefited from cooperation with the BRICs. Third, I will analyze the degree to which China and the BRICs have tried to challenge the existing

international order. Fourth, I will describe the limits that will likely prevent BRIC cooperation from going too far. Lastly, I will offer some conclusions and brief speculation about the future of the BRICs.

Rising Powers and Unipolarity: Structural Incentives for Cooperation

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, many international relations theorists found themselves unable to explain or predict international dynamics in a unipolar world. Some relied on structural realism and balance of power theory to predict that unipolarity would not last long, as new great powers would rise to balance the U.S. and multipolarity would re-emerge.³ By the mid-to-late 1990s, as the system remained unipolar, scholars developed new theories to account for this lack of balancing and explain the implications of a unipolar distribution of power for international politics.

According to the theory of unipolar stability, a unipolar distribution of power imposes severe constraints on the behavior of other states, while the unipole's massive power advantage leaves it free from constraints.⁴ Under unipolarity, even if the other major powers combined their efforts, they would still not be powerful enough to challenge or check the unipole. Balancing is not only futile but also counterproductive, as such attempts would likely lead the dominant state to retaliate. Structural constraints limit the potential strategic choices for other states and incentivize them to cooperate with the unipole.

At the same time, the unipole may perceive relatively minor challenges as particularly threatening.⁵ Goldstein persuasively argues that in response to a rising power, the unipole "has strong incentives to remain vigilant against this possibility [of the rise of a potential peer competitor]." Applying this argument to the rise of China, he suggests: "Unipolarity provides strong incentives for the United States to pay close attention to increases in China's capabilities inasmuch as it is one of a small handful of states that may have the necessary ingredients to emerge one

3. See Kenneth Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security* 18 (Fall 1993): 44–79; and Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security* 17 (Spring 1993): 5–51.

4. See William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24 (Summer 1999): 5–41; and Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). For the most recent scholarship on unipolarity, see the series of essays in *World Politics* 61 (January 2009). For other theoretical explanations for the lack of balancing against the U.S., see G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); and Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2006).

5. See Robert Jervis, "The Compulsive Empire," *Foreign Policy* 137 (July-August 2003): 83–87.

day as a peer competitor; arguably it is the leading candidate for this role.”⁶ Structural constraints should be especially tight for a rising power as the unipole is likely to be very sensitive to changes in relative power and likely to be vigilant in responding to potential competitors, hoping to eliminate them before they become legitimate challengers.

Chinese analysts recognize the structural constraints of unipolarity.⁷ According to Peking University Professor Zhu Feng, “The unipolar ‘American system’ and ongoing U.S. efforts to make its hegemonic position ‘unchallengeable’ have reduced China’s balancing options and compelled China to bandwagon with the United States.”⁸ Chinese experts also explicitly recognize the added difficulty of being a rising power in a unipolar world. Peking University Professor Jia Qingguo writes, “A unipolar system poses the greatest challenges for a rising power.”⁹ In the mid-1990s, Chinese scholars began to explore western theories that linked rising powers with the onset of major wars, as well as historical examples of rising powers such as Germany and Japan that had provoked such conflicts. These scholars concluded that if a rising China did not want to repeat this historical experience, and hoped to avoid preventive American action, it needed to cooperate with the United States.¹⁰ Theoretical analyses of rising powers and China’s rise not only highlight the need to cooperate with the unipole, but also recognize the difficulties of preventing the unipole’s vigilant response to increases in material power.

6. See Avery Goldstein, “Parsing China’s Rise: International Circumstances and National Attributes,” in *China’s Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, ed. Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 60–61; and Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). For a theoretical discussion of the difficulty of rising into different polarities, see Randall L. Schweller, “Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory,” in *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (London: Routledge, 1999), 1–32.

7. See Yan Xuetong, *Zhongguo Jueqi jiqi Zhanlue* [The Rise of China and its Strategy] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005); and Men Honghua, *Jiangou Zhongguo Dazhanlue de Kuangjia* [Constructing a Framework for China’s Grand Strategy] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004).

8. See Zhu Feng, “China’s Rise will be Peaceful,” in *China’s Ascent*, 37. For a similar, though less theoretical, argument, see Wang Jisi, “China’s Search for Stability with America,” *Foreign Affairs* (September–October 2005). All translations are the author’s.

9. See Jia Qingguo, “Jiyu yu Tiaozhan: Danji Shijie yu Zhongguo de Heping Fazhan” [Opportunities and Challenges: A Unipolar World and China’s Peaceful Development], *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu* [Studies in International Politics] 4 (2007): 51.

10. See Shi Yinhong, “Guoji Zhengzhi de Shijixing Guilu jiqi dui Zhongguo de Qishi” [The Century Pattern of International Politics and Inspiration for China], *Zhanlue yu Guanli* [Strategy and Management] 5 (1995): 1–3; and Tang Yongsheng, “Guoji Zhengzhi Changzhouqi Guilu zai Dangdai de Yanbian” [The Contemporary Evolution of the Pattern of Long Cycles in International Politics], *Zhanlue yu Guanli* 1 (1996): 46–51. Even nationalists that had a grand plan for China’s future role in world recognized that China needed to cooperate with the United States. For example, see Cai Jianwei, chief ed., *Zhongguo Dazhanlue: Lingdao Shijie de Lantu* [China’s Grand Strategy: A Blueprint for Leading the World] (Haikou: Hainan Chubanshe, 1996).

The Constraints of Unipolarity and Post-Cold War Chinese Foreign Policy

Since the late 1980s, Chinese foreign policy has largely followed the predictions and causal logic of unipolarity stability theory. In formulating Chinese foreign policy, Chinese leaders make judgments about trends in the international environment, which then help determine the policy choice. For the last twenty-five years, one of the major debates has been over how to properly characterize international structure (*guoji geju*), which was judged to be bipolar through most of the Cold War. From the late 1980s until today, Chinese leaders have consistently characterized multipolarization (*duojihua*) as the global trend, though there has been less agreement as to whether the international structure itself is currently unipolar, multipolar, or in transition.¹¹

Most Chinese leaders and analysts expected a rapid transition to post-Cold War multipolarity. However, in the early 1990s, as America's power advantage was still great, Chinese leaders decided they had no choice but to cooperate with the United States.¹² Even hard-line analysts such as Yan Xuetong from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) recognized that balancing against the U.S. would be too costly, and that China's weakness gave it no choice but to cooperate.¹³ By the mid-1990s, as a multipolar world had failed to emerge, many Chinese strategists endorsed the view that although multipolarization remained the trend, the current international structure was one of "one superpower, many great powers" (*yichaoduoqiang*).¹⁴ As a result of the Kosovo War, America's continued rapid economic growth, and President George W. Bush's effort to create what was perceived to be an American empire, Chinese analysts judged the multipolarization trend to have run into "difficulties" and been on a "tortuous path."¹⁵ Although

11. For an excellent discussion of the origins of the multipolarization assessment and its evolution throughout the 1990s, see Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2005 [2000]), ch. 1.

12. See He Fang, "Shijie Geju yu Guoji Xingshi" [World Structure and International Situation], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* [World Economics and Politics] 11 (1991). In 1992, President Jiang Zemin announced a sixteen-character formulation (*tifa*) to guide the development of U.S.-China relations, which included "avoid confrontation" (*bugao duikang*).

13. See Yan Xuetong, "Dangqian wo guo waijiao mianlin de tiaozhan he renwu" [The challenges and tasks that our country's diplomacy currently faces], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* (1993).

14. See Zhou Jianming, "Zhengque Renshi 'Yichaoduoqiang' de Guoji Geju" [Properly Understand the International Structure of 'One Superpower, Many Great Powers'], *Shehui Kexue* [Social Sciences] 2 (1998): 34–37. Some analysts had endorsed this view in the early 1990s, but it became more widespread in the mid-1990s.

15. See Shi Yinhong, "Zhengque Bawo Shijie Geju jiqi Fazhan Qushi" [Properly Grasp the World Structure and its Development Trend], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi Luntan* [Forum on World Economics and Politics] 4 (1999): 36–37; and Liu Haijun, "Woguo Guanyu 'Duoji (hua) Geju de Liangci Zhengming'" [Two Debates on Multipolar(ization) Structure], *Guoji Guancha* [International Survey] 2 (2000): 41–45.

multipolarization remained the trend, the formation of a multipolar world remained unlikely for many years.¹⁶

In general, cooperation and accommodation has been the strategic approach China has tried to adopt in its relations with the U.S. throughout the last two decades.¹⁷ Chinese leaders and analysts concluded that as long as the international structure was not multipolar, systemic constraints gave China few options other than cooperation. When China's behavior in the South China Sea and towards Taiwan in 1995–1996 was perceived as aggressive, the U.S. and regional actors assertively balanced against a relatively weak China.¹⁸ Learning how tight these constraints were not only further pushed China towards cooperating with the U.S., but also showed the difficulty in cooperating with a potentially hyper-vigilant unipole.¹⁹

The unipole's hypersensitivity to potential challenges also meant that it could overreact to increased cooperation between the rising power and others, interpreting low-level cooperation as a potential alliance that needed to be dealt with. The characterization of post-Cold War Sino-Russian relations by some analysts as a bloc or anti-American alliance provides some evidence of such an overreaction.²⁰ Under the constraints imposed in a unipolar world, the rising power is likely not only to cooperate with the dominant state, but to be especially careful so that its unilateral actions or relations with others are not perceived as a potential challenge.

Chinese Perceptions of Enduring Unipolarity

In the last couple of years, several American and European scholars and analysts have been arguing that the U.S. is fundamentally in decline and the world will soon become multipolar, if it has not already. Under those conditions, the

16. See Ruan Zongze, "Yilake Zhanzheng yu Guoji Geju" [The Iraq War and International Structure], *Qiushi* [Seeking Truth] 12 (2003): 55–57; and Li Jingzhi, "Shijie Geju he Daguo Guanxi de Xin Bianhua" [World Structure and New Changes in Great Power Relations], *Guoji Luntan* [International Forum] 5 (2003): 1–8.

17. See James C. Hsiung, "China's Omni-Directional Diplomacy: Realignment to Cope with Monopolar U.S. Power," *Asian Survey* 35 (June 1995): 573–86; and Rosemary Foot, "Chinese Strategies in a US-hegemonic Global Order: Accommodating and Hedging," *International Affairs* 82 (2006): 77–94.

18. See Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*; Thomas J. Christensen, "Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and U.S. Policy toward East Asia," *International Security* 31 (Summer 2006): 81–126; and Michael A. Glosny, "Heading toward a Win-Win Future?: Recent Developments in China's Policy towards Southeast Asia," *Asian Security* 2 (2006): 24–57.

19. The emphasis in post-Cold War defense reports on preventing the rise of a potential peer competitor, and discussions of China in this context, is further evidence for hypersensitivity. See Lu Gang and Guo Xuetang, chief eds., *Zhongguo Weixie Shei: Jiedu "Zhongguo Weixielun"* [Who Does China Threaten? Interpreting "China Threat Theory"] (Shanghai: Xuelin Press, 2004).

20. See Constantine Menges, "Russia, China, and What's Really on the Table," *Washington Post*, July 29, 2001.

constraints on China would loosen considerably, and it would have a much larger range of potential strategic choices. However, the majority of Chinese analysts and scholars reject claims of American decline and deny the world is about to enter a new era of multipolarity.²¹

Some Chinese analysts see an end to unipolarity in the near future, but they are clearly in the minority. In probably the most well-known example, Li Hongmei, an editor and columnist for the *People's Daily* online, boldly predicted the “unambiguous end to the U.S. unipolar system after the global financial crisis.” She continued, “The U.S. is no longer ‘King of the hill,’ as a new phase of multipolar world power structure will come into being in 2009, and the international order will be correspondingly reshuffled.”²² Others have specifically highlighted how the global financial crisis has ended America’s dominant financial and economic position in the world.²³

Yet the strong majority among Chinese academics and government think-tank researchers conclude that there has been no substantive change in the international balance of power. Most also argue that “one superpower, many great powers” remains the international structure, the world trend is still multipolarization but a multipolar order will not emerge for a long time, and the U.S. continues to be the lone superpower.²⁴ Recent discussions among these experts show that the global financial crisis has not altered these assessments.²⁵ According to Qin Yaqing, Executive Vice President at the China Foreign Affairs University, “The financial crisis has not substantively changed the distribution of power in the international system, America’s position as the one superpower has not been fundamentally challenged.”²⁶ Major General Peng Guangqian observes: “America’s position as the ‘one superpower’ (*yichao*) still has not

21. For a similar argument, see Bonnie S. Glaser and Lyle Morris, “Chinese Perceptions of U.S. Decline and Power,” *Jamestown Brief*, July 9, 2009.

22. See Li Hongmei, “The U.S. Hegemony Ends, the Era of Global Multipolarity Enters,” *People's Daily* (online), February 24, 2009.

23. See Wu Jianmin, “Dashi, Dongxiang, Sikao: dui 2008nian Guoji Xingshi de Huigu yu Sikao” [Great Events, Trends and Reflections: Review and Reflections on the International Situation in 2008], *Shijie Zhishi* [World Affairs] December 16 (2008): 28–31.

24. See “‘9–11’ yilai Guoji Bianju yu Zhongguo Waijiao” [Changes in the International Situation since 9–11 and China’s Diplomacy], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations] 9 (2006): 1–41, 47; and “Zhongguo shi ge ‘Daguo’ ma?” [Is China a “Great Power?”], *Shijie Zhishi*, No. 1 (2007): 16–27.

25. See “Dangqian Guoji Jinrong Weiji yu Guoji Tixi Zhuanxing” [Contemporary International Financial Crisis and Transformation of the International System], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 4 (2009): 1–42; “Aoyunhou Shidai” Zhongguo yu Shijie de Guanxi” [China’s Relations with the World in the “Post-Olympics Era”], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 9 (2008): 1–34; and Xu Jin, “Jingji Weiji Nanyi Dianfu ‘Yichao duoqiang’ Geju” [It Will Be Difficult for the Economic Crisis to Overturn the Structure of “One Superpower, Many Great Powers”], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* 12 (2008): 26–27.

26. See Qin Yaqing, “Guoji Tixi Zhuanxing yiji Zhongguo Zhanlue Jiyuqi de Yanxu” [Transformation of the International System and the Continuation of China’s Period of Strategic Opportunity], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 4 (2009): 35.

changed.”²⁷ In a clear refutation of declinist arguments, Wang Jisi, Dean of Peking University’s School of International Studies, contends, “There really is no reliable basis for saying that at this point the United States has had a setback from which it cannot recover . . . and there is no question that its position as the only superpower will continue for 20–30 years.”²⁸

Chinese analysts recognize that America’s image and power have relatively declined as a result of the Iraq War and the financial crisis, but they argue that it is still too early to declare that the U.S. is in fundamental decline or that the international structure will soon change. According to Fu Mengzi: “The U.S. position as sole superpower is still unprecedented and will continue for a rather long period, but the burden of the Iraq War and financial crisis, with the economic recession likely to continue, will unavoidably lead American power into a state of relative atrophy.”²⁹ Although China has reduced the relative power gap in recent years, analysts highlight America’s immense power advantage, China’s status as a weak developing country facing severe domestic problems, and the potential negative effect of the financial crisis on China.³⁰ In an important December 2008 speech marking the thirtieth anniversary of China’s “reform and opening,” President Hu Jintao offered the official judgment that “China is still in the initial stage of socialism and will be so for a long time.”³¹ Given this starting point, most experts argue that the process of multipolarization will be long and a multipolar world is unlikely to emerge for decades.³²

Given that the trend of multipolarization has been a part of the government’s position since the late 1980s, recent official assessments also do not suggest that the leadership sees the U.S. in decline or the emergence of a multipolar world in the near term. The most recent defense white paper, released in January 2009, declared that multipolarization was “gaining momentum.”³³ These assessments

27. See Peng Guangqian, “Quanqiu Jinrong Weiji dui Guoji Geju de Yingxiang” [The Influence of the Global Financial Crisis on the International Structure], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 4 (2009): 27.

28. See Wang Jisi, “Roundtable on U.S.-China Relations,” *Nanfeng Chuang*, October 20, 2008.

29. See Fu Mengzi, “Guoji Zhengzhi Jingji Xingshi Zhengzai Jingli Jubian” [The International Political and Economic Situation is Experiencing Great Changes], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 9 (2008): 6. See also Jin Canrong, “Ruhe Renshi Guoji Daqushi” [How to Understand Major International Trends], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 9 (2008): 6.

30. See “Zhongguo shi ge ‘Daguo’ ma?” [Is China a “Great Power?”], *Shijie Zhishi* 1 (2007): 16–27.

31. See “Hu Jintao: zai Jinian Dang de shiyijie zhongquanhuì zhaokai 30 zhounian dahui shang de jianghua” [Hu Jintao: Speech at Meeting to Commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Third Plenary Session of 11th CCP Central Committee], *Xinhua*, December 18, 2008.

32. See Yu Xintian, chief ed., *Guoji Tixi zhong de Zhongguo Juese* [China’s Role in International Order] (Beijing: Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 2008), 3; and Wang Jisi, “Dangdai Shijie Zhengzhi Fazhan Qushi yu Zhongguo de Quanqiu Juese” [Political Development Trends in the Contemporary World and China’s Global Role], *Beijing Daxue Xuebao* (Zhexue Shehui Kexueban) [Peking University Journal [Philosophy and Social Sciences edition]] 46 (January 2009): 13.

33. See “China’s National Defense in 2008,” Beijing, January 2009.

suggest that Chinese leaders and experts expect the U.S. to remain the superpower for a long time, the system to continue to be unipolar for the foreseeable future, and the constraints of crafting foreign policy under unipolarity to endure as well. Therefore, in general, China should be expected to continue trying to accommodate and cooperate with the U.S. and try to make sure that a rising China's actions are not perceived as a potential challenge to the United States.

Cooperation with the BRICs: How Does China Benefit?

Despite fundamental differences between the four countries and structural constraints of unipolarity that might have kept them from cooperating, the BRICs have surpassed most expectations in recent years in forming a nascent political grouping. On the foundation of other meetings between newly emerging powers, most importantly the trilateral Russia-India-China (RIC) arrangement, the BRIC foreign ministers began meeting in 2006. BRIC cooperation expanded to include two finance ministers' summits, leaders' meetings, and a stand-alone BRIC leaders' summit in June 2009, which included a joint communiqué. Russia and Brazil have been the driving forces that have transformed the BRICs from an abstract financial notion into a genuine political grouping. However, the Chinese have also agreed to participate and cooperate. In a lengthy interview on the BRICs on the eve of the leaders' summit, Director-General Wu Hailong of the International Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs characterized the formation of the BRIC grouping as an "evolution from a hypothetical (*xunli*) into a realistic platform for international cooperation."³⁴ This characterization corresponds to that of other Chinese analysts, who characterize China's cooperation with the BRICs as developing in a gradual, step-by-step manner, with no real clear point where a decision to "join the BRICs" occurred. Chinese academics have characterized it as a "logical choice" (*shunlichengzhang*).³⁵

China needs the BRICs much less than the other three countries do. As the world's second largest economy, a nuclear weapons state, a permanent member of U.N. Security Council, the largest holder of foreign exchange reserves, and a rising power whose influence is spreading across the globe, the rest of the world has already recognized China's status as one of the most important countries in the world. Having China as a partner has helped raise the status and profile of the other three BRICs countries, but China has less need for an association

34. See Liu Xinyu, "Jinzhan Fenghui shouxu Mouhua Hezuo Zouxiang" [BRIC Summit Plans the Future Trend of Cooperation], *Huanqiu*, June 15, 2009.

35. Author's interviews with Chinese academics, Washington, DC, spring 2009.

with the BRICs.³⁶ Even if this cooperation is logical for China, it is also costly and risky. As Chinese leaders' time is limited and valuable, participation in meetings has an opportunity cost. Moreover, China also risks being perceived as participating in a political bloc whose aim is to challenge and undermine the U.S. and the western liberal order.

First, there is little evidence that the BRICs should be seen as a coalition that is trying hard to balance against the United States. Chinese leaders, as well as those of most of the other BRICs, have bent over backwards to prove to the U.S. that the BRICs are not trying to confront the U.S., and they remain very sensitive to the possibility that increased cooperation may be seen as a challenge to the United States. Chinese leaders rejected Prime Minister Primakov's 1998 proposal of a "strategic triangle" between China, Russia, and India in large part because they believed it would be seen as too confrontational by American leaders.³⁷ China and India only agreed to trilateral cooperation because it was based on the principles of "no alliance, no confrontation, and not targeted at a third country."³⁸ These principles also served as the foundation of BRIC cooperation. According to Foreign Ministry official Wu Hailong, "Four country [BRIC] cooperation is open and transparent cooperation, not aimed at third parties."³⁹ Other analysts recognize that any attempt to turn the BRICs into an anti-U.S. alliance would backfire and damage China's interests and its prospects for development.⁴⁰

Second, BRIC cooperation is not solely an anti-Bush, anti-U.S., or anti-western phenomenon, but is based on deeper common interests. BRIC cooperation has developed during President Bush's second term, when his policies were less unilateralist, and President Obama's first term. Moreover, U.S.-China and U.S.-India relations have never been better, but BRIC cooperation has continued. Lastly, BRIC cooperation is not a product of the current global economic and financial crisis. It has undoubtedly played a role in elevating this cooperation but the momentum for cooperation and earliest BRIC meetings predated the onset of the crisis.

Although Chinese officials have made several statements about China's cooperation with the BRICs in the last couple of years, most of these are filled with diplomatic niceties. We need to look beyond the public pronouncements to

36. See Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing and the New Geopolitics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 43, 46, 177.

37. One analyst observed: "Establishing an anti-hegemonic united front has costs and no benefits." See Yan Xuetong, "Guoji Huanjing ji Waijiao Sikao" [International Environment and Reflections on Diplomacy], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 8 (1999): 11.

38. See Ma Jiali, "ZhongEYin Sanjiao Guanxi de Xin Fazhan" [New Developments in Sino-Russian-Indian Triangular Relations], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 7 (2005): 59–62.

39. See Liu Xinyu, "Jinzhuan Fenghui shouxu Mouhua Hezuo Zouxiang."

40. See "BRICs Xianxiang' de Pouxì" [An Analysis of the BRICs Phenomenon], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 9 (2004).

appreciate why China has deepened cooperation with the BRICs or how it benefits from this cooperation.⁴¹ In the rest of this section, I will analyze the various ways that China has benefitted from its cooperation with the BRICs.

Stabilize International Environment and Prevent Encirclement

Since Deng initiated “reform and opening” in the late 1970s, the fundamental goal of China’s diplomacy has been to create a stable and peaceful international environment that is conducive to economic development. China shares a land border with fourteen other states, and faces many potential threats on its periphery. India and Russia are two of China’s most powerful neighbors, with a great capacity to threaten China, complicate its international environment, and force it to divert resources away from economic modernization. Moreover, China fought wars with both during the Cold War, which has left a legacy of mistrust. China’s efforts to cooperate with the BRICs are a small part of a larger effort, through bilateral and multilateral channels, to stabilize its international environment and reassure India and Russia that China will not threaten them or challenge their interests as it grows more powerful.⁴² Although Brazil is less important in China’s international environment, as Chinese interests have spread across the globe, China has faced the need to reassure all nations that its rise will not damage their interests and that it wants to maintain friendly, cooperative relations.

Improving relations with India and Russia not only make it less likely that they will directly threaten China, but it also makes them less likely to join with the U.S. in encircling China by joining an anti-China balancing coalition. According to Huang Renwei, Vice President of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, “Developing common interests with other late developing great powers . . . prevent[s] the U.S. from pulling them into a strategic coalition to contain China.”⁴³ Cooperation through the BRICs grouping is only one part of a larger effort to build cooperative relations with these powers, but BRICs cooperation helps to stabilize China’s international environment.

41. For example, see “Yang Jiechi Attends the Chinese, Russian, Indian, and Brazilian Foreign Ministers’ Meeting,” *Xinhua*, May 16, 2008.

42. Zhang Yunling, the Director of the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) characterizes China’s moves to improve relations with Russia as an attempt to “strive to create a more favorable space for survival and development under the current international structure.” See Zhang Yunling, chief ed., *Huoban haishi Duishou: Tiaozhengzhong de ZhongMeiRiE Guanxi* [Partner or Adversary: Adjustments in Sino-American-Japanese-Russian Relations] (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2001), 40.

43. See Huang Renwei, “Guoji Tixi Zhuanxing yu Zhongguo Heping Fazhan Daolu” [Transformation of International System and China’s Peaceful Development Road], *Guoji Tixi yu Zhongguo de Ruan Liliang* [The International System and China’s Soft Power] (Beijing: Shishi Chubanshe, 2006), 18.

Exchange Ideas and Experiences

Cooperation with the BRICs, moreover, provides China with an excellent opportunity to share its development experiences with the other BRICs, as well as learn from their experiences. In Director-General Wu Hailong's discussion of BRIC cooperation, he noted the importance of "sharing experiences, exchanging what one has learned" (*fenxiang jingyan, jiaoliu xinde*).⁴⁴ The BRICs face common challenges as developing countries and global challenges often affect them in a similar way. In addition to discussions about how to respond to the financial crisis, the BRICs have exchanged ideas and experiences on food security, agriculture, disease, foreign aid, energy, and global warming. Sharing these experiences not only helps the BRICs themselves, but also allows them to share experiences and "best practices" with the developing world and expand South-South cooperation.

Coordinate BRIC Positions and Improve Bargaining Position with Western Countries

China and the BRICs have learned that exchanging ideas also allows them to coordinate positions and maximize their bargaining leverage in meetings with western powers. Chinese leaders and experts have realized that if they want to increase their say in world affairs and reform the international order, they need to do so through engaging the West. However, they have also learned from observing Russia's marginalization in the G8 that the best way to engage the western powers is as a united group.⁴⁵ A Chinese columnist observes, "The four governments, if better coordinated and choreographed, could initiate fresh ideas and grab more decision-making powers from the developed ones."⁴⁶

In the last couple of years, officials from China and the BRICs have emphasized coordination. They have also recognized the need for their own dialogue mechanism to exchange ideas, reach consensus, and develop a more unified vision.⁴⁷ After the last two G5 outreach group (Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa) meetings, the two BRIC finance ministers meetings, and the BRIC leaders' summit, the participants presented their consensus positions in joint communiqués. Moreover, these meetings have been organized so that the developing countries can coordinate positions right before engaging

44. See Liu Xinyu, "Jinzhan Fenghui shouxiu Mouhua Hezuo Zouxiang." For a discussion of the importance of exchange of ideas in a BRIC context, see Chu Shulong, "Jiaqiang Hezuo zhengfeng shi" [Strengthening Cooperation at Meeting], *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], July 19, 2006.

45. See Cao Lingjun, chief ed., *Baguo Jituan yu Dangdai Shijie Geju* [G8 and Contemporary World Structure], (Renmin Chubanshe, 2005), 194.

46. See Li Hong, "BRIC Not Yet Full-Blown," *People's Daily*, June 18, 2009.

47. For an excellent discussion of this increased emphasis on coordination, see Pang Zhongying, "Xinxing Daguo, youxian Hezuo" [Newly Emerging Great Powers, Limited Cooperation], *Dongfang Zaobao* [Oriental Morning Post], December 30, 2008.

with western countries, thereby maximizing leverage. Xue Lei, a researcher at the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, explicitly praised the role of the BRIC leaders' summit in helping the BRIC countries coordinate their position in advance of the next G20 summit in fall of 2009.⁴⁸

There is some evidence that these efforts to coordinate positions have led to increased leverage. According to reports, the initial draft of the communiqué from the November 2008 G20 summit did not mention giving emerging nations a greater say. However, after considerable pressure from the developing nations, the final version of the communiqué not only stated that emerging and developing countries "should have a greater voice and representation," but also called for the expansion of the Financial Stability Forum. According to Russian Deputy Finance Minister Dmitry Pankin: "The G20 summit showed that if we [BRIC] act in concert we have a very good chance of having our voice heard."⁴⁹ Moreover, BRIC leaders are not only coordinating their positions, but also beginning to coordinate strategies for pushing the western countries to adopt their preferred reforms. At the July 2009 G8 summit in Italy, a major portion of Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo's remarks related to how the G5 countries needed to exert more efforts to push the international community to make needed reforms.⁵⁰

Hide in a Group while Advancing its Agenda

If China made an aggressive, unilateral push to reform the international order, it would risk being marginalized as a single voice or being perceived as a threat that would provoke a hyper-vigilant response.⁵¹ By engaging the western powers through the BRICs, China is able to hide behind others and not be perceived as the greatest threat to U.S. interests, especially as the other BRICs have been much more outspoken in their criticisms.⁵² Moreover, because China is able to engage the western powers in a group, it is less likely that the demands of the BRICs can be easily ignored.

On several issues, the other BRICs' open criticism of U.S. and western behavior has made it relatively easy for the Chinese to lay low. Russian and Brazilian leaders and officials have been far more direct and confrontational in blaming

48. See Xue Lei, "Zhongguo Waijiao Zoujin Duobian Xietiao Shidai" [China's Diplomacy Enters the Era of Multilateral Coordination], *Wen Hui Bao*, June 18, 2009.

49. See Vladimir Radyuhin, "BRIC Nations Played Crucial Role at G20 Summit," *Guardian*, November 26, 2008; and Song Guoyou, "Buyao Qingyan G20 Daiti G8" [Do Not Casually Declare that the G20 has Replaced the G8], *Guoji Xianqu Daobao* [International Herald Leader], November 20, 2008.

50. See Sun Shangwu, "G5 Leaders Urge Action from G8," *China Daily*, July 10, 2009.

51. Author's interviews with Chinese scholars and think tank researchers, Washington, DC, spring 2009.

52. For a discussion of the continued logic behind this approach, see Yuan Peng, "Meiguo Weixielun: Rang Bieren Shuo ba" [U.S. Threat Theory: Let Others Say It], *Huanqiu Shibao* [Global Times], February 14, 2007.

the U.S. for the financial crisis and calling for a new financial order.⁵³ Russia has also been more vocal in its criticisms of U.S. policy on issues such as the Balkans, Kosovo, the Iraq War, and Iran's nuclear program.⁵⁴ Although far less provocative than Russian behavior, India and Brazil have directly challenged western nations over free trade during various rounds of WTO negotiations, most notably at the 2003 Cancun meeting.⁵⁵

As the other BRICS in effect run interference for China through their open criticisms, it can still work to reform the international order. There is some worry that confrontational behavior by the other BRICS may challenge the U.S. too directly, and implicate China through "guilt by association." However, Chinese experts are optimistic that through engagement and cooperation, they can limit how confrontational the other BRICS are.⁵⁶

Work for the Interests of the Global South and Secure its Political Status as a Developing Country

China maintains its identity as a developing country. As its power has increased, Chinese leaders have pledged to improve the lives of its brothers in the developing world.⁵⁷ In addition to directly sharing "best practices," Chinese cooperation with the BRICS to make the international system more democratic and representative, and more reflective of the needs of the developing world, helps the global South. At the preparatory meeting for the BRIC leaders' summit, Ambassador Zhang Yan declared that "BRIC is a guardian of the interests of developing countries."⁵⁸

Perhaps just as important for China, cooperating with the most important group of emerging developing countries to safeguard the interests of the rest of the developing world helps secure China's status as a developing country. China has some legitimate claim to being a developing country, given that it still has not entered the top 100 in the world in terms of per capita GDP, but its booming economy and increasing international influence is leading some developing

53. See "BRIC Nations Say No IMF Cash without Representation," *Reuters*, March 13, 2009.

54. For thorough discussions of these numerous challenges, see Lo, *Axis of Convenience*; and Dmitri Trenin, "Russia leaves the West," *Foreign Affairs* (July-August 2006).

55. See Andrew Hurrell and Amrita Narlikar, "A New Politics of Confrontation? Brazil and India in Multilateral Trade Negotiations," *Global Society* 20 (2006): 415-33.

56. Author's interviews with Chinese scholars, Washington, DC, spring 2009.

57. See Gregory T. Chin, "China's Evolving G8 Engagement: Complex Interests and Multiple Identity in Global Governance Reform," in *Emerging Powers in Global Governance: Lessons from the Heiligendamm Process*, ed. Andrew F. Cooper and Agata Antkiewicz (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 83-114.

58. See "Address at the Inauguration of Pre-BRIC Summit Preparatory Meeting by H. E. Mr. Zhang Yan, Chinese Ambassador to India," May 13, 2009.

countries to question its developing-country credentials. In addition to the value of this status for China's identity, Chinese leaders have repeatedly invoked its status as a developing country to deflect calls by western countries to bear more international responsibility and international burden. If the rest of the developing world does not see China as a developing country, then China may be forced to either take on more international responsibility or open itself to more criticism and pressure from the western world, either of which could undermine its economic modernization.⁵⁹

Restrain U.S. Hegemonism and Revisionism

All of the BRIC countries are deeply concerned that America's dominant power position will allow it to behave as it pleases and damage their fundamental interests.⁶⁰ Chinese leaders and analysts refer to such behavior as hegemonism and power politics, and have been very critical of American interventionism, interference in the internal affairs of others, willingness to violate existing rules and norms, and efforts to revise the international order in its favor.⁶¹ Although realistic about how successful these four relatively weak countries may be at restraining the hegemon, the leaders of the BRICs recognize that they will be more successful as a group than they would be as individual states. They also hope that working as a group would attract the support of other countries, especially if American behavior was especially threatening and revisionist.

Explore Options other than the United States

Each of the BRIC nations recognizes that in a unipolar world, its relations with the U.S. are most important. However, each also wants to limit its excessive dependence on the U.S. by developing important relations with other countries to try to increase its options and freedom.⁶² Improving relations with the other BRICs is an important way for China to minimize its excessive dependence on the United States.

59. See Liu Jianfei, "'Zhongguo Zerenlun' Kaoyan Heping Fazhan" ["China Responsibility Theory" Tests Peaceful Development], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 4 (2007): 22–26; and Liu Ming, "Zhongguo Guoji Zerenlun Pingxi" [Assessment of China International Responsibility Theory], *Mao Zedong Deng Xiaoping Lilun Yanjiu* [Theoretical Research on Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping], 50–55.

60. See Hurrell, "Hegemony, Liberalism and Global Order: What Space for Would-be Great Powers," *International Affairs* 82 (January 2006): 18.

61. See Wang Jisi, "Meiguo Baquan de Luoji" [The Logic of American Hegemony], *Meiguo Yanjiu* [American Studies] 3 (2003): 7–29.

62. See Evan S. Medeiros, "China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 47 (4th quarter 2007): 33.

China and the BRICs as a Challenge to International Order

Given historical experiences of rising powers trying to overthrow the international order and provoking wars, the emergence of China and other new powers has led many to fear that history will repeat itself. As China has deepened its cooperation with the BRICs, some have wondered whether this new grouping represents an effort to disrupt and overthrow the existing international structure. Yet despite displeasure with certain aspects of the international order, China has mostly accepted that order and decided to fix its problems by reforming it from the inside. Although China and the BRICs have recently undermined the dollar as the reserve currency and pressured the western powers to make the international order more inclusive and representative, these limited efforts do not suggest a grand plan to overthrow the order that the BRICs will implement as they grow stronger. Moreover, the willingness of the western countries to accommodate BRIC demands make it more likely that the BRICs will be satisfied with the existing order and behave as “responsible stakeholders” to protect it. However, it remains a possibility that China’s cooperative behavior and acceptance of the international order is a short-term tactic to allow China to get stronger, and that once it does it will destroy the existing order and establish a new one.

Acceptance of the International Order

Chinese government officials and experts have accepted the existing international order, decided to participate in it, and recognized that China has benefitted from this participation. In a 2007 speech analyzing Chinese diplomacy, Ambassador Shen Guofang characterized China as “an active participant (*jiji canyuzhe*) that had integrated with the world.”⁶³ As the January 2009 Defense White Paper puts it, “China has become an important member of the international system, and the future and destiny of China have been increasingly closely connected with the international community. China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can the world enjoy prosperity and stability without China.”⁶⁴

In one of the clearest statements of China’s more favorable assessment of the international order, Chinese leaders have dropped the long-standing formulation (*tifa*) of calling for a “new international political and economic

63. See Shen Guofang, “Zhongguo Xin Waijiao de Linian yu Shijian” [Ideas and Practice in China’s New Diplomacy], *Shijie Zhishi* 13 (2007): 42.

64. See “China’s National Defense in 2008,” Beijing, January 2009.

order.⁶⁵ The 2007 work report for the 17th Party Congress changed the wording to a need to “work to make the international order fairer and more equitable.”⁶⁶ In recent years, Chinese foreign ministry officials have also expressed a more positive evaluation of America’s presence in East Asia.⁶⁷

Chinese academic and think tank experts echo this favorable evaluation of the international order. Pang Zhongying, a professor at Nankai University, characterizes mainstream Chinese views in these terms: “China has peacefully joined the international system, and there is no need to change the fundamentals of the contemporary international order.”⁶⁸ CICIR President Cui Liru argues that China also became a noticeable beneficiary and key proponent of the system.⁶⁹ More recently, Jin Canrong has suggested, “China is satisfied with the existing international order.”⁷⁰ Most recent analysis by China experts in the U.S. concludes that China has shown its increasing acceptance of the international order and its norms in a variety of issue areas.⁷¹

Reform and Improve the International Order to Address Areas of Dissatisfaction

Although China has largely come to accept the international order, there are still some aspects that it considers unfair or unjust. However, rather than seeking to overthrow the order, Chinese officials and experts have recently emphasized the need to reform it. Yang Jiemian, President of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, maintains that “the newly emerging powers have chosen to make some improvements and developments, on the foundation of the current

65. Deng Xiaoping first used this formulation in 1988 and it was subsequently endorsed by all of Chinese leaders, and included in the work reports of the Party Congresses. See “China Eager to Establish New International Order,” *Xinhua*, February 28, 1991.

66. Although this change may appear small, changing *a tifa* that was first enunciated by Deng Xiaoping and had been repeated for almost twenty years is very significant.

67. See Fu Ying, “China and Asia in a New Era,” *China: An International Journal* 1 (September 2003): 311; and Secretary Colin L. Powell, “Briefing on Trip to East Asia,” July 29, 2001.

68. See Pang Zhongying, “Zhongguo zai Guoji Tixizhong de Diwei yu Zuoyong” [China’s Position and Role in the International System], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 4 (2006): 20. China’s view on the international order also experienced an “identity transformation from victim of order to beneficiary of order.” See Guo Shuyong, “Lun Zhongguo Jueqi yu Shijie Zhixu de Guanxi” [On the Relationship between China’s Rise and International Order], *Taipingyang Xuebao* 6 (2005): 5.

69. See Cui Liru, “The Absence of a Model,” *China Security* 4 (Spring 2008): 9.

70. See Jin Canrong, “Welai 30nian qujueyu meiguo nengfou Jiena Zhongguo Jueqi” [The Next 30 Years Depend on whether or not the U.S. can accept China’s Rise], *Dongfang Zaobao*, January 7, 2009.

71. See Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980–2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is China a *Status Quo* Power?” *International Security* 27 (Spring 2003): 5–56; Bates Gill, *Rising Star: China’s New Security Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007); and Elizabeth Economy and Michel Oksenberg, eds., *China Joins the World: Progress and Prospects* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1998).

existing international systems.”⁷² Focusing mostly on the positive aspects of the international order, Ambassador Shen Guofang and Ruan Zongze, who subsequently became an official in the U.S. Embassy, refer to China’s desire to work with other powers to become a “builder” (*jianshezhe*) of international order.⁷³ Pang Zhongying notes that although there are some unfair aspects of the international order that deserve criticism, China challenged the order during the Cold War as an outsider whereas today Chinese complaints are voiced from within the system and matched by a desire to protect and reform it.⁷⁴

Despite Chinese recognition that the country has been a primary beneficiary of the international order, China identifies several features that it considers unfair or unjust. One common critique is that the international order was established at the end of World War II by western powers to serve their interests and there was no input from China or other developing countries.⁷⁵ More recently, as China and the BRICs have become more powerful, the critique has been that international institutions have not evolved to give these countries a greater voice and greater influence. For example, China’s voting rights in the IMF and World Bank are less than those of France and Britain, even though the Chinese economy is larger.⁷⁶ In addition to the problems of not being representative, others have argued that post-World War II international institutions need to be reformed to deal with the new threats and challenges of the globalized world.⁷⁷ Chinese experts are also unhappy that the North-South gap has grown in recent years, as many poor countries have been left behind by an order focused on protecting the interests of the western powers.

Chinese officials and experts also criticize certain U.S. behavior, which is not necessarily endemic to it but sometimes becomes associated with the western order. For example, China objects to U.S. interference in the domestic affairs of China and other countries, support for Taiwan and other separatist movements, efforts to export democracy and western values, and willingness to use force to

72. See Yang Jiemian, “Xinxing Daguó Qunti zai Guóji Tixi Zhuānxíngzhōng de Zhānlue Xuānzé” [The Strategic Choices on Newly Emerging Powers in the Transformation of the International System], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* 6 (2008): 6. For a similar argument, see Zhang Tuosheng, “Defining China’s Role on the World Stage,” *China Daily*, December 22, 2006.

73. See Shen Guofang, “Zhōngguó Xīn Wàijiào de Línian yu Shíjian,” and Ruan Zongze, “Shíxian Zhōngguó Wàijiào ‘Huáyuquán’” [Achieving China’s Diplomatic ‘Right to Speak’], *Shijie Zhishi* 32 (2005): 28.

74. See Pang Zhongying, “Zhōngguó zai Guóji Tixizhōng de Diwei yu Zuoyōng,” 19.

75. See Men Honghua, *Jiāngōu Zhōngguó Dàzhānlue de Kuāngjiā*.

76. For discussions of this critique, see Bob Davis, “Brazil, Russia, India, China Offer IMF Financial Aid for Wider Policy Role,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 27, 2009; and “Zhōngguó shì gè Dàguó ma?”

77. Wang Jisi has referred to a “global governance deficit” and an “international regime deficit.” See Wang Jisi “Dāngdài Shíjiè Zhèngzhì Fāzhān Qūshì yu Zhōngguó de Quānqiú Juésè” [Development Trends in Contemporary World Politics and China’s Global Role], *Beijing Daxue Xuebao* [Peking University Journal] 46 (January 2009): 13.

settle disputes.⁷⁸ With the onset of the global economic crisis, China has joined other countries in criticizing the lack of regulation, supervision, and information in the international financial system. Moreover, the crisis has also highlighted China's discomfort with the vulnerability that comes from holding a huge amount of dollar-denominated assets.

Limited Vision for Future Order

Although China and the other BRICs have identified aspects of the international order they would like to improve, none has a concrete and constructive agenda for change or vision for a future world order. There is agreement on what actions or changes they do *not* support in the international order, but there is much less well-developed thinking on a positive agenda. After the BRIC leaders' summit, Rand researcher Andrew Weiss posed the key question and offered a cautious response: "but is this array of BRIC concerns . . . matched by a meaningful vision for the future? It's doubtful."⁷⁹ Notwithstanding fears in certain quarters that China and the BRICs have a plan to challenge and overthrow the existing order, it is not clear what they would do even if they were given the opportunity to remake the international order in any way they wanted.

Since the founding of the PRC, Chinese leaders have offered abstract visions for how nations should interact and proposed vague principles that should form the foundation of a just international order. In negotiations with India in 1953–1954, Premier Zhou Enlai first introduced the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence—mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. After the end of the Cold War, Jiang Zemin proposed the New Security Concept as a set of normative principles that were opposed to what was viewed as the "Cold War mentality."⁸⁰ In 2005, Hu Jintao proposed "harmonious world" as the new ideal vision for international relations.⁸¹ In a recent analysis of international order, former Chinese

78. See Lin Limin and Chang Shanshan, "Guanyu Zhongguo Chengzhang wei Shijie di'er da Jingjiti hou de Guoji Zhanlue Sikao" [Reflections on International Strategy after China Rises to become the World's Second Largest Economic Entity], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 10 (2008): 40.

79. See Andrew S. Weiss, "BRIC-a-Brac," *Foreign Policy* (online), June 2009.

80. It is usually summarized as consisting of the principles of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and cooperation. See "China's Position Paper on the New Security Concept," June 8, 2002.

81. See "Hu Calls for a Harmonious World at Summit," *China Daily*, September 16, 2005. Chinese leaders and experts have also increasingly emphasized vague concepts such as "diversification of the world" (*shijie duoyanghua*), "cultural diversification" (*wenhua duoyuanhua*), and the Confucian principle of "harmony with differences" (*he'erbutong*). See "Hexie Shijie yu Zhongguo Waijiao" [Harmonious World and China's Diplomacy], *Waijiao Pinglun* [Foreign Affairs Review] 87 (February 2006): 15–20.

Ambassador to the EU Ding Yuanhong summarized the content of a just order: all powers are equal; all countries treat each other with mutual respect; mutual non-interference in internal affairs is acceptable; bullying of weak countries by the strong is opposed; countries are allowed to make decisions on their own without outside interference; the use of force to solve problems is opposed; the goal is protecting world peace and promoting common development.⁸² It is difficult to object to most of these principles in the abstract, but it is also difficult to interpret them as a concrete vision for world order that challenges the West.⁸³

In response to the global economic crisis, Chinese demands for a new financial order have been more specific and concrete than the principled visions discussed above. Chinese officials have not only insisted upon improved regulation and supervision to prevent future financial crises, but have urged reform of the voting shares in international financial institutions to make them more inclusive and representative.⁸⁴ However, if China or the BRICs were given free reign to introduce concrete plans to get out of the economic crisis, redesign the international financial order, or thoroughly reform the international order, it is still not clear that they could present any concrete vision that could be implemented.

Recent Challenges to International Order: Attacking the Dollar and Linkages at the April G20 Summit

Although I argue above that China has mostly been satisfied with the international order, there are at least two recent exceptions. First, China and the BRICs have challenged the power of the dollar by suggesting the need to move to a more diversified reserve currency and by beginning to explore settling bilateral trade in local currency. Second, China and the BRICs drew a clear link between reforming the voting shares in the IMF and World Bank and providing additional funds to the IMF. These challenges have been significant, but they do not necessarily foreshadow more aggressive moves to undermine and destroy the existing international order. And despite China's support for both challenges, it has pulled back in recent months and limited its challenge to the dollar. Moreover, on both issues, significant forces within

82. See Ding Yuanhong, "Jianli Gongzheng Guoji Zhixu" [Establishment of a Just International Order], *Heping yu Fazhan* [Peace and Development] 2 (2005): 15–16, 14.

83. Pang Zhongying, then a professor at Nankai University, argues that China's "proposals are empty, too focused on principle and have the flavor of political propaganda. There are few proposals that are concrete and workable or can be implemented." See Pang Zhongying, "Zhongguo zai Guoji Tixizhong de Diwei yu Zuoyong," 18.

84. In addition to President Hu's speeches at the G20 summits and BRICs leader's summit, see Wang Qishan, "G20 Must Look Beyond the Needs of the Top 20," *The Times*, March 27, 2009.

the liberal western order also support changes on these fronts, and, as I argue later, the order itself is in the process of changing to become more inclusive and representative.

Although Russian officials had called for replacing the dollar as the global reserve currency earlier, March 2009 statements by People's Bank of China Governor Zhou Xiaochuan drew international attention. Zhou raised the need to "create an international reserve currency that is disconnected from individual nations and is able to remain stable in the long run, thus removing the inherent deficiencies caused by using credit-based national currencies."⁸⁵ He specifically raised special drawing rights (SDRs), an IMF reserve asset whose value would be based on a basket of currencies, as a potential future substitute. Although the dollar no longer being the global reserve currency would have huge geopolitical impact and would greatly undermine America's financial power, China's raising this issue was as much a result of China's weakness as it was a power play.⁸⁶ Chinese leaders have realized that by purchasing so many dollar-denominated assets, they have made the Chinese economy extremely vulnerable to changes in the value of the dollar. General concern about the value of the dollar, and fears that U.S. efforts to stimulate the economy could trigger inflation, thus harming China's interests, led China to issue this warning. Although China wishes to diversify and become less dependent on the dollar, Chinese bankers are well aware that any rapid moves away from the dollar will dramatically reduce the value of the remaining dollar-denominated assets.⁸⁷ In addition to the potential domestic gains from standing up to the West, the major aim of this push seemed to be to pressure the U.S. to maintain the stability of the dollar.⁸⁸ Zhou's statements were as much a result of China being caught in a dollar trap of its making as they were a powerful rising power challenging the system.

China has also slowly backed away from this challenge. Although Zhou raised the issue before the April G20 summit, there are no reports that China specifically raised the issue of replacing the dollar during the G20 summit. China did not broach the subject during the BRIC leaders' summit either. According to one reporter, "China . . . was largely silent in Yekaterinburg. It did not echo Russian and Brazilian calls for the BRIC powers to try to loosen the grip of the dollar on the world financial system."⁸⁹ Before the 2009 G8 summit, Chinese government officials were quick to refute press reports that China had proposed it as a topic

85. See "China Central Bank Governor Suggests Creating Super-Sovereign Reserve Currency," *Xinhua*, March 24, 2009.

86. See Jonathan Kirshner, "Dollar Primacy and American Power: What's at Stake?" *Review of International Political Economy* 15 (August 2008): 418–38.

87. See John Pomfret, "The End of Dollar Dominance?" *Washington Post*, March 23, 2009; Alison Klayman, "China Calls for New World Reserve Currency," *Voice of America*, March 26, 2009; and Paul Krugman, "China's Dollar Trap," *New York Times*, April 2, 2009.

88. See Wang Xu, "Experts Cool to Zhou Proposal," *China Daily*, March 25, 2009.

89. See Chris Buckley, "Much-Trumpeted BRIC Summit Ends Quietly," *Reuters*, June 17, 2009.

for the G8+5 outreach session.⁹⁰ Although making it clear that China hoped the U.S. maintained the stability of the dollar, Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei characterized the dollar as “the most important major international reserve currency of the day, and for years to come That’s the reality.”⁹¹ He also characterized the replacement of the dollar as the reserve currency as “now a discussion among academics. It is not the position of the Chinese government.”⁹² Moreover, rather than being a revolutionary idea designed to overthrow western order, SDRs and diversification have been endorsed recently by westerners such as Joseph Stiglitz and George Soros, and historically by John Maynard Keynes.. Not only have experts in other developed countries expressed support for this direction, the National Intelligence Council’s “Global Trends 2025” predicts that the dollar’s role as preeminent reserve currency will erode.⁹³

China has also begun trying to limit its dependence on the dollar by exploring the use of local currencies in trade. In June 2009 Russia and China agreed to expand this practice; China and Brazil are exploring this possibility as well.⁹⁴ Other countries are also considering this option, in part because it reduces transaction costs by eliminating the fee for exchanging into dollars. For the agreements involving China, the amount of trade to be settled in this manner is unknown, but it is likely to start small and proceed slowly given that the Chinese *Renminbi* is still not fully convertible.⁹⁵ This issue is worth paying attention to in the future, but is both a relatively small issue for the time being and as much a product of China’s weakness as it is strength.

The second area in which China and the BRICs have challenged the international order has been in drawing linkages between their willingness to provide more funds to the IMF to help other countries recover from the crisis and demands that the April G20 summit endorse changes in IMF and World Bank voting shares. The Chinese public statements on this implicit blackmail threat were less blunt and provocative than those from Brazil and others, but the Chinese seemed to make the linkages clear.⁹⁶ China, as well as the other BRICs

90. See “Summit Talks Likely to Turn to Dollar,” *China Daily*, July 3, 2009.

91. See “Vice FM: US Should Maintain Stability of Dollar,” *China Daily*, July 6, 2009.

92. See “China Reassures on Dollar Debate before G8,” *China Daily*, July 6, 2009.

93. See “Nobel Laureate Stiglitz Calls for New Global Reserve Currency System,” *Xinhua*, March 27, 2009; and “Experts Call for Diversified Reserve Currency Ahead of G8 Summit,” *China Daily*, July 5, 2009.

94. See “Yuan Small Step,” *Economist*, July 9, 2009; “Lula: Let’s Trade in our own Currencies,” *Xinhua*, May 21, 2009; “China, Brazil Working on Trade FX Deal,” *Reuters*, June 28, 2009.

95. See Steve Levine, “China’s Yuan: The Next Reserve Currency?” *Business Week*, May 26, 2009.

96. See “BRIC Nations Say No IMF Cash without Representation,” *Reuters*, March 14, 2009; and Jeffrey E. Garten, “The G-20 and the Future of Capitalism: Part I,” *YaleGlobal*, March 30, 2009. According to the statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “President Hu made it clear that China is ready to make active contributions to increasing resources of the IMF and stressed at the same time that the IMF should seek a balance between rights and obligations.” See “President Hu Jintao’s Attendance at the Second Financial Summit of G20 Leaders Achieves Major Outcomes,” April 2, 2009.

promised to provide more financing to the IMF at the April G20 summit, including \$40 billion from China, but the G20 also agreed to implement the changes in voting shares and even accelerate future reviews.⁹⁷ Although a clear example of China and the BRICs pressuring the western powers, this was far from the frontal assault on the existing order that others worry may come from rising powers.

Evolution of International Order: Making it Easier to be a Responsible Stakeholder

Recent changes in the international order after the April G20 summit and through other processes suggest that the order is becoming more inclusive. This should not only make China and the BRICs more satisfied with the international order, but also potentially more willing to play the role of “responsible stakeholder.” Many of the demands for changes in the international order were included in the communiqués issued after the November 2008 BRIC finance ministers’ meeting, the March 2009 BRIC finance ministers’ meeting, and the June 2009 BRIC leaders’ summit. In addition to demanding improved regulation and supervision, these communiqués, as well as statements by Chinese leaders, all insisted on more equitable participation in the international order, and specifically called for reviews of the voting shares in the World Bank and IMF and broadening the membership of the Financial Stability Forum.

The statement after the April 2009 G20 summit and pledges by the western great powers have shown a willingness to address many of these concerns and accommodate their demands by revising some of the core features of the international order to make it more inclusive. The G20 statement included a pledge to “reform our international financial institutions.” Not only did the G20 agree to expand the FSF to include all G20 countries, but it pledged to implement existing reforms in IMF and World Bank voting shares and promised to complete the next round of reforms in IMF quotas by January 2011 and accelerate the timetable for the next round of reforms in World Bank quotas to spring 2010. The G8 summit has also become more inclusive in recent years with the initiation in 2007 of the Heiligendamm Process, which invites Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa (G5) to attend a special G8 + 5 outreach session. At the 2009 G8 summit in Italy, this process was expanded into the Heiligendamm-L’Aquila Process (HAP), which not only continued the outreach sessions but expanded the mandate to include discussions on any topic. HAP would allow others to join as well.

Moreover, in the past few years, the United States has displayed a new-found willingness to cooperate multilaterally and support moves to make the

97. See “At G20, China Finds a Way to Raise Stature in World Finance,” *Xinhua*, April 4, 2009.

international order more inclusive. In response to the economic crisis, rather than relying on the liberal western G7 countries to plan a response, President Bush called a leaders' summit of the more inclusive G20. Reports also suggest that the U.S. has been willing to support reform of the voting shares in the IMF.⁹⁸ In a July 2009 major foreign policy address, Secretary of State Clinton not only signaled a continuing commitment to making the international order more inclusive, but also repeated ideas that Chinese leaders and BRIC communiqués had proposed. In explaining how the countries of the world will address the world's challenges, she said: "we'll work through existing institutions and reform them." Citing President Obama's statement after the G8 summit, she suggested that "we are seeking institutions that 'combine the efficiency and capacity for action with inclusiveness.'" And in a clear endorsement of a more inclusive approach to global governance, she promised that the U.S. "will offer a place at the table to any nation, group, or citizen willing to shoulder a fair share of the burden."⁹⁹

These developments have met with mixed evaluations in China and the other BRICs. Some Chinese leaders and experts have very positively evaluated the recent moves by the established powers, including some references to "turning points" and a "new order."¹⁰⁰ However, others still express doubt that the western countries will keep their promises, worry that the developing countries will really be allowed full participation, and suspect that this apparent accommodation is only a short-term product of the financial crisis.¹⁰¹

A recent *China Daily* article contends, "It is unfair to ask the developing world to share the responsibility without listening to its views on how to address global issues."¹⁰² Renmin University Professor Shi Yinhong argues that the U.S. and China "should work to move from a 'power transition' to a structural transformation (*geju zhuanhuan*) from U.S.-led to something more shared." He further adds: "China would have confidence in that system."¹⁰³ The recent adjustments in the international order have at least begun to move in the

98. See Zhang Ran, "IMF Reform 'Key to Tackling Downturn,'" *China Daily*, July 9, 2009.

99. See Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Foreign Policy Address at the Council on Foreign Relations," Washington, DC, July 15, 2009.

100. See "China Hails G20 Progress," *The Times*, April 3, 2009; "President Hu Jintao Accepts a Joint Interview by the Japanese Media Institutions Stationed in Beijing," May 4, 2008; and Fu Mengzi, "Daweiji Cuisheng Xinzhiyu" [Great Crisis Gives Birth to New Order], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, No. 4 (2009): 19–21.

101. See Huangfu Pinglin, "G20 Fenghui de Tiaozheng Qidai" [Expectation of Adjustments at G20 Summit], *Liaowang Xinwen Zhoukan*, March 23, 2009, 56–7; Liu Liwei, "Xunqiu Gongying de Shuguang" [The Dawn of Seeking Win-Win], *Liaowang Xinwen Zhoukan*, April 6, 2009, 8–10; and "How Does G8 Summit Play its Role in World Affairs?" *Xinhua*, July 10, 2009.

102. See Cai Hong, "A Group Depends on What Leaders Make of It," *China Daily*, July 9, 2009.

103. See Shi Yinhong, "ZhongMei Guanxi Xianzhu Fazhan de yi da keneng Qianjing" [One Great Possible Prospect for Notable Development in Sino-American Relations], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* [International Studies] 1 (2007): 5.

direction of being more inclusive and more shared, making it easier and more likely that China will behave as a “responsible stakeholder” for the sake of this order.

This discussion does not suggest that the U.S., China, and the BRICs have fundamentally escaped the “tragedy of great power politics” or that they are on the verge of accomplishing “peaceful change.” However, in his seminal work Robert Gilpin argues that “peaceful international change appears to be most feasible when it involves changes *in* an international system and to be most difficult when it involves changes *of* an international system.”¹⁰⁴ The general acceptance of the order by China and the BRICs and their relatively modest calls for reform, combined with the western powers’ openness to address some of these concerns, suggest that we are currently in a process of negotiation and mutual accommodation over the existing order from countries firmly entrenched in that order. Yuan Peng, director of CICIR’s Institute for American Studies, seems to agree with this assessment. He writes, “The struggle over international order evolved into a struggle over whether or not China can be a responsible stakeholder within the international order.”¹⁰⁵ Although this process is likely to be difficult, and could ultimately result in rising powers becoming dissatisfied with the order and seeking to overthrow it, the current evolving process of mutual negotiation over the nature of the order is a generally positive development for world peace and stability.

Limits on Advances in BRIC Cooperation

Although BRIC cooperation has so far exceeded most expectations, limiting factors are likely to constrain it in the future. The anticipated decline in American power may reduce the structural constraints that incentivize the BRICs not to challenge the United States. When this happens, the BRICs could move to formally unite to challenge a weakened United States. However, the fundamental differences within the BRICs and intra-BRIC competition make advances in this direction unlikely. Moreover, as the U.S. declines and India, China, and Russia grow more powerful, these intra-BRIC tensions may become even more serious, making deeper cooperation not particularly likely.

104. See Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 206. For other analysis of peaceful change, see Edward Hallett Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1946 [2nd edition]); and Charles A. Kupchan *et al.*, eds., *Power in Transition: The Peaceful Change of International Order* (New York, United Nations University Press, 2001).

105. See Yuan Peng, “Zhong-Mei Guanxi Xin Tedian” [New Characteristics in Sino-American Relations], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* 1 (2007): 10–11.

Differences within the BRICs

In addition to the great economic potential of each BRIC nation and reasonable chance of fulfilling it, which Goldman Sachs analysts highlighted when they coined the term, the BRICs also share a broadly similar world view and belief that their voice and the interests of the developing world are underrepresented in the international order. However, there are fundamental differences among the BRICs, including diverse political systems, varied economies, and dissimilar views on key policy issues such as free trade, energy pricing, and how to reform existing institutions. Lastly, as BRIC commonalities and shared interests are excessively shallow, there has been little evidence of any “BRICs mentality,” and one is unlikely to form given the differences. After a thorough analysis of similarities and differences, Leslie Armijo concluded, “The notion of the BRICs countries as a set thus appears forced.”¹⁰⁶

Although Chinese government officials stress the broad similarities between the four countries, Chinese analysts are more frank about fundamental differences. CICIR analyst Lin Limin asks, “Why does it put Brazil, Russia, India, and China together and coin a new word? These four countries are actually quite different from each other in many ways and even in fundamental nature.”¹⁰⁷ Commentary from Chinese analysts around the time of the BRIC leaders’ summit also could not avoid calling attention to the important disparities among the four countries.¹⁰⁸

The Importance of the U.S.

The central importance of relations with the U.S. for each of the BRICs is also an important limiting factor for the development of the BRIC grouping. Any moves to turn the BRICs into an anti-U.S. alliance or to ask the BRICs to risk their relations with the U.S. for the sake of the BRICs are likely to lead to the collapse of the BRICs as a grouping. The U.S. is not only the most powerful actor in the system, but it is also the most important source of trade, investment, and technology, which developing countries rely on for economic growth. Moreover, mounting a challenge to the U.S. not only risks potential retribution, but also the

106. See Leslie Elliott Armijo, “The BRICs Countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as Analytical Category: Mirage or Insight,” *Asian Perspective* 31 (2007): 9. For other discussions of these differences, see Andrew Hurrell, “Hegemony, Liberalism and Global Order: What Space for Would-be Great Powers.”

107. See “‘BRICs Xianxiang’ de Pouxi.”

108. See “Jinzhuan Siguo Shounao Fenghui: Cong ‘Huobi Gongshi’ dao ‘Fenghui Jizhihua;” and Wang Yusheng, “‘Jinzhuan Siguo’ Fenghui jiang Juxing” [BRIC Summit will be held], *Jiefang Ribao*, June 12, 2009.

loss of cooperative relations, especially as most of the BRICs have a closer relationship with the U.S. than any of them have with each other.¹⁰⁹

Intra-BRIC Mistrust and Competition

Even without inherent differences and the centrality of the U.S., the deep mistrust between BRIC countries would likely limit how close the grouping could become. Although some suggest that the threat from the U.S. has helped drive the BRICs together, the reality may be that the BRICs already see each other as the greater potential threat. This is much less true for Brazil, but the other three countries view each other with deep mistrust. Although Sino-Indian relations have improved in recent years, the 1962 war, unresolved border disputes, China's support for Pakistan, and China's perception of India's continued support for Tibet continue to complicate relations. Moreover, as both countries have developed economically, modernized their militaries, and expanded their regional and global interests, new sources of mistrust and potential competition have emerged. The Indians are threatened by China's moves to improve relations with and provide limited assistance to Myanmar, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, and worry that these ties are forming a ring of encirclement around India to restrain its influence. The early manifestations of India's "Look East" policy have also threatened China's interests, as it perceives India as intruding upon its sphere of influence in Myanmar and Indochina. Mutual suspicions have also been stirred by each nation's military build-up and by evidence of the early stages of competition over control of the Indian Ocean and a potential arms race.¹¹⁰

Although generally more cooperative than Sino-Indian relations, Sino-Russian relations have their areas of friction as well. The historical legacies of the relationship include Russian encroachments on Chinese territory in the nineteenth century, China's perceived unfair treatment and ultimate abandonment in the Sino-Soviet alliance, the 1969 border war, and military confrontation throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. Although relations during the post-Cold War period have improved significantly, the Chinese have repeatedly felt abandoned by Russia's mild response to U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and its quick moves to repair relations with the U.S. after the September 11th

109. See Harsh V. Pant, "Feasibility of the Russia-China-India 'Strategic Triangle': Assessment of Theoretical and Empirical Issues," *International Studies* 43 (2006): 51–72. For an explicit connection between the importance of the U.S. and limits on BRIC cooperation, see Pang Zhongying, "Xinxing Daguo, youxian Hezuo."

110. See Jing-dong Yuan, "The Dragon and the Elephant: Chinese-Indian Relations in the 21st Century," *Washington Quarterly* 30 (Summer 2007): 131–44; and John W. Garver, "China's Influence in Central and South Asia: Is It Increasing?" in *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, ed. David Shambaugh, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 205–27.

attacks. In recent years, there have also been delays and difficult bargaining over Chinese imports of weapons and Russian plans to establish an oil pipeline to serve China. The Russians are also concerned that as China continues to develop economically, Russia will be left as nothing but a provider of raw materials to the regional economic juggernaut.¹¹¹ Although tensions in Sino-Indian and Sino-Russian relations have not prevented the establishment of stable relations or the formation of a BRIC grouping, the many issues suggest that the limited trust in most of the bilateral relations will limit how far BRIC cooperation can go.

Conclusion

The BRICs have come together in a political grouping in a way that has far exceeded most expectations. For China, cooperation with the BRICs has occurred under the structural constraints of unipolarity, which incentivize China to cooperate with the U.S. and make sure that a rising China's behavior is not seen as a threat to which the hyper-sensitive unipole needs to respond. However, as this article has shown, China has benefitted from its cooperation with the BRICs in significant ways. Looking forward, one of the major challenges for China in its engagement with the BRICs is how to maximize its benefits from cooperation while making sure that the U.S. does not perceive its cooperation with the BRICs as a threat. Zhao Gancheng, a researcher at the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, perfectly captures this dilemma in an analysis of BRIC cooperation. He argues that "[China's] objective is through cooperation, strengthen its position in international system, but at the same time, don't try to challenge the U.S. in a confrontational mode."¹¹² China does not see its cooperation with the BRICs as part of an anti-U.S. hard balancing coalition. If anyone tried to move the BRICs in that direction, China would oppose the attempt, as would several other participating states. Although BRIC cooperation has been significant, fundamental differences among the BRICs, the continued importance of the U.S., and intra-BRIC competition and rivalry are important limits on how much further BRIC cooperation can go. Looking to the future, as the U.S. declines and the BRICs continue to rise, it is very possible that intra-BRIC competition and rivalry will become extreme, further limiting BRIC cooperation.

U.S. policy is an important factor that could potentially overcome these limits and push the BRICs towards deeper cooperation. If the U.S. perceives limited BRIC cooperation as an anti-U.S. bloc and adopts a more hostile policy towards this

111. See Lo, *Axis of Convenience*; and Yu Bin, "China and Russia: Normalizing their Strategic Partnership," in *Power Shift*, 228–46.

112. See Zhao Gancheng, "ZhongMeiE Zhanlue Guanxi de Zhengce Yiyi yu Fazhan Qianjing" [Political Implications and Development Prospects for Sino-American-Russian Strategic Relations], *Nanya Yanjiu* [South Asian Studies] 2 (2005): 4.

“alliance,” it may drive these countries closer together and create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Moreover, if the U.S. and other western countries refuse BRIC demands for limited changes in the international order, the BRICs may become disillusioned, see themselves as forced to mount a sweeping challenge, and seek to replace it with an order more in their interests. Thus far, this scenario looks unlikely. Western countries have started to show openness to reforming the order and accommodating some of the BRIC demands. Although negotiation over reforming international order is likely to be a lengthy and difficult process, the willingness of western countries to entertain BRIC proposals should increase the BRICs’ satisfaction with the international order, make them more likely to act as “responsible stakeholders,” and reduce the prospect that they will challenge that order.

Looking to the future, China’s power will likely provide a challenge to BRIC cooperation and the BRICs as a grouping. Although the other three powers have gained in prestige through their association with the rising Chinese juggernaut, analysts have begun to suggest that China’s overwhelming power relative to the other three will undermine the BRICs as a coherent grouping. For instance, recent unofficial calls for a Sino-American G2 to address global challenges and manage global order suggest that China is no longer an emerging power or a developing country. Although this is undoubtedly a concern for BRIC coherence, China is already much more powerful than the other BRICs by most measures and its advantages have not affected the positive momentum of BRIC cooperation. In addition, although foreign analysts may call for a G2, Premier Wen Jiabao and most Chinese experts have criticized the concept as inappropriate and infeasible, arguing that China is too weak to take on such responsibility and recognizing that endorsing the idea would harm China’s diplomacy and isolate it from the developing world.¹¹³ In fact, rather than being eager to be seen as part of a G2 leading and managing the world, China’s leaders are much happier to continue to maintain a relatively low profile as a developing country, cooperate with other emerging developing countries, and benefit from this cooperation while not being seen as confronting the United States.

113. See “Chinese Premier Rejects Allegation of China, U.S. Monopolizing World Affairs in Future,” *Xinhua*, May 21, 2009; Wu Jianmin, “‘G2’ de Tifa butuo” [The “G2” Formulation is Inappropriate], *Renmin Ribao Haiwaiban*, May 25, 2009; and Chu Guofei and Chen Wenxin, “ZhongMei ‘Liangguo Jituan’ Gouxiang de youlai ji kexingxing Fenxi” [An Analysis of the Origins and Feasibility of the U.S.-China “G2” Concept], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 6 (2009): 18–22, 42.