



# Is Peaceful Accommodation of Rising Powers Possible?

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# The problem of rising powers

- China, Russia, and maybe India and Brazil
- Power transitions have led to major wars in the past
- Potential for violent conflict in Eastern Europe and East Asia
- Will the mistakes of 1914 be repeated a century later?



# The problem of rising powers

- International order could be disrupted even without violent conflict
- Solving collective action problems may become more difficult
  - Lack of consensus on climate change and free trade
  - Blocking of UN action on Iraq and Syria



# Overview

- What is accommodation?
- Peaceful change and war avoidance in theory
- Strategies of peaceful change
- The emerging power transition in Asia
- Key questions



# What is accommodation?

*Mutual adaptation and acceptance by established and rising powers, and the elimination or substantial reduction of hostility between them*

- Key components:
  - Status Adjustment
  - Sharing of leadership roles through institutional privileges
  - Establishment of a “warm peace”, not just absence of war
  - Playing by a set of mutually accepted norms and rules



# What is accommodation?

- Full accommodation
  - UK-US (late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century), US-PRC (1970s)
- Partial or limited accommodation
  - US-USSR (post-1945)
- Non-accommodation
  - Japan and Germany (post World War I)



# What is accommodation?

- Symbolic accommodation
  - US-India (since 2005)
- Region-specific accommodation
  - Concede primacy in a specific region
- History shows that non-violent accommodation is a rare event



# Is peaceful change possible?

- IR theory has been notoriously weak in explaining peaceful change or how to achieve it
- E.H. Carr and Change
- Charles Kupchan – hegemon and challenger must:
  - Show strategic restraint and mutual accommodation
  - Fashion agreement on the rules for a new global order
  - Legitimate that mutually agreed global order
- Stephen Rock – if state interests and objectives minimally collide and similar socio-political culture exists





# Is peaceful change possible?

- Are these criteria achievable?
- How to fashion an international order with:
  - Co-existence of different types of powers
  - Reduced points of tension
  - Mutual recognition of power and status aspirations



# War avoidance in Realism

- Realist theories argue the cost of war should be made higher than the benefits – attempt to maintain the status quo
  - Balance of power
  - Containment
  - Deterrence
- The pursuit of these strategies can themselves produce vicious conflicts
  - Challenger is likely to see them as provocative and aggressive



# War avoidance in Realism

- The dominant power's capabilities could decline
  - No longer able to pursue balance, deterrence and containment
- War is still likely if the challenger finds the status quo unbearable
- Chaos and crises continue especially in the “peripheral” regions



# War avoidance in Liberalism

- International institutions and regimes
- Interdependence
- Democratic norms
- Liberal international economic order
  
- Collective security and gradual, peaceful change
  
- In practice: liberal states have used coercive force and a legitimacy deficit exists



# Ideas, norms, and peaceful change

- Constructivism: build security community
  - Western Europe as the example of this
- Is this translatable to non-Western contexts?
- What if rising powers see the existing norms as instruments to perpetuate the status quo?



# Grand strategies of peaceful change

- Ideological/normative accommodation
  - Challenger accepts some of the core normative framework of the dominant power, and vice versa
  - In today's world, regional states must also accept the transition as legitimate
- Territorial accommodation
  - Not just physical territory but spheres of influence as well



# Grand strategies of peaceful change

- Economic accommodation
  - Deep interdependence makes conflict difficult as it becomes more costly
- Institutional accommodation
  - Effective participation of emerging powers in system-wide decisions – key leadership roles
- Proper distribution of systemic benefits to rising powers is essential



# Strategies of rising powers

- If the order is perceived to be malleable, not necessary for violent challenge
- If it is seen as rigid, may resort to conflict if benefits exceed costs
- Is the rising power willing to be accommodated?
- Incremental adjustment or violent overturning?





# Constraining factors

- Nationalism
  - Perception of historical injustice and desire for revanchism
  - Weak domestic elites may give in to such impulses to sustain their positions, or lose ground to hawkish elements
- Much depends on the internal political order
- How much accommodation is feasible, and how much is enough?



# Case studies

- Peaceful accommodation: the UK and the US
- Partial accommodation: the US and the PRC
- End of the US-Soviet rivalry and its outcomes today
  - Failure to accommodate a declining power
- Outright failures
  - Japan, Germany, and World War II



# The emerging power transition

- Fundamental changes in today's world:
  - Economic globalization and unprecedented interdependence
  - Institutions allow for engagement and soft-balancing
  - Norms of territorial integrity
  - Dominance of defence in military technology
  - Absence of intense nationalism and expansionist ideologies



# The emerging power transition

- A cold peace emerging between China and the US?
- Partial acceptance of international norms, except in terms of democratic society
- Successfully inserted into the economic order
- Institutional accommodation mostly accomplished



# China's challenge

- Conflictual relationships with other Asian states
- Little in common and little legitimacy with Asia's democratic states especially
  - Too much assertiveness could backfire
- Miscalculation could derail peaceful accommodation



# India's challenge

- More prospects for peaceful accommodation
- Shares many goals with existing ideological/normative order
- Internal development lacking – may not be ready to assume leadership
- Very much a work in progress



# Peaceful change

- Growing importance of regional pivotal powers?
  - Turkey, Nigeria, Indonesia, Pakistan, Argentina
- Avoiding major war is in everyone's interest
  - Even the “winner” can end up crippled
  - Smaller states end up as victims and could lose their sovereign existence



# Conclusion: key questions

- Is violent conflict inevitable in power transitions?
  - What else can bring change to international order?
- Do different types of power resources matter today?
- What are the mechanisms to accommodate a rising power?
  - Do institutions offer the best arena?
- Under what conditions does accommodation fail?





# Key questions

- When is accommodation not appeasement?
- How does a dominant power balance between accommodation and containment of a challenger?
- How can the opposition of regional states to the rising power from their region be handled?



Thank you