

Assessing the West's Role in the Post-Western World

Rohan Hazell:

The term post-Western world can be misleading in that it seemingly implies the West's role in the coming era will be minimal.

However, many of the multilateral institutions, political norms, and cultural influences established by the West will continue to shape the world, even as power dynamics shift.

How the West engages with the changing world will therefore profoundly influence the trajectory of the future.

But it is equally important to recognise that the West in itself is not a monolith, and differences in geography and sociopolitics will dictate how North America and Europe will navigate a multipolar world.

To shed more light on this, let's hear from Professor Kishore Mahbubani, former President of the UN Security Council, and Distinguished Fellow at the Asian Research Institute.

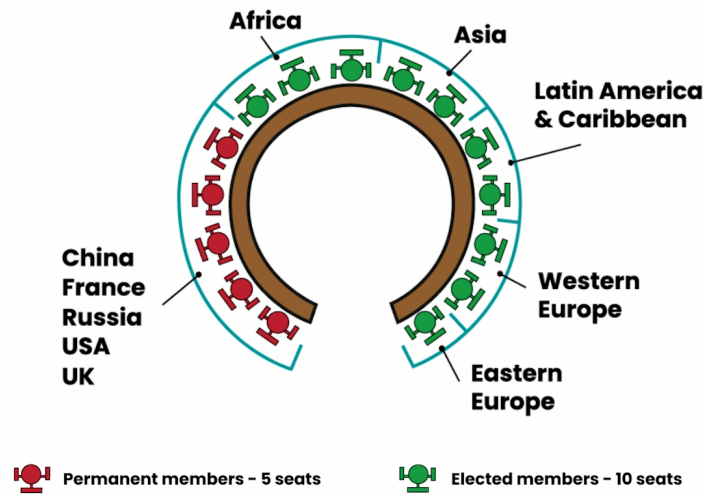
Professor Kishore Mahbubani:

What is the role of Western-led multilateral institutions in the coming world order?

I think it's very important that we must strengthen and preserve the United Nations and the multilateral rules-based order that also includes the UN Security Council. The Security Council today faces a major strategic dilemma. It can either keep its current composition of five permanent member states, or it can strengthen its credibility. Because if it keeps the composition and doesn't include new emerging powers like India, like Brazil, like Nigeria or South Africa, then the UN Security Council will lose its credibility.

In fact, I have argued quite provocatively that India can actually undermine the UN Security Council by just declaring that it will no longer obey the decisions of the UN Security Council. And India is big enough to make such a statement. So if the United States, Russia, China and Europe want to preserve the credibility of the UN Security Council, they should admit India immediately as a permanent member of the UN Security Council with a veto.

UN Security Council members



In fact, Martin Wolf once said, and I cite him in my book, “The Great Convergence”, if you have a Security council by 2020, with the UK inside and India outside, then it's no longer a credible UN Security Council. So maybe one gift that the United Kingdom can give to India in return for having colonised India for so long is to vacate its seat. And as you know, in this year, in 2022, India's economy in nominal terms, is now bigger than that of the United Kingdom. So if you want to represent the great powers of today, you should have India in the Security Council and not the United Kingdom.

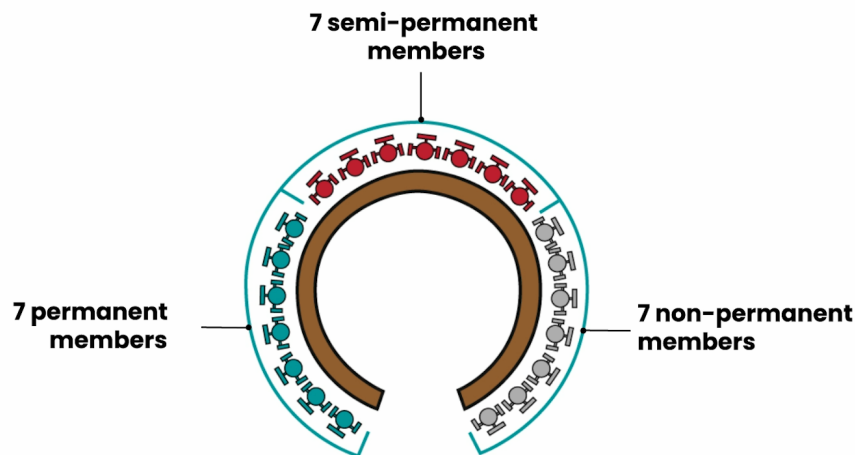
“Within a decade a world in which the UK is on the United Nations Security Council and India is not will seem beyond laughable.”

– Martin Wolf,
Chief Economics Commentator, *Financial Times*

Source: *Financial Times*, 2009

And instead, I think what you should have is a single European seat. And that way you will still have 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council. I wrote my book, *The Great Convergence*. I suggested a 7-7-7 formula whereby you have 7 permanent members and 7

semi-permanent members. Because there are some countries, the next 28 largest countries, always rotate through the Security Council more often, making them semi-permanent. And the advantage of making them semi-permanent is that then they will welcome the new permanent members.



UN Security Council members

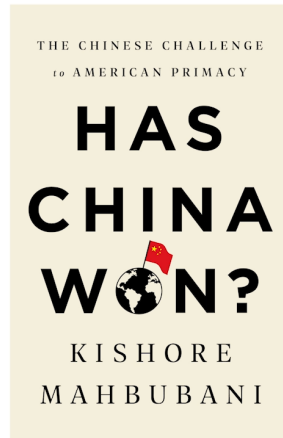
I will give you some examples. One reason why Brazil couldn't get this UN Security Council is because Argentina, its neighbour says, why not me? One reason why India cannot get into the UN Security Council is because its neighbour Pakistan says, why not me? So why not create a formula whereby countries like Pakistan and Argentina become semi-permanent members of the UN Security Council? And they say, okay, I also get something.

So the 7-7-7 formula is the best realistic formula for reforming the UN Security Council. And I hope that India will look at it seriously because this will facilitate India's early admission into the UN Security Council.

Will the West reject the post-Western world order?

The danger, of course, is that since the West represents a minority of the world's population, they could, in a sense, effectively self-isolate themselves from the rest of the world if they start imposing conditions on the rest of the world.

And as we move into the post-Western world, fewer and fewer societies will accept any kind of pressure or advice from the West on how they should structure their societies. In my book, “Has China Won?”, I document in Chapter 7 how the United States itself, as a society, is experiencing some very serious internal social problems. And for the friends of the United States, and I consider myself a friend of the United States, we would like the United States to do better, perform better and do well. But for the United States to perform better, it should focus on its own internal social problem.



source: mahbubani.net

The United States is the only major developed country where the average income of the bottom 50% has been going down. And in the year 2022, something remarkable has happened, because the United States has a per capita income which is more than six times more than that of China. And yet, in the year 2022, life expectancy in China became longer than life expectancy in the United States. And that's amazing. And so the United States should therefore do some deep reflection on what has gone wrong internally in its society. And the United States should actually ask itself, can the United States learn lessons from the rest of the world?

Now, this is something, again, that most Americans find inconceivable, that they could learn lessons from the rest of the world on how to create a more egalitarian, more prosperous society, especially for the bottom 50%. And so instead of engaging in geopolitical contests with China, the goal of my book, “Has China Won?”, is to persuade the United States that given its own internal challenges, and given the fact that China still has internal challenges, the United States and China should engage in win-win cooperation rather than lose-lose geopolitical contestation.



How does the Russia-Ukraine war factor into the shift to a post-Western era?

Well I think, number one, we have to acknowledge this is a vital principle of international law, that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is illegal, it violates the UN charter and it's against international law and therefore it should be condemned. That is very, very clear. But at the same time, when wars happen, we also have to find out what are the structural causes of the war.

And I think when future historians write about this, like take, for example, how did World War 2 come? How did Hitler emerge? Today the historians agree that the structural reason why the Nazi regime emerged in Germany is because the Europeans imposed punitive sanctions on Germany after World War 1. And because they tried to punish Germany, it led to a backlash and that's the creation of a fiercely nationalist leader like Hitler in Germany. This is what British historians write about.

So, similarly, I think at the end of the Cold War, when Western Europe had a chance to integrate Russia into a European order and create an order in which Russia was an equal member, there's no doubt that the opportunity was missed. And here I must say that one lesson that we in East Asia can learn from all this is that when new powers emerge, like China, it's important to create an inclusive order that includes the new rising powers. And that's what we have so far successfully done in East Asia in all our regional arrangements. We include China in the regional arrangements.

By contrast, the Europeans failed to create a new order which included Russia. Russia was not included in the European Union, Russia was not included in NATO. And so as a result of it, the alienation of Russia, that I think was one of the structural causes for this war in Ukraine. And I think the Europeans should therefore, again, do some deep reflection on what they could have done to prevent this war in Ukraine from happening.

The Geopolitical Realities Facing the US and Europe in the Post-Western World

I think the United States will remain either the number one or the number two power for the next 20 - 30 years. It will be a mistake to underestimate the United States and the force and power of the United States. And at the same time, it's also possible that the United States will take advantage of some of the suspicions of China's neighbours and try to create an anti-China coalition. I don't think many countries want to join such a coalition. In fact, most countries in the world want to have good ties with the United States and want to have good ties with China. But the United States will remain a force for a long time to come.

However, the Europeans don't have the same kind of force as the United States does. And the United States is very, very far away from the Islamic world, very far away from Africa, so it doesn't have to worry about problems in that part of the world. The United States is protected by two powerful oceans, mighty oceans; the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. But Europe doesn't have that privilege, and therefore it's important for the Europeans to exercise a far greater degree of geopolitical realism.

And again, speaking as a friend of Europe, I've been advising Europe to become more realistic in their geopolitical policies and understand and accept that as we move into a post-Western world, they have to adjust and adapt to it.

I have always been advocating that in geopolitics you have to be Machiavellian, because geopolitics is very cold and ruthless and it punishes countries that are geopolitically naive. It is a fact that many European countries have become geopolitically naive because they haven't understood where their own long-term interests lie and they're sacrificing their own interests and concerns for the sake of others.

Rohan Hazell:

Although the post-Western world will see rising powers like China and India having greater influence on the global stage, this does not mean that the West will become redundant.

Rather, Professor Kishore argues that the multilateral rules-based order set up by the West, including the UN, should be preserved, and strengthened for the benefit of all.

This will require the West to become more accepting of sharing power with non-Western countries and respecting their wants.

This is the geopolitical reality facing the West, and neglecting it could lead to unwelcome tension and even conflict.