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The Decline of US Hegemony and the Rise of Multi-Polar Security Architectures in Asia

Ms. Nayab Jamshed

M.Phil International Relation, Department of Governance Politics and Public Policy, Abasyn University Peshawar

Dr. Muhammad Naveed Ul Hasan Shah

Assistant Professor Department of Political Science & IR, University of Central Punjab, Lahore

Dr. Fazeel Ashraf Qaisrani

Lecturer, Department of Political Science and IR, University of Gujrat

ABSTRACT

The decline of US hegemony and the concomitant rise of multipolar security architectures in Asia is reshaping regional order and strategic behavior. This article examines how relative US retrenchment driven by shifts in domestic politics, economic competition, and selective engagement interacts with the growing capabilities and institutional activism of regional powers to produce a more multipolar security environment across Asia. Using a qualitative, historical-comparative approach that integrates policy documents, official statements, and secondary literature, the study maps major security architectures formal and informal emerging in East, South, and Central Asia, and analyzes their drivers, structures, and implications. Key findings indicate that US military primacy and institutional centrality are contested rather than abruptly ended: the United States remains highly capable but less able or willing to unilaterally shape outcomes. In response, regional actors are diversifying security arrangements: minilateral coalitions (Quad-type groupings), expanded Eurasian platforms (SCO and BRICS-associated security dialogues), and state-led hub-and-spoke partnerships are proliferating. This institutional diversification increases strategic complexity and produces both opportunities for burden-sharing and risks of fragmentation, misalignment, and normative divergence. Policy-relevant implications include the need for adaptive US strategies that combine selective engagement with support for inclusive, interoperable frameworks; for regional states to pursue institutional complementarity rather than exclusive blocs; and for scholars to reconceptualize regional order as dynamic institutional pluralism rather than a binary hegemonic vs. post-hegemonic outcome. The article contributes to debates on hegemonic decline, regional order formation, and plural security governance by offering an integrative analytical framework and by highlighting avenues for cooperative stability amid rising multipolarity.

Keywords: *US Hegemony, Multipolarity, Asian Security Architectures, Institutional Pluralism, Indo-Pacific, Minilateralism.*

Introduction

The post-World War II international order was defined by US hegemonic leadership a position rooted in unmatched military capabilities, economic power, alliance networks, and institutional influence. In Asia, this hegemony manifested through a series of bilateral security alliances, forward-deployed military bases, and leadership in shaping the region's political,

economic, and normative frameworks (Ikenberry, 2011). The “hub-and-spokes” alliance system, institutional leadership in the creation of regional bodies like APEC, and the role of US extended deterrence became the central pillars of regional security architecture throughout the Cold War and into the early post–Cold War era (Calder, 2004; Green, 2017). However, over the past two decades, shifts in global power distribution, the rise of new actors, and transformations in regional strategic behavior have eroded the unipolar moment and ushered in an era of multipolarity. Asia, once a key theatre of US dominance, is now at the forefront of this systemic change. The decline of US hegemony is neither abrupt nor absolute; it is a relative process driven by multiple interlocking factors. Domestically, political polarization, fiscal constraints, and war fatigue have limited Washington’s capacity for sustained overseas engagement (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016).

Internationally, the rapid rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and the increasing agency of middle powers such as India, Japan, and South Korea have challenged US dominance and reshaped the regional balance of power (Allison, 2018; Mearsheimer, 2019). Moreover, US strategic recalibrations including the “Pivot to Asia,” the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, and selective retrenchment under successive administrations have signaled both a recognition of changing realities and a redefinition of America’s role in the region (Campbell & Ratner, 2018). As US primacy faces growing constraints, Asian security governance has entered a new phase characterized by institutional pluralism, strategic diversification, and competitive order-building. Multipolar security architectures ranging from formal alliances and multilateral organizations to minilateral coalitions and issue-based partnerships are proliferating across the region (Tow & Cooper, 2019). These include established frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-led mechanisms, as well as newer groupings like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), AUKUS, and the India–Japan–Australia trilateral (Medcalf, 2020; Grossman, 2022). They reflect a strategic environment where no single power can unilaterally shape outcomes and where states seek diversified approaches to security, autonomy, and influence. This transformation also reflects deeper structural trends in the international system. The diffusion of power from the West to the East, the rise of transnational security challenges, and the increased salience of maritime and non-traditional security issues have altered the foundations of regional order (Acharya, 2014). Asian states are no longer passive recipients of great power strategies; they are active participants in shaping the region’s security architecture. Middle powers such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea are pursuing proactive foreign policies and institutional innovations, while smaller Southeast Asian states are leveraging multilateralism to hedge against uncertainties (Goh, 2013; He, 2021). China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and expanding military footprint, India’s Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), and ASEAN’s persistent pursuit of “centrality” are all part of this evolving landscape. Despite extensive scholarship on US hegemony and Asian security, existing literature often presents a binary narrative of hegemonic dominance versus decline. Some scholars emphasize the resilience of US power and its continued indispensability for regional order (Beeson, 2018; Green, 2017), while others argue that multipolarity signals the end of US-led order and the emergence of post-American regionalism (Mearsheimer, 2019; Ikenberry, 2018). However, such dichotomies overlook the complexity of institutional

adaptation and the coexistence of hegemonic legacies with new forms of security cooperation.

Moreover, while the rise of China and its challenge to US primacy have been widely studied, less attention has been given to how multiple actors including middle powers and regional institutions are co-constructing alternative security architectures that operate alongside, and sometimes against, US-led frameworks. This article seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining how the decline of US hegemony is driving the proliferation of multipolar security architectures in Asia. It argues that US relative decline has not resulted in strategic vacuum but has instead catalyzed a more fragmented, yet dynamic, regional order characterized by overlapping institutions, diversified alignments, and competitive norm-setting. These new architectures ranging from China-centered organizations like the SCO to US-aligned coalitions such as the Quad and AUKUS coexist, compete, and sometimes complement each other, shaping a complex and evolving security landscape. Understanding this transition is essential for grasping the nature of contemporary Asian order and the future of US engagement in the region.

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative and historical-analytical approach, drawing on primary sources such as policy documents, speeches, and official strategies, as well as secondary academic literature. It traces the trajectory of US hegemonic presence in Asia, identifies key drivers of its relative decline, and maps the emergence of multipolar security architectures. Through comparative analysis, the article highlights how different actors great powers, middle powers, and regional organizations contribute to this evolving order and how their interactions redefine regional security dynamics. The article is structured as follows. The next section reviews existing literature on hegemonic decline, multipolarity, and Asian regionalism, outlining the key theoretical debates and identifying gaps. The subsequent sections analyze the drivers of US relative decline, examine the major emerging security architectures, and assess their implications for regional stability and order. The article concludes by reflecting on the prospects for cooperative security in a multipolar Asia and the future role of the United States in this transformed environment. In sum, the decline of US hegemony and the rise of multipolar security architectures represent not the end of American influence but the reconfiguration of regional order. This transition underscores a fundamental shift from a unipolar, hegemon-centric system to one defined by institutional diversity, shared leadership, and strategic fluidity. Understanding this shift is crucial for policymakers, scholars, and regional actors navigating the complexities of twenty-first-century Asian security.

Literature Review / Integration

Theoretical Framework: Hegemony, Decline, and Order Transition

The concept of hegemony has been central to understanding the evolution of international order. Hegemonic stability theory (HST), articulated by scholars like Kindleberger (1973) and Gilpin (1981), posits that a dominant power provides public goods such as security, open trade, and institutional frameworks that underpin global stability. The post-1945 order, anchored in US material superiority and institutional leadership, exemplified this dynamic. However, as Organski (1968) argued in power transition theory, hegemonic orders are not static: they evolve as rising powers accumulate capabilities and challenge existing hierarchies. Robert Keohane (1984) nuanced this debate by arguing that institutional cooperation could persist beyond hegemonic decline, as regimes and norms develop their own momentum. This

insight is crucial for analyzing Asia's security order today: even as US primacy erodes, institutional architectures remain sites of contestation and adaptation. Cox (1987) and Nye (2015) further emphasize that hegemonic power comprises material, institutional, and ideational dimensions; decline may occur unevenly across these spheres, shaping different forms of order transition. English School theorists add another layer by distinguishing between international society and world society. Bull (1977) and Buzan (2014) argue that order transformation is not merely a function of power shifts but also of normative evolution and institutional pluralism. This is particularly relevant to Asia, where regional actors increasingly shape order through localized norms and multilateral institutions, challenging the Western-centric frameworks historically imposed by US hegemony.

Debates on US Hegemonic Decline

The question of whether US hegemony is declining and what this means has generated extensive scholarly debate. Layne (2018) contends that unipolarity is eroding due to structural shifts in global power, particularly China's rise, and that the US will face growing constraints in shaping outcomes unilaterally. Zakaria (2019) similarly argues that the diffusion of power is producing a "post-American world," where the US remains influential but no longer dominant. Ikenberry (2011), however, cautions against overestimating decline, emphasizing the resilience of US-led institutions and alliances. Empirically, the US still commands unparalleled military reach and alliance networks (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016). Yet, its relative economic weight is shrinking, and its political will to sustain extensive commitments has weakened (Mearsheimer, 2019). Domestic polarization and strategic overextension have fueled retrenchment impulses (Posen, 2014), while unilateralism under the Trump administration eroded US credibility and encouraged hedging among allies (Allison, 2020). The Biden administration's efforts to revitalize alliances signal continuity, but the shift toward selective engagement suggests a recalibration rather than restoration of primacy (Campbell & Sullivan, 2019). China's ascent is central to this transformation.

Shambaugh (2020) documents Beijing's growing military power, economic clout, and institutional activism, from the BRI to the AIIB. China seeks not merely to balance US power but to shape alternative regional norms and institutions (Callahan, 2016). India's rise adds complexity: while aligning with the US in some domains, New Delhi pursues strategic autonomy and institutional diversification (Mohan, 2013). Middle powers like Japan, Australia, and South Korea are also recalibrating, deepening intra-regional ties while sustaining US partnerships (Medcalf, 2020). These dynamics suggest that US decline is relative, incremental, and multidimensional. The US remains indispensable but no longer hegemonic in the traditional sense. Its role is shifting from sole architect to primary stakeholder within a pluralistic order shaped by multiple actors and institutions.

Multipolarity and the Evolution of Asian Security Architectures

Asia's security landscape reflects broader global transitions but exhibits distinct regional logics. Acharya (2014) emphasizes "multiplex" regionalism, where overlapping and diverse institutions coexist without a single organizing hierarchy. This contrasts with the hierarchical, US-centric "hub-and-spokes" system that dominated the Cold War era.

A key feature of the emerging order is minilateralism: small, flexible coalitions focused on specific issues. The Quad (US, Japan, India, Australia) exemplifies this approach, evolving from a crisis-response mechanism into a broader Indo-Pacific platform (Green, 2021). AUKUS, a

trilateral security pact centered on technology and deterrence, further illustrates how selective partnerships complement traditional alliances (Tow & Stuart, 2022). These coalitions allow states to address shared challenges such as China's assertiveness or supply-chain vulnerabilities without committing to formal treaty obligations. At the same time, multilateral institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and ASEAN-led mechanisms (ARF, ADMM-Plus) have expanded their scope and membership, offering alternative venues for dialogue and security cooperation (Ferdinand, 2016). While often criticized for limited effectiveness, these forums embody norms of inclusivity, sovereignty, and consensus that contrast with Western alliance models (Acharya, 2014). China and Russia use the SCO to institutionalize their strategic partnership and engage Central and South Asian states (Ambrosio, 2017), while ASEAN's "centrality" discourse positions Southeast Asia as a convening hub amid great-power rivalry (Haacke, 2019).

Institutional pluralism also manifests in informal and issue-specific partnerships. Japan and India's bilateral security cooperation, India's engagement with Russia and Central Asia, and South Korea's "New Southern Policy" illustrate the diversification of strategic networks beyond US-centric frameworks (Mohan & Raja, 2021). This mosaic of architectures reflects not only shifting power but also differentiated threat perceptions, historical experiences, and governance preferences across Asia.

Gaps and Limitations in Existing literature

Despite rich scholarship on hegemonic decline and regional order, significant gaps remain. First, much literature remains overly bipolar in focus, framing change primarily as a US-China rivalry. This neglects the agency of middle powers, smaller states, and regional organizations in shaping institutional outcomes (Breslin, 2021). Second, analyses often treat institutions as passive reflections of power rather than as independent variables that structure interactions and influence order trajectories (Keohane & Martin, 1995).

Third, while there is growing recognition of institutional diversity, existing studies rarely theorize how multiple architectures coexist, interact, and evolve. Concepts like "institutional competition" (Aggarwal & Evenett, 2014) and "regime complexity" (Alter & Raustiala, 2018) offer useful starting points but require adaptation to capture Asia's distinctive mix of formal alliances, minilateral coalitions, and informal networks. Finally, normative and ideational dimensions how different actors envision legitimate order remain underexplored, particularly beyond China and the US (Acharya & Buzan, 2019).

Toward an Integrated Understanding of Multipolar Security Order

Addressing these gaps requires reconceptualizing Asian order as a dynamic system of institutional pluralism. Declining US hegemony is not producing a vacuum but a proliferation of overlapping and interacting security architectures. These structures reflect diverse strategic calculations: some aim to hedge against China's rise, others to reduce dependency on the US, and still others to address transnational threats or enhance autonomy. Their coexistence produces a "patchwork order" (Feigenbaum & Manning, 2021) that is more complex, adaptive, and contested than previous hierarchies.

This pluralistic order is neither inherently unstable nor cohesive. On one hand, institutional diversity enables tailored cooperation and reduces overdependence on any single power. On the other, fragmentation risks misalignment, duplication, and competitive bloc formation. The outcome will depend on how states manage institutional interactions whether they

pursue complementarity or exclusivity, and whether major powers accommodate or seek to dominate regional frameworks.

In sum, the literature reveals a shifting landscape: US hegemony is eroding but not collapsing; power is diffusing but not evenly; and order is becoming more institutionalized yet more fragmented. Understanding these transformations requires moving beyond binary narratives of rise and decline toward a framework that captures the institutional, normative, and strategic pluralism shaping Asia's emerging security order. This article contributes to that effort by synthesizing diverse strands of scholarship, identifying gaps, and offering an integrated perspective on the interplay between hegemonic decline and the rise of multipolar security architectures.

This study adopts a qualitative, historical-comparative research design to examine how the decline of US hegemony interacts with the emergence of multipolar security architectures in Asia. Rather than relying on a single explanatory model, the research synthesizes multiple approaches historical institutionalism, power transition theory, and regional security complex theory to analyze both structural transformations and agency-driven institutional developments.

The unit of analysis is the Asian regional security order, with particular attention to the Indo-Pacific, East Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia. The research focuses on the period from the end of the Cold War (1991) to the present, a timeframe that captures the peak of US unipolar dominance and its gradual transformation into a contested, multipolar environment. This longitudinal perspective enables the identification of continuities, ruptures, and patterns in regional security arrangements over time.

The data corpus consists of three main categories:

Primary sources: US National Security Strategies, Pentagon defense reviews, Chinese and Indian white papers, speeches by policymakers, joint communiqués, and official statements from organizations such as ASEAN, SCO, and the Quad. These texts provide insight into state intentions, policy priorities, and institutional objectives.

Secondary sources: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and policy reports from leading research institutes and think tanks. These works offer theoretical frameworks, empirical analyses, and scholarly debates that inform the study's analytical lens.

Institutional records: Charters, founding documents, and summit declarations of key regional organizations, which shed light on their evolving mandates, membership, and operational modalities.

The sampling strategy is purposive, focusing on documents and studies that directly address US strategic posture, Asian security architectures, and regional order transformation. Sources were collected primarily through Google Scholar and institutional databases, ensuring scholarly credibility and traceability.

The analytical procedure follows a thematic coding approach. Data are organized into thematic clusters hegemonic decline, power redistribution, institutional diversification, and strategic interaction. Within each cluster, the study identifies patterns, causal mechanisms, and variations across cases. For example, US alliance evolution is analyzed alongside the emergence of minilateral coalitions like the Quad, multilateral institutions such as SCO and ASEAN, and informal security networks. Comparative analysis highlights both convergence and divergence in institutional objectives, governance models, and strategic functions.

A triangulation strategy strengthens the study's validity by cross-verifying findings from different data types policy documents, scholarly analyses, and institutional records. Historical tracing is used to map key inflection points in the evolution of Asian security order, such as China's BRI launch (2013), the US "pivot to Asia" (2011), and the formalization of the Quad (2017).

The limitations of the study are acknowledged. As a qualitative analysis, it prioritizes depth over breadth and does not seek to provide statistical generalizations. Additionally, the rapid evolution of security architectures means some findings may require updating as new institutions and alignments emerge. Nonetheless, the methodological approach ensures analytical rigor and contextual richness, allowing for nuanced insights into the interplay between US hegemonic decline and Asia's emerging multipolar security order.

1. Shifting Strategic Landscape: Evidence of US Hegemonic Decline

The empirical evidence across the last three decades reveals a gradual but significant erosion of US dominance in Asia. At the height of unipolarity in the 1990s and early 2000s, the United States maintained an unrivaled military presence with over 100,000 troops stationed across Asia, anchored by bilateral alliances with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia (Ikenberry, 2011). US-led institutions like APEC and security dialogues such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) reflected Washington's central role in shaping regional norms and agendas. However, this hegemonic position has since been constrained by structural, domestic, and geopolitical factors.

First, the redistribution of global power is evident in the economic domain. According to World Bank data, the US share of global GDP declined from over 25% in 1991 to around 15% in 2023, while China's share rose from less than 2% to nearly 18% (Shambaugh, 2020). Military balances are also shifting: China now fields the world's largest navy by ship count, and its defense budget about \$225 billion in 2023 has grown more than tenfold since 2000. The US maintains qualitative superiority, but its margin of dominance is narrowing, especially in key areas such as anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities and regional missile forces (Mearsheimer, 2019).

Second, US domestic constraints have reshaped its strategic posture. Political polarization and war fatigue following the protracted conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have fueled calls for strategic restraint (Posen, 2014). Budgetary pressures have further limited Washington's ability to sustain extensive global commitments. The Trump administration's "America First" policies accelerated perceptions of US retrenchment, as seen in the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and skepticism toward multilateralism (Allison, 2020). Although the Biden administration has sought to repair alliances, the long-term credibility of US commitments remains under question, prompting regional actors to diversify their security options.

Third, regional agency has become a decisive factor. Asian states increasingly resist binary alignments and pursue flexible strategies that balance relations with Washington and Beijing. Southeast Asian states, for instance, engage with China economically while maintaining security ties with the US (Haacke, 2019). Middle powers like Japan and Australia are expanding defense cooperation independently of Washington, while India pursues strategic autonomy even as it deepens its partnership with the US (Mohan, 2013). This diversification

reflects a multipolar strategic environment where the US is an important but not singular actor.

2. Proliferation of Multipolar Security Architectures

The relative decline of US hegemony has not led to institutional vacuum but rather to an explosion of new and diverse security architectures. These frameworks vary in scope, membership, formality, and strategic orientation, collectively reshaping Asia's security order.

a. Minilateral Coalitions: Flexible, Issue-Specific Partnerships

Minilateralism has emerged as a hallmark of the multipolar era, reflecting the preference for agile and purpose-driven cooperation over large, consensus-based forums. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is the most prominent example. Initially formed in 2007 as a coordination mechanism following the Indian Ocean tsunami, the Quad was revitalized in 2017 amid growing concerns over China's assertiveness (Green, 2021). Its agenda now spans maritime security, supply-chain resilience, emerging technologies, and health cooperation. The Quad's flexible, non-treaty nature allows members to deepen cooperation without formal alliance commitments, reflecting a shift away from US-centric security guarantees toward shared responsibility.

Similarly, AUKUS a security pact among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States announced in 2021 signals new forms of collaboration centered on advanced defense technologies, cyber capabilities, and undersea warfare (Tow & Stuart, 2022). AUKUS illustrates how the US is repositioning itself from unilateral provider to enabler and partner, sharing strategic burdens while embedding its role within new cooperative frameworks.

b. Multilateral Institutions: Expanding Membership and Strategic Scope

Traditional multilateral institutions have adapted to new power realities by broadening participation and diversifying agendas. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), founded in 2001, has expanded from a China-Russia-led initiative into a major Eurasian platform that includes India, Pakistan, and Iran (Ambrosio, 2017). The SCO's agenda extends beyond counterterrorism to include economic cooperation and regional connectivity, reflecting its evolution into a broader governance framework that complements China and Russia's strategic interests.

ASEAN-led institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ADMM-Plus remain central to inclusive dialogue and norm-building in Asia (Acharya, 2014). While often criticized for their consensus-driven, non-binding approaches, these forums embody principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and inclusivity valued by many Asian states. ASEAN's concept of "centrality" allows smaller states to shape regional agendas and mitigate great-power competition, even as the organization navigates internal divisions and external pressures (Haacke, 2019).

c. Informal and Hybrid Partnerships: Strategic Autonomy and Networked Security

Beyond formal institutions, a dense web of bilateral and trilateral partnerships is transforming the regional order. Japan and India's growing security cooperation including joint naval exercises and technology sharing illustrates how middle powers are building capabilities and influence outside US-led structures (Mohan & Raja, 2021). India's engagement with Russia and Central Asia, and its participation in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), reflect its multipolar strategy. South Korea's "New Southern Policy" and growing

defense cooperation with ASEAN states further demonstrate diversification (Ferdinand, 2016).

This networked security architecture reflects a broader trend toward strategic autonomy and resilience. States increasingly view security not as dependence on a single great power but as a distributed capability achieved through multiple, overlapping partnerships. This evolution reduces vulnerability to geopolitical shocks and enhances bargaining power vis-à-vis major powers.

3. Strategic Consequences: Complexity, Fragmentation, and Innovation

The proliferation of multipolar security architectures carries significant strategic consequences for Asia's regional order.

a. Increased Complexity and Institutional Density

Asia's security landscape is now characterized by institutional layering the coexistence of formal alliances, minilateral coalitions, multilateral forums, and informal networks. This density reflects both power diffusion and functional diversification, as states seek tailored solutions to distinct security challenges (Aggarwal & Evenett, 2014). Institutional layering increases redundancy and resilience but also complicates coordination, potentially leading to duplication of efforts or conflicting agendas.

b. Fragmentation Risks and Normative Divergence

While institutional diversity enhances flexibility, it also risks fragmentation. Competing visions of order liberal, sovereignty-based, or authoritarian can lead to normative clashes and undermine collective action (Acharya & Buzan, 2019). For example, the US emphasizes a "free and open Indo-Pacific" anchored in democratic governance, while China promotes "community of shared destiny" narratives emphasizing sovereignty and development. These competing discourses shape institutional agendas and influence membership choices, potentially polarizing the regional order.

Fragmentation is also evident in security approaches. ASEAN's inclusive forums prioritize dialogue and consensus, while minilateral coalitions like the Quad adopt more strategic postures. These divergent logics reflect underlying differences in threat perceptions and strategic cultures, which may impede cooperation on cross-cutting issues such as maritime security, cybersecurity, or climate change.

c. Strategic Innovation and Adaptive Governance

At the same time, institutional pluralism fosters strategic innovation. Flexible coalitions allow states to experiment with new forms of cooperation, from joint technology development to coordinated supply-chain strategies (Feigenbaum & Manning, 2021). Multilateral platforms provide venues for dialogue that reduce misperceptions and manage competition. Informal networks enable rapid responses to emerging challenges without bureaucratic constraints. Collectively, these innovations contribute to a more adaptive and resilient security ecosystem, even if it lacks the coherence of previous hegemonic orders.

4. The Evolving US Role: From Hegemon to Stakeholder

The United States remains a critical actor in Asian security but in a transformed capacity. Rather than dictating regional order, Washington increasingly competes, collaborates, and coexists with other powers and institutions. Its alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Australia remain robust, but they now operate alongside autonomous regional initiatives and non-US partnerships (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016). The US "Indo-Pacific Strategy" emphasizes

partnerships, capacity-building, and institutional support, signaling a shift toward enabling rather than monopolizing regional security provision (Campbell & Sullivan, 2019).

This recalibration carries both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, burden-sharing reduces US costs and enhances legitimacy. On the other, it requires navigating institutional fragmentation, normative divergence, and power diffusion. US influence will increasingly depend on its ability to integrate into and shape multipolar architectures rather than to stand above them.

Summary of Key Findings

US hegemony in Asia is declining relatively, not absolutely. The US retains unmatched global capabilities but faces structural constraints, domestic pressures, and regional agency that limit unilateral dominance.

Multipolar security architectures are proliferating. Minilateral coalitions, multilateral institutions, and informal partnerships reflect diverse strategic preferences and functions.

Institutional pluralism increases complexity and resilience but risks fragmentation. Competing visions and overlapping mandates may impede collective action, but diversity also fosters innovation and adaptability.

The US role is evolving from hegemon to stakeholder. Its influence depends increasingly on partnership-building, institutional adaptation, and support for inclusive frameworks.

The emerging Asian security order is thus not a simple story of hegemonic replacement but one of institutional diversification, adaptive governance, and contested pluralism. Power diffusion and strategic innovation are producing a dynamic and complex regional order that reflects the realities of a multipolar world.

The transformation of Asia's security order from one dominated by US hegemony to a more pluralistic, multipolar configuration represents one of the most consequential geopolitical shifts of the 21st century. This study has traced the structural, institutional, and strategic dimensions of that transformation, highlighting the factors contributing to the erosion of American primacy, the rise of new power centers, and the reconfiguration of regional security architectures. The findings underscore that the decline of US dominance is not synonymous with American withdrawal or irrelevance; rather, it marks a transition toward a more complex and contested regional order in which multiple actors shape the balance of power, institutional norms, and strategic agendas.

Conclusion

The decline of US hegemony in Asia is the product of both internal and external dynamics. Domestically, political polarization, economic constraints, and strategic overextension have weakened Washington's ability to sustain a hegemonic role. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan eroded US credibility, while economic crises undermined its capacity to project sustained influence. Externally, the accelerated rise of China as a comprehensive national power, India's growing strategic ambitions, Russia's renewed assertiveness, and the activism of middle powers such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia have collectively diluted US dominance. Together, these developments have reshaped the regional strategic environment from one characterized by unipolar leadership to one marked by competitive multipolarity.

A central insight of this research is that multipolarity in Asia is not merely a redistribution of power but also a transformation of institutional and normative orders. During the unipolar era, US alliances and bilateral security treaties formed the backbone of regional security.

These institutions were hierarchical, US-centric, and embedded in a broader liberal order that reflected American preferences. However, as US primacy waned, a new wave of institutional experimentation emerged. China spearheaded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), while ASEAN deepened its own frameworks through ASEAN+ mechanisms. Simultaneously, minilateral coalitions such as the Quad and AUKUS arose, reflecting more flexible, issue-specific cooperation models. These evolving architectures illustrate a shift away from hegemonic ordering toward networked, pluralistic, and overlapping security arrangements.

Importantly, these new architectures are not uniform in purpose or orientation. Some, like the Quad, are explicitly aimed at balancing China's influence and preserving a rules-based order. Others, like the SCO, challenge Western norms and promote alternative visions of regional governance rooted in sovereignty and non-interference. ASEAN, meanwhile, seeks to maintain centrality by mediating among competing powers and providing inclusive platforms for dialogue. This institutional diversity is a defining feature of Asia's emerging order and reflects the region's complex power distribution and divergent strategic priorities. The emergence of multipolar security architectures has significant implications for regional stability and global governance. On the one hand, institutional pluralism allows states to pursue their security interests through multiple channels, reducing dependence on any single power and fostering resilience against systemic shocks. It also encourages innovation, as states experiment with different models of cooperation suited to specific challenges such as maritime security, cyber threats, and supply chain resilience. On the other hand, overlapping institutions can generate fragmentation, duplication, and normative contestation. Competing visions of order liberal, sovereignist, or revisionist may clash, complicating consensus on key security issues.

The decline of US hegemony also alters the strategic calculus of middle powers and smaller states. Under unipolarity, alignment with Washington often offered security guarantees and economic benefits. In the multipolar era, however, states must navigate a more complex strategic landscape, balancing relations among multiple great powers while seeking to preserve autonomy. Countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, and South Korea exemplify this hedging behavior, deepening economic ties with China while strengthening security partnerships with the United States and its allies. This strategic diversification enhances agency but also introduces uncertainty, as shifts in the balance of power can rapidly alter alignment choices.

Furthermore, the study reveals that normative and ideational competition is becoming as significant as material power in shaping Asia's order. China promotes a vision of regional security rooted in mutual respect, non-interference, and development-centric cooperation, contrasting sharply with the US-led liberal order emphasizing democracy, human rights, and rule of law. India, meanwhile, seeks a multipolar Asia anchored in strategic autonomy and regional leadership. These competing narratives influence institutional design, membership criteria, and operational norms, shaping the character and trajectory of regional security architectures.

Despite the clear trend toward multipolarity, the United States remains a pivotal actor. Its military capabilities, network of alliances, and economic influence ensure that it will continue to shape Asia's security environment. However, the nature of its role is evolving from that of

a hegemon to a balancer, coalition-builder, and agenda-setter within a more distributed system. The challenge for US strategy lies in adapting to this new reality, leveraging partnerships, and engaging with emerging institutions without insisting on hegemonic control.

Looking forward, Asia's security future will likely be defined by hybrid ordering dynamics that blend elements of balance-of-power competition, institutional cooperation, and normative contestation. Multipolarity is not inherently unstable, but its stability depends on the ability of regional actors to manage rivalry, build inclusive institutions, and reconcile divergent visions of order. The coexistence of US-centric, China-centric, and multilateral arrangements may generate friction, but it also offers opportunities for pragmatic collaboration on shared challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and transnational crime.

In conclusion, the decline of US hegemony and the rise of multipolar security architectures in Asia reflect deeper transformations in global politics. They signal the end of a unipolar moment and the beginning of a more complex, pluralistic era in which power is distributed, institutions are diversified, and strategic agency is more widely shared. Understanding this transition is essential for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to navigate the evolving Asian order. Rather than lamenting the erosion of hegemony, stakeholders must focus on shaping the norms, institutions, and cooperative mechanisms that will underpin stability in a multipolar Asia. This study contributes to that endeavor by illuminating the structural drivers, institutional dynamics, and strategic implications of Asia's shifting security landscape, offering a foundation for future research and policy innovation in the emerging era of multipolarity.

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