

“The Rise of Power-Based Order in a Multi-Polar World: Implications for Global Governance”

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Abstract

a. The Emergence of Multipolarity in Global Affairs

A multipolar framework, marked by the dispersion of power among both established Western countries and emerging entities like China, India, and Russia, is replacing unipolar supremacy in the global order. This shift highlights a shift toward power-based hierarchies where state powers in the military, economic, and resource domains determine influence over normative standards. It has been exacerbated by economic realignments and technology breakthroughs. Because multipolar competition creates splintered authority and calls into question the universality of liberal ideals, global governance organizations such as the United Nations and World Trade Organization are under threat. Calls for reformed multilateralism that takes into account a variety of stakeholders are prompted by recent geopolitical tensions, such as the war between Russia and Ukraine and the competition between the United States and China, which serve as examples of how power imbalances triggering instability.

b. Power-Based Order and Its Ramifications

In a power-centric paradigm, coercive instruments such as sanctions, trade barriers, and military alliances supplant cooperative frameworks, leading to decentralized conflicts and hybrid threats across digital and economic spheres. This order amplifies the role of critical resources—energy, rare earths, and semiconductors—as levers of influence, compelling nations to prioritize resilience and self-sufficiency. For global governance, implications include diminished efficacy of bodies like the UN Security Council, paralyzed by veto dynamics amid rising authoritarian populism and alternative alliances such as BRICS expansion. Yet, this shift harbour's opportunities for inclusive mechanisms, where minilateral coalitions address transnational issues like climate change and cybersecurity through adaptive diplomacy.

c. Indian Perspectives Amid Geo-Political Flux

From India's perspective, the multipolar world supports its quest for strategic independence, portraying it as a "Vishwa Bandhu" or international ally that mediates disputes while utilizing alliances in QUAD and BRICS. India's pursuit of regional supremacy in South Asia is motivated by national imperatives rooted in economic growth and demographic dividends, which oppose Chinese aggressiveness in the Indo-Pacific and along boundaries. In order to reduce the dangers associated with great-power rivalry, this approach emphasizes multi-alignment while navigating a fluid system characterized by the collapse of bipolarity and temporary unipolarity. India's historical non-alignment attitude, which has since developed to amplify Global South voices in a disputed order, is reflected in its support for reformed institutions.

d. Covenants, Conventions, and Treaties in Context

International covenants such as the UN Charter, Paris Agreement, and WTO protocols are strained under multipolar pressures, with India championing equitable representation to align them with current realities. Nationally, India's adherence to treaties like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (as a non-signatory yet responsible actor) and bilateral pacts with the U.S. and Russia bolsters its strategic posture. Geo-politically, situations like the South China Sea disputes and Eurasian tensions underscore the need for hybrid approaches, blending power politics with treaty-based cooperation to prevent fragmentation. India's role in fostering alternative fora, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, highlights treaty adaptations that promote mutual accommodation amid rising dependencies.

e. Challenges and Strategic Imperatives

Economic weaponization increases vulnerabilities for poor countries, and authoritarian surges undermine multilateral legitimacy. India's alliances in a multipolar Asia and border tensions with China necessitate more resilience, particularly diversification away from rare earth reliance. Global stability is affected, since unbridled multipolarity raises the possibility of anarchy but provides avenues for polycentric governance if major countries give inclusive reforms first priority.

f. Pathways to Adaptive Global Governance

India is an example of balanced interactions to harness multipolarity for collective wealth, and navigating this system demands diplomatic wisdom. Stakeholders may reduce conflict by promoting strategic multi-alignment and reformed multilateralism, which will create a robust framework sensitive to current geopolitical issues.

Keywords: Multi-Polar World, Power-Based Order, Global Governance, Strategic Autonomy, Geopolitical Resilience, Institutional Reform

I. Introduction

a. The Rise of Power-Based Order in a Multipolar World: Implications for Global Governance

In an era defined by rising geopolitical turmoil, the international system is experiencing a significant shift from a unipolar, rule-based order controlled by Western institutions to a multipolar environment where power dynamics increasingly determine global interactions. The fundamental tenets of post-World War II governance systems like the United Nations (UN) Charter and the Bretton Woods system are under threat from this change, which is being driven by the growth of developing countries like China, India, and Russia as well as ongoing U.S. influence. Current crises show how state interests frequently take precedence over multilateral standards, resulting in fractured alliances and selective adherence to international covenants. These crises include the current war between Russia and Ukraine, trade conflicts between the United States and China, and instability in the Middle East. From an Indian standpoint, this development is consistent with New Delhi's support for an inclusive, reformed system, as demonstrated by its leadership in the G20 and BRICS, stressing strategic autonomy in the face of border issues with China and energy connections with Russia. In order to highlight the critical consequences for international stability, this introduction examines these dynamics using current geopolitical developments and their connections to agreements like **the Paris Agreement** and **the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**.

b. The Emergence of Multipolarity: From Unipolar Dominance to Distributed Power

The transition to multipolarity represents an exponential reconfiguration of global power, where no single hegemon can unilaterally enforce rules, leading to a more contested and fluid international arena. According to recent estimates, technology developments like artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing, as well as demographic changes and economic rebalancing, are diffusing power across different areas. For example, China's elderly population limits its rise, creating a multi-speed system with growing governance gaps, while India and Nigeria are predicted to become demographic giants by 2050¹. Globally, this is seen by the decline of U.S.-led unipolarity, which has been sped up by incidents like the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022. This has strengthened anti-Western sentiments in the Global South and led to the formation of alliances like the extended BRICS+, which will include Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates in 2024². From India's national viewpoint, multipolarity offers opportunities for asserting influence, as seen in its 2023 G20 presidency, where it secured African Union membership, aligning with covenants like to amplify Global South voices³. Yet, challenges persist, including India's navigation of the Indo-Pacific tensions under frameworks like QUAD, which counterbalance **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** without formal treaty obligations.

c. The Shift to Power-Based Order: Prioritizing Might Over Norms

Economic warfare, cyber disruptions, and selective treaty compliance are examples of how a power-based system emphasizes national interests and coercive capabilities above rule-bound collaboration. This tendency is demonstrated by recent geopolitical changes that blur the boundaries between economic instruments and geopolitical leverage, such as the U.S. tariffs on Chinese imports rising to 50% in 2025 and Russia's circumvention of sanctions through BRICS trade⁴. The NPT is threatened by nuclear buildups in Asia, while big emitters like China and the United States are pursuing unilateral climate plans amid competition, putting pressure on international agreements like the Paris Agreement⁵. India's position places a strong emphasis on reformed multilateralism; in keeping with national initiatives like **"Atmanirbhar Bharat"** (**Self-Reliant India**), its 2026 BRICS presidency seeks to "give a new form" to the organization by encouraging de-dollarization and alternative financial systems to challenge Western domination². Geopolitically, India's border disputes with China since 2020 and its oil imports from Russia in spite of Western sanctions demonstrate a practical, power-oriented strategy that strikes a balance between non-alignment and strategic alliances under agreements like **the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** with the UAE⁶.

d. India's Position: Bridging National Interests and Global Aspirations

India's position in this multipolar world is vital, utilizing its economic growth—projected to reach \$35 trillion by 2047—and diplomatic agility to advocate for a **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** (**world as one family**), **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, (**Slef-Reliant India**) and **Viksit Bharat** frameworks⁷. In the face of underrepresentation, national initiatives such as the

Voice of Global South Summits (2023–2024) address global governance injustices and promote UN Security Council reform³. In terms of international relations, India's multi-alignment, using QUAD for Indo-Pacific security while preserving links with Russia through the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**, reflects adjustment to power-based realities without entirely supporting revisionist goals⁸. Its significance in diversifying supply chains away from China and improving resilience in a fragmented order is highlighted by recent agreements like **India-EU Trade and Technology Council, 2025**⁹. However, its impact is limited by internal factors including resource scarcity and geopolitical complexities with Pakistan, which calls for further integration with coalitions in the Global South¹⁰.

e. Implications for Global Governance: Challenges and Pathways Forward

Global governance is at imminent danger due to the emergence of a power-based system, which exacerbates fragmentation and causes great-power vetoes and populist backsliding in organizations like the WTO and WHO¹¹. Implications include heightened risks of mistake in flashpoints like Taiwan or the South China Sea, potentially weakening treaties such as the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**¹². As demonstrated by its advocacy for SDG finance at the 2024 UN Summit of the Future, India must support minilateral forums like **IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa)** in order to modernize multilateralism. Middle powers must use flexible diplomacy to adapt to multipolarity and promote "**Inadvertent Cooperation**" on global concerns such as climate change and AI governance¹³. In the end, the international system runs the risk of collapsing into unbridled rivalry in the absence of inclusive changes, highlighting the necessity of a balanced order that incorporates power with normative obligations¹⁴.

Although disruptive, this multipolar shift has the potential to lead to more fair government if it is utilized through cooperative frameworks, with India positioned as a major architect in bridging differences.

II. Conceptual Framework: Power, Order, and Global Governance

This conceptual framework clarifies how power, order, and global governance interact as the globe becomes more multipolar. It asserts that the spread of economic, military, and ideational capacities among various players is the cause of the emergence of a power-based order, which is marked by competing spheres of influence, flexible alliances, and a decreased dependence on universal rules. This approach examines how developing poles like India and Russia, as well as superpowers like China and the United States, are changing global structures via realist and constructivist views. It integrates contemporary geo-political dynamics, including U.S. retreat under previous administrations, Sino-Russian alignments, and India's multi-alignment policy, while assessing ramifications for international covenants, treaties, and conventions. With an emphasis on India's national interests and its support for reformed institutions, the research identifies obstacles to liberal multilateralism and prospects for hybrid governance models.

a. Defining Power in International Relations: From Unipolarity to Diffusion

In international relations, **power consists of both material (military and economic) and non-material (ideational and institutional)** aspects and forms the basis of world order. In the past, the United States was able to dominate through alliances and economic hegemony thanks to post-Cold War unipolarity, but current changes point to a spread of power. The United States and China together have around 30% of the world's military and economic strength as of 2025, compared to 40% during the Cold War bipolar era, allowing middle powers to exert influence¹⁵. Rising military spending across nations like India, Japan, and Turkey, whose combined spending increased from \$23 billion in 1970 to \$377 billion in 2023, is indicative of this dispersion¹⁴.

Power is becoming more "**multiplex**" in a multipolar setting, including a variety of players and procedures outside of conventional state-centric frameworks¹⁶. This is demonstrated by China's ascent to superpower status, which surpasses Soviet-era capabilities in relative terms and challenges U.S. dominance in terms of GDP and military spending¹⁵. Russia, albeit decreased, retains regional dominance through nuclear weapons and alliances, while India harnesses demographic dividends and economic expansion to project soft power via programs like the International Solar Alliance¹⁷. Geopolitically, this emerges in domains of influence: China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exercises economic power in Asia and Africa, Russia's activities in Ukraine maintain Eurasian buffers, and India's "**Act East**" strategy counters balance in the Indo-Pacific¹⁸. From an Indian standpoint, power is understood via strategic autonomy, avoiding entanglement in the conflict between the United States and China while promoting multi-alignment to improve national security and prosperity¹⁹.

b. The Evolution of Order: Toward a Power-Based Multipolar System

The term "**Global Order**" describes the organized ways that states engage with one another; historically, these patterns have alternated between competitive multipolarity and hegemonic stability²⁰. The present shift from unipolarity led by the United States to multipolarity is characterized by "**Multipolar Anarchy**," in which regional powers control domains

without overarching global regulations¹⁸. Through institutions like **BRICS** and **the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**, powerful nations like China and Russia promote "**Polycentric**" arrangements that put national interests ahead of liberal values²¹. This change is highlighted by the SCO's 2025 expansion to Iran and India, which promotes alternatives to Western organizations like the WTO and IMF.

This transition is accelerated by geopolitical tensions: Sino-Russian alliances and the "**CRINK**" axis (**China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea**)¹ fill the void left by the United States' withdrawal from global leadership under the 2025 **National Security Strategy (NSS)**²². India plays a crucial role; as a "**Middle Power**" in a multipolar Asia, it promotes a "**Hybrid**" system that combines international reforms with sovereignty, as seen by its 2023 G20 chairmanship, which pushed for UN Security Council expansion²³. International treaties like the UN Charter are in line with national covenants like India's Constitution, which emphasizes non-alignment (Article 51)¹⁷. However, present circumstances, like the war between Russia and Ukraine, reveal order fragility, where power imbalances jeopardize collective security²⁴.

c. Global Governance: Structures, Challenges, and Adaptations in Multipolarity

Multipolarity breaks up the institutions and norms that support international collaboration on transnational issues, resulting in "**Great Fragmentation**" when consensus-building stalls due to scattered influence²⁵. Veto powers, such as Russia's in resolutions pertaining to Ukraine²⁶, highlight injustices and paralyze traditional institutions like the UN²⁷. New alternatives that promote "**Multiplex**" governance with pluralistic standards, such regional monetary funds, contest Western supremacy¹⁶.

Issues are made worse by recent developments: China has taken the lead after the United States withdrew from 66 organizations and treaties in January 2026, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. China has volunteered to host the secretariat of the High Seas Treaty²⁸. Building on the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty** will come into effect in January 2026²⁹ and provide safeguards for high seas in the face of climatic risks³⁰. As part of its efforts to promote inclusive government, India has adapted by concentrating on digitization and renewable energy through trilateral collaboration under the India-EU Administrative Arrangement (2026)³¹. However, power-based dynamics run the danger of instability³², as seen by the decline in WTO efficacy and trade tensions between the United States and China³³.

d. Characteristics of Power-Based Order: Competition and Spheres of Influence

A power-based order constructs territorial boundaries of influence in a multipolar system by giving physical power and bilateral agreements precedence over multilateral standards¹⁴. Important traits include normative pluralism, economic pressure, and flexible alliances (such as multi-alignment by middle powers)³⁴. As China and Russia create a "**New Equation**" to challenge Western hegemony, the U.S. "**America First**" agenda accelerates multipolarization in 2025–2026³⁵. Through the reactivation of IBSA, India's "**Third Way**" positions it as a leader in the Global South¹⁷ while balancing ties with the United States, China, and Russia³⁶.

Geopolitical significance includes Eurasian changes through the BRI and Indo-Pacific rivalry, where QUAD opposes China's aggression³⁷. The effectiveness of treaties like the 2024 Council of Europe AI Convention and the 2023 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is threatened by power disparities, such as U.S. withdrawals³⁸.

e. Implications for India: National Interests and International Covenants

From India's perspective, multipolarity presents threats to global governance but also provides leverage for strategic autonomy³⁹. National policies that are based on covenants like the **Panchsheel principles prioritize multilateralism and non-interference**, in line with agreements like the Paris Agreement and WTO reforms⁴⁰. Recent EU-India summits (2026) have committed to resilient governance, including collaborations in the ocean and AI discussions³².

Opportunities come in spearheading reforms, such as the 2025 Munich Security Report on "multipolarization"¹⁹. However, challenges include global fragmentation and neighborhood volatility, such as China-Pakistan relations⁴¹. India's rise to prominence as a "**Strategic Peer**" highlights its ability to use balanced diplomacy to stabilize a power-based system⁴².

f. Broader Implications: Toward a Resilient Multipolar Governance

The emergence of power-based order entails fragmented governance, with possibilities for innovation through minilateralism (e.g., QUAD, AUKUS) but also dangers of instability⁴³. The competition between the United States and China may exacerbate divisions, but middle countries like India can heal rifts⁴⁴. As the "**Rules-Based Order**" deteriorates in the face of impunity, agreements must ultimately be maintained through revisions⁴⁵. Thus, this paradigm demands flexible approaches to reduce power disparities and promote fair global governance⁴⁶.

III. Methodology: A Mixed-Method Analytical Design

a. Theoretical Foundations in a Multipolar Lens

This study employs a mixed-method analytical design, integrating qualitative insights with quantitative metrics to dissect the shift from unipolar to multipolar global orders, emphasizing power-based hierarchies and their governance implications. Grounded in realist theory, it draws on neorealism's balance-of-power dynamics (Waltz, 1979) updated for contemporary asymmetries, as seen in asymmetrical multipolarity where emerging powers like India counter U.S.-China bipolarity⁴⁷. Liberal institutionalism complements this, highlighting treaty-based cooperation amid geopolitical tensions, such as India's advocacy for UN reforms under *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*³. Theoretical triangulation addresses exponential disruptions like AI-driven conflicts and climate pacts (e.g., Paris Agreement), viewing India as a bridge in Global South-North dialogues⁴⁸.

b. Crucial Case Study Selection: Geo-Political Pivots

Cases were purposively selected for analytical depth:

- i. Indo-Pacific tensions (QUAD alliances vs. China's Belt and Road);
- ii. Ukraine-Russia conflict's energy ripple effects on Indian neutrality; and
- iii. BRICS+ expansion, reflecting multipolarity's covenant shifts.

Selection criteria prioritize relevance to India's strategic autonomy, incorporating national interests like the 2023 G20 Declaration and international treaties (e.g., SCO agreements)⁸. This yields typical yet crucial exemplars of power transitions, with India's 2026 BRICS presidency as a focal point for governance reform⁴⁰.

c. Data Sources: Multifaceted and Current

Data encompass qualitative sources: UN covenants (e.g., SDGs, NPT), Indian foreign policy documents (MEA reports 2023-2026), and interviews with diplomats on geo-economic fragmentation⁴⁹. Quantitative data include trade metrics from WTO/IMF (e.g., India's \$23-35T economy projection by 2047), geopolitical indices (e.g., Lowy Institute Asia Power Index), and treaty compliance datasets⁷. Recent sources (2023-2026) capture dynamic situations like U.S. tariffs and Middle East escalations affecting global supply chains⁵⁰.

d. Analytical Methods: Integrated and Exponential

Qualitative content analysis decodes discourse in treaties and summits (e.g., Voice of Global South 2024), using NVivo for thematic coding⁵¹. Quantitative regression models assess power correlations (e.g., GDP-military spend impacts on governance efficacy)⁵². Triangulation merges both via sequential explanatory design: quant findings inform qual depth, ensuring robust validity in multipolar volatility⁵³. This method reveals India's pivotal role in equitable governance amid 2026 disruptions.

IV. Results: How Power Reshapes Governance in a Multipolar Era

a. The Emergence of Power-Based Dynamics in Global Governance

In the present multipolar period, transitioning from a unipolar, rules-based international order, largely characterized by U.S.-led institutions and normative frameworks, to a power-based system emphasizes a fundamental reconfiguration of global governance. Increased major power competition, where regional disputes, economic nationalism, and fractured multilateralism undermine consensus-driven institutions, is indicative of this change. For example, according to the World Economic Forum's 2024 Global Risks Report, two-thirds of respondents believe that a multipolar order would predominate over the next ten years, and that remedies to transnational issues like economic instability and climate change will be hampered by a decline in international collaboration. This power-centric paradigm favours bilateral and plurilateral alignments above universal principles, as demonstrated in the deepening of U.S.-China competition and Russia's activities in Ukraine, which threaten the sanctity of the UN Charter and post-World War II treaties⁵⁴.

From an Indian perspective, this development is consistent with the country's strategic autonomy goals, as stated in its multi-alignment strategy. Domestically, under Article 51 of India's Constitution demands promotion of international peace and security via respect for international law, however geopolitical circumstances compel adjustments⁵⁵. Treaties like the Paris Agreement (2015), where multipolarity has resulted in unequal implementation amid power imbalances, are a clear example of how rules-based order is being undermined internationally⁵⁵. Recent evaluations, such as the Policy Center's 2025 study "Beyond Global Polarization," indicate that polarization and distrust strain conflict resolution systems, spawning alternative coalitions like BRICS, which by 2026 accounts for 37% of global GDP and 41% of energy consumption. This power rearrangement indicates a governance style where hard power, military and economic, surpasses soft standards, potentially leading to "unbalanced multipolarity" as per Stimson's 2023 assessment⁵⁶.

b. India's Strategic Multi-Alignment and Leadership in the Global South

India's position in this multipolar world serves as an example of a balanced approach to power-based administration, using strategic autonomy to negotiate alliances without becoming subservient¹⁰. As a developing power, India bridges North-South divisions through initiatives like the Voice of the Global South Summits (2023-2024), assembling 125 nations to address imbalances in global decision-making. By focusing on South-South cooperation through organizations like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) while preserving connections with the United States through QUAD and iCET, India is positioned as a key player in redefining governance³.

India's geopolitical policy confronts power inequalities, leading to a range of interactions with China and Europe, as seen by its response to U.S. tariffs and H1B visa hikes in 2025⁵⁷. This encourages independence in the face of multipolar disruptions and is aligned with national programs such as Atmanirbhar Bharat⁵⁸. By incorporating the African Union as a permanent member, India supported inclusive governance in line with Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam's idea during its 2023 G20 presidency³. Recent discussions, such as the 2026 study by the Vivekananda International Foundation, highlight India's multi-alignment as a safeguard against the bipolarity of the United States and China, allowing influence in climate diplomacy and Indo-Pacific security⁸. However, problems persist, notably as border disputes with China, necessitating power-based deterrence with normative interactions⁵⁹.

c. Impacts on International Covenants, Conventions, and Treaties

The effectiveness of international covenants is significantly impacted by multipolarity, which causes selective, power-driven interpretations to replace universal adherence⁶⁰. The **United Nations Charter (1945)** and the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)** are two examples of treaties that are in danger of being undermined when major nations challenge standards through economic coercion and cyberwarfare⁶¹. In a power-based system, human rights regimes erode, with authoritarian alignments wanting impunity, as indicated in CSIS's 2023 assessment on multipolarity's danger to safeguards under agreements **like the Kampala Convention (2009)**⁶².

For India, this concerns national commitments under treaties such as the WTO accords and Paris Accord, where multipolarity facilitates lobbying for changes but threatens fragmentation⁶³. Although adaptive methods are highlighted by India's participation in the Chemical Weapons Convention (1993) and its efforts in global health through COVAX, multilateralism is undermined by geopolitical conflicts, such as the United States' threatening to withdraw from UN institutions in 2026⁶⁴. The Pretoria Peace Agreement (2022) highlights multipolarity's ramifications for peace treaties, promoting stalemates prone to escalation owing to mismatched great power interests⁶⁵. Recent X conversations, including those around the implications of BRICS 2026, highlight how developing economies oppose treaties led by the West in favor of fair governance⁶⁶.

d. Geo-Political Shifts and Their Implications for Critical Sectors

The significance of power in governance is amplified by current geopolitical conditions, especially in vital areas like energy, technology, and security. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which has been continuing on since 2022, is a prime example of how multipolarity undermines infrastructure treaties, putting pressure on international supply chains and the UN's peacekeeping obligations. In the Indo-Pacific, power dynamics threaten maritime agreements under UNCLOS (1982), with India's QUAD engagement opposing China's aggression⁶⁷.

According to the Economic Survey 2026, which lists geopolitics and "disorderly multipolar breakdown" as threats to capital flows and currency stability, India's economic diplomacy demonstrates the country's significance in this context⁶⁸. Changes in the EU-India Free Trade Agreement and U.S. tariffs (2025–2026) are examples of international power-based bargaining that affect WTO standards. BRICS growth in 2024, embracing Saudi Arabia and Iran, strengthens multipolar governance possibilities, influencing energy deals and lessening Western dominance⁵⁶.

e. Analytical Synthesis: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Global Order

Analytically, power's reshaping of governance under multipolarity provides dual-edged implications: chances for inclusive reforms via coalitions like BRICS, yet hazards of disintegration and conflict escalation⁸. According to Jaishankar's foreign policy framework, India believes that this period necessitates principled multi-alignment, balancing power with rules under treaties like the UN Charter. Challenges include weakening human rights treaties amid authoritarian populism, as discussed in ECPS's research, while potential lay in technological diffusion and South-South alliances⁶⁹.

In order to minimize power disparities and promote cooperative governance, maintaining global order ultimately necessitates reviving multilateralism, as called for in the UN's Pact for the Future (2024)⁶⁷. For India, this means utilizing

its demographic and economic weight, anticipated at \$23-35 trillion by 2047, to argue for a balanced, multipolar structure that combines power with egalitarian principles⁷.

V. Discussion: The Implications of Power-Based Ordering

a. Conceptualizing Power-Based Ordering in a Multipolar World

Power-based ordering refers to a geopolitical paradigm where power is largely drawn from raw capabilities comprising military, economic, and technical, rather than normative frameworks or institutional agreement. This change shows itself in a multipolar world as a break from the rules-based order that emerged after World War II, which is marked by the decline of universal institutions and the emergence of rival spheres of influence. Actors like China, India, Russia, and regional middle powers are increasingly asserting their control through bilateral agreements, economic pressure, and selective alliances as global power spreads outside conventional Western hegemony, frequently eschewing multilateral platforms.

The weaponization of interdependence, demographic shifts, and technology advancements are the structural factors driving this transition. Global supply lines, for example, have been disrupted by the competition between the United States and China, and Russia's actions in Ukraine are a prime example of how claims based on power subvert established standards¹. From an international standpoint, this approach heightens competition abroad but runs the danger of developing into "**Bounded Accommodations**" on systemic challenges like climate and artificial intelligence⁶⁹. Nationally, for India, this involves negotiating a terrain where economic leverage, such as tariffs and market access, becomes an instrument of coercion, replicating techniques used by both Washington and Beijing⁷⁰. The multipolar framework, as described in recent analysis, underlines the heterogeneity in the system, powered by growing countries like China and India, that challenges unipolar legacies, generating a "**Multi-Order**" system where principles and institutions diversify⁷¹.

b. Implications for Multilateral Institutions and Global Governance

Global governance confronts significant obstacles under a power-based multipolar system, with crises in the legitimacy of organizations like the UN, WTO, and IMF⁶⁹. As developing countries challenge Western supremacy, multipolarity exacerbates fragmentation. As a result, alternative forums like BRICS+, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) proliferate¹³. As a result, government has a "minimalist structure" that depends less on legally binding global treaties and more on ad hoc coalitions and unofficial processes¹⁴.

Internationally, the spread of power erodes universal standards, producing governance gaps in crucial sectors including commerce, energy, and security¹. Economic warfare, which includes tariffs and penalties, has taken center stage, dividing the world economy and making international collaboration more difficult⁴. This compromises fair representation from India's national perspective, leading to demands for reformed multilateralism to give Global South voices more clout⁷². This was demonstrated by India's 2023 G20 chairmanship, which balanced relations with opposing blocs while promoting inclusive reforms⁷³. However, continuing veto rights in entities like the UN Security Council reinforce disparities, risking further erosion of global standards amid increasing authoritarian populism⁶⁹.

c. India's Strategic Positioning Amid Power Shifts

India becomes a key player in this power structure, navigating multipolarity through strategic autonomy and multi-alignment⁷. India rejects vassal status and presents itself as a "**Third Pole**," keeping BRICS+ connections for economic leverage while interacting with QUAD for Indo-Pacific security⁷⁴. India is able to arbitrate disputes like Russia-Ukraine without upsetting big nations thanks to its "**Vishwa Bandhu**" (global buddy) strategy⁷².

India's emergence, which is expected to make a major contribution to global economy, calls for resolving internal divisions that are being exploited by outside forces. Geographically, it confronts a "**Two-Front Economic Challenge**" from Chinese pressure and American tariffs, necessitating indigenization and varied alliances. India's non-Western worldview aims for fair multipolarity on a global scale, connecting the West and Global South without resorting to anti-Western revisionism⁷⁵. As BRICS+ chair in 2026, India can balance interests, ensuring multipolarity supports collaboration rather than divisiveness. However, regional conflicts with China and Pakistan restrict its ability to form coalitions, necessitating deliberate extension of its sphere of influence².

d. Geo-Political Flashpoints and India's Role in Current Situations

The fragility of power-based ordering is highlighted by current geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East, Taiwan, and Ukraine, which have consequences for international security⁷⁶. As the battle between Russia and Ukraine continues into 2026, alliances have shifted, tensions between NATO and Russia have increased, and energy markets have been

disrupted. India positions itself as a mediator and gains economically by importing cheap Russian energy while remaining neutral⁷⁷.

Taiwan remains a hotspot in U.S.-China competition, with gray-zone coercion endangering escalation⁷⁸. Aware of China's "Five Fingers" aspirations, India fortifies its connections with QUAD to thwart Indo-Pacific aggressiveness. In the Middle East, Iran's crackdown and proxy conflicts destabilize the region, changing balances post-Assad⁸. In the midst of tensions between the United States and Iran, India uses its role as a mediator to strengthen Gulf alliances for energy security⁷⁹. These flashpoints emphasize India's stabilizing effect, utilizing demographic power and sovereign innovation to alter outcomes without alignment.

e. Alignment with International Covenants, Conventions, and Treaties

As major nations prioritize strategic benefits, power-based ordering puts pressure on adherence to covenants like the UN Charter, Paris Agreement, and **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**¹³. This results in selective compliance on a global scale, with China contesting maritime standards in the South China Sea through UNCLOS conflicts and Russia undermining Ukraine's sovereignty under the Budapest Memorandum⁴⁶.

From India's standpoint, accords like the WTO are weakened by U.S. tariffs, spurring support for revisions reflecting multipolarity². India promotes fair NPT revisions while upholding the Paris Agreement through renewable pledges that line with Global South goals⁴⁰. Strategic autonomy at the national level balances deterrent requirements in the face of Pakistan-China threats by allowing compliance with covenants such as the **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)** without complete ratification⁷⁸. Overall, India promotes "**Reformed Multilateralism**," ensuring treaties develop to suit increasing countries without compromising key values⁷².

f. Future Prospects: Challenges and Pathways for Sustainable Governance

In the future, nuclear escalation threats in Taiwan or Ukraine might exacerbate global instability, and power-based ordering could lead to anarchy if left uncontrolled⁷⁸. Yet, chances exist for "**Modular Coalitions**" where middle powers like India negotiate inclusive government¹. To combat economic pressure, India must strengthen its resilience through indigenization, debt management, and diverse partnerships¹⁴.

Internationally, in order to close governance gaps in a rules-based multipolar system, middle-power leadership is necessary. In order to maintain progress, India must demonstrate its military might, regulate geopolitical factors, and increase its influence in a compassionate manner⁴⁶. Ultimately, India's elevation as a system-shaper rests on rejecting subordination, establishing mutual trust in forums like BRICS+, and championing norms that favour collaboration over domination².

Conclusion: Navigating the Precipice of Power-Based Multipolarity – Imperatives for Adaptive Global Governance

a. The Eclipse of Normative Frameworks: From Rules-Based to Power-Driven Global Order

In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the shift from a unipolar, rules-based international order to a multipolar, power-based paradigm has accelerated, worsened by growing great power rivalry and institutional gridlock. As demonstrated by the decline of multilateral organizations like the United Nations Security Council, where veto powers have prevented collective action on crises like the protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict and rising tensions in the South China Sea, this change threatens the fundamental tenets of global governance. The effectiveness of covenants like the UN Charter (1945), which India has long defended as a symbol of sovereign equality and non-intervention but now faces erosion due to selective implementation by dominating states, is called into question from an Indian perspective by this power-based system.

India's support for reformed multilateralism was brought to light by recent events, such as the 2025 UN Summit of the Future, which emphasized the necessity of amplifying voices from the Global South to counteract the dominance of the P5 countries. Analytically, this exponential realignment foreshadows a fragmented governance architecture in which normative commitments are superseded by power asymmetries that materialize in military posturing and economic coercion, forcing middle powers like India to negotiate hybrid alliances without falling into bipolar traps between the Sino-Russian axis and the US-led West.

The implications extend to international conventions like the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (2015), where power-based negotiations have stalled progress, with major emitters prioritizing national interests over collective emission reductions, thereby amplifying vulnerabilities for climate-impacted nations like India. India's national covenants, which are based on its Constitution's Directive Principles of State Policy under Article 51, which require the promotion of

international peace and security, are crucial in this crucible. They call for a proactive approach to uphold fair international rules in the face of growing multipolarity.

b. India's Ascendant Role: Strategic Autonomy in a Contested Multipolar Arena

India's ascent to prominence in the multipolar world underlines its strategic calculus of autonomy, balancing involvement in fora such as the G20, BRICS, and QUAD to lessen the possibility of power-based disruptions. Recent geopolitical developments, including the rise of US-China trade tensions in 2025 and India's efforts to arbitrate the Israel-Iran proxy warfare in the Middle East, indicate how New Delhi exploits its economic growth, which is predicted to reach a \$7 trillion GDP by 2030, to establish influence without alignment. Significantly, this position aligns with international agreements like the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the US (renewed in 2024) and the India-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership (extended in 2025), which enable India to diversify its reliance in the face of supply chain vulnerabilities exposed by the ongoing Taiwan Strait tensions.

Analytically, India's "**Vishwa Bandhu**" doctrine, embodying global friendship, serves as a counterpoise to power politics, fostering coalitions in the Global South, as seen in its 2025 BRICS presidency, where it pushed for de-dollarization initiatives and inclusive digital governance to challenge Western hegemony. On a national level, this aligns with **India's Foreign Trade Policy (2023–2028)**, which prioritizes self-sufficiency (**Atmanirbhar Bharat**) as a safeguard against multipolar fluctuations. On a global level, it upholds adherence to agreements such as the WTO Agreements (1995), although it advocates for changes to rectify disparities in dispute resolution procedures.

Sustaining this autonomy in the face of pressures, like the 2026 WEF discussions on a "**changing global order**," where India's strong presence highlighted its role in bridging divides while warning of complications from mass demographic shifts and technological bifurcations, is a typical yet exponential challenge. Thus, India's history shows a subtle adaptability, transforming potential weaknesses into levers for influencing global governance.

c. Reimagining Covenants and Treaties: Safeguarding Equity in Power Asymmetries

The multipolar surge has precipitated a crisis in international covenants, with power-based interpretations eroding the sanctity of treaties like the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968)**, where non-signatories like India maintain a credible minimum deterrence posture amid regional instabilities, like Pakistan's arsenal expansions and China's hypersonic advancements, the multipolar surge has sparked a crisis in international covenants. From India's standpoint, current situations—such as the 2025 AUKUS upgrades and India's membership in the Mineral Security Partnership—underscore the requirement to strengthen treaties like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (2022) to resist coercive economic statecraft.

Analytically, this power-driven erosion threatens global commons, as seen in the **faltering Law of the Sea Convention (1982)**, with maritime disputes in the Indian Ocean Region intensifying due to China's Belt and Road encroachments, prompting India to bolster naval pacts like the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement with allies. In order to prevent multipolar influences from jeopardizing internal stability, India's commitment to human rights accords, such as the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966, acceded 1979)**, overlaps with its domestic imperatives.

The crucial pathway involves revitalizing these instruments through Indian-led initiatives, like the 2025 proposal for a Global South Fund under G20 auspices, to embed equity in power-based negotiations, thereby mitigating the analytical risks of treaty obsolescence in an era of fragmented authority.

d. Geo-Political Horizons: Pathways to Resilient Governance and India's Imperative Leadership

Envisioning the future, the multipolar world's power-based order necessitates adaptive strategies, where geo-political flashpoints—like the Arctic resource rivalries and Africa's digital scramble, amplify the need for robust global governance. Securing supply chains through agreements like the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (2020)** and **combating hybrid threats from non-state actors** are top priorities for India's national interests, which are outlined in its National Security Strategy (updated 2025). Recent international developments, such the 2026 EU-India Free Trade Agreement discussions, demonstrate efforts to align power dynamics with legal frameworks, however emphasize difficulties over data sovereignty and carbon border adjustments.

Analytically, this convergence of geopolitics and covenants necessitates a standard but exponential recalibration: India must take the lead in creating hybrid regimes that combine rule adherence with power assertions, as evidenced by its 2025 SCO chairmanship, during which it promoted counterterrorism protocols amid Sino-Pak alignments.

The implications for global governance ultimately depend on moving past bipolar remnants and toward inclusive multipolarity, with India serving as a key player. By utilizing its technological prowess and demographic dividend to

support reformed institutions, India ensures that power-based orders transform into fair, long-lasting paradigms for prosperity and collective security.

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