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# The Future of the Global Geopolitical Landscape: Regional Hegemony Divisions

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**Abstract:** While the fears of a global war largely subsided since the Cold War's end, ongoing regional conflicts signal that comprehensive global peace remains elusive. In forecasting the future, the most crucial aspect is to identify the fundamental dynamics shaping the global landscape. The U.S. strategic community hopes to maintain and strengthen America's control over global affairs, preserving its status as the sole superpower. As China's strength continues to grow and the trend of anti-globalization progresses, the international geopolitical landscape is undergoing profound adjustments. In the long-term geopolitical landscape of the future, the division of regional hegemonies is likely to be a persistent trend.

**Keywords:** global, geopolitical landscape, regional hegemony

## 1. Introduction

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the global geopolitical landscape has been undergoing profound adjustments. The once-promising and much-discussed "Russian Renaissance"[\[1\]](#) in the early post-Cold War period has long vanished. The failed economic transition and the two Chechen wars had sealed Russia's ongoing decline. While Russia managed to partially maintain its status as a major power by winning the Russo-Georgian War and annexing Crimea, the protracted Russo-Ukrainian conflict has undoubtedly showcased its downfall vividly[\[2\]](#). This year's "Wagner rebellion" has further exposed the internal disputes and conflicts within Russia to the world[\[3\]](#). An underpowered and internally divided Russia is unlikely to become a true global superpower but rather remains a regional player.

Meanwhile, after more than 30 years of rapid economic growth, China has also become the world's second-largest economy. In contrast to earlier estimates by Western experts, China's actual economic growth has far exceeded their expectations. Initially, the West projected that by 2025, the U.S. GDP would still be more than 3 times that of China[\[4\]](#).

Now, despite slowing down, China's economy is still positioned to achieve significant growth than many other developed economies[5]. The strengthening of China's economic power and rising political ambitions will challenge America's global dominance. Nevertheless, due to the intensification of Western decoupling processes from China and the growing perception to view the Chinese market separately, the external drivers of China's economic growth will gradually weaken. Moreover, the increasing trend of aging will also hinder China's future economic growth prospects. The gap in economic size between China and the U.S. showed a trend of further expansion last year[6]. In addition, territorial disputes and historical issues with neighboring countries will continue to disrupt the rise of China's political influence. Therefore, China will mainly exist as a regional power.

For the U.S., there are also intense internal conflicts. Although this is not expected to lead to the ultimate downfall of the U.S.[7], it will significantly reduce the country's focus on external affairs. Simultaneously, global industrial supply chain adjustments and supply chain risks during the three-year pandemic have strengthened the U.S.' determination to transition from "offshore outsourcing" to "nearshore outsourcing". Therefore, its center of engagement will largely shift towards geographically proximate countries and regions with ideological affinities (i.e., Western Europe and North America). The hasty withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the same from Afghanistan both indicate a decline in American influence in the Middle East. Hence, the future U.S. will primarily exist as a regional hegemon[8].

In the foreseeable future, spanning from a decade to several decades, the fundamental trend in the global geopolitical landscape will be the emergence of various regional hegemonies. The shaping and development of this crucial trend are driven by the ongoing fragmentation of the global space during the phase of anti-globalization.

## **2. Background of the Trend of Regional Hegemony: Continued Progress of Anti-Globalization and Fragmentation of Global Space**

Since the Age of Discovery, there have been signs of globalization, and the relationships between different countries and civilizations are no longer, as Karl Marx put it, "potatoes in a sack", with only occasional collisions and rare deep and close exchanges. In the tide of global capital expansion, different countries and civilizations have been deeply involved in this process and have gradually become part of the global capitalist production chain. The objectivity of the trend of globalization is undeniable.

After the upheavals in the Eastern Bloc, ideological barriers were largely removed, and the new technological revolution drove capital and production factors to expand deeply on a global scale. One of the prominent outcomes of globalization after the Cold War is the rise of China as the "world's factory" in the global economic landscape. However, globalization was originally a comprehensive multidimensional and multilayered process, involving interactions among various levels such as economic, technological, and cultural factors. Some argue that globalization is simply synonymous with economic globalization, believing that the logic of optimizing resource allocation based on production efficiency has indisputable advantages, and therefore, the process of globalization is destined to continue and cannot be reversed<sup>[9]</sup>. This view is undoubtedly one-sided.

The decisive driving force behind globalization is capital, and the logic of globalization is fundamentally based on economic principles<sup>[10]</sup>. These factors indicate that globalization has continuous evolutionary dynamics. However, globalization does not follow a linear upward trajectory but rather fluctuates and progresses in a winding and complex manner. While the driving force behind globalization is capital, and it is based on economic principles, both non-economic forces and non-economic principles can also act as hindrances to globalization and, for a certain period, reverse the process of globalization. Recorded instances of anti-globalization, as a matter of fact, have occurred five times, and since the U.S.-China trade war, a new wave of anti-globalization has been ongoing. From Trump to the current Biden administration, the push for economic decoupling from China has remained a consistent demand of the

U.S. government, with Europe, Japan, South Korea, and other countries continuously following suit. The most prominent trend is that Mexico's total exports to the U.S. surpassed China's this year[\[11\]](#), marking a significant breakthrough in the "nearshoring" policy. Meanwhile, due to concerns about the geopolitical situation, Chinese capital is also withdrawing significantly from the West[\[12\]](#). The weakening of economic and financial ties between China and the West undoubtedly reflects the trend of anti-globalization.

The reason why the trend of anti-globalization can occur and continue to have an impact still lies in the fundamental imbalances in the development of various regions worldwide. These imbalances include differences in the stages of civilization that each country is in[\[13\]](#), variations in the pace of reform processes, and disparities in industrial efficiency among countries that compel industries to relocate and restructure. This, in turn, leads to a reshuffling of the global industrial landscape. Additionally, differences in the timing of political and financial reforms in various countries result in some nations' political structures and financial efficiency not meeting the requirements of globalization, prompting financial capital to return to their home countries or seek investments elsewhere. The development of the U.S. nearshoring policy and changes in the flow of financial capital, as described earlier, both reflect the influence of these factors. Anti-globalization also has significant and undeniable consequences for the global situation.

The primary impacts of anti-globalization are reflected in aspects such as the global economic contraction, a gradual decline in economic growth in most countries, large-scale industrial restructuring, a growing political shift towards the left, and increasing nationalist sentiments. Regarding the future trajectory of the global geopolitical landscape, the main impact of anti-globalization is the continued strengthening of the process of global spatial fragmentation. After World War II, through the long-term integration of globalization, the original fragmented state of global space gradually showed a trend towards integration, as well as the creation of a unified global market.

However, the stage of anti-globalization is quite the opposite. In January 2020 the trend of global spatial fragmentation would gradually intensify. While there was still a trend of fragmentation during the relatively smooth development phase of global integration, during the stage of anti-globalization, this trend of fragmentation would undoubtedly become more pronounced.

Specifically, after the 2014 Crimea crisis, Ukraine effectively split into three parts: Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, and Western Ukraine. With the annexation of Crimea into Russia through a controversial referendum and the outbreak of the Russo-Ukraine conflict, this fragmentation trend has further escalated. The Middle East, which the U.S. originally had absolute control over, has already fragmented into six major segments controlled by the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Russia (through Syria), Iran, Turkey[\[14\]](#), and various militia groups. It is worth noting that the reconciliation process between Saudi Arabia and Iran has completely bypassed U.S. influence. Meanwhile, Israel, a long-standing U.S. ally, has significantly modified the cherished Western principle of "separation of powers" by expanding the powers of the executive branch to strengthen government control. This "reform" process, implemented firmly against public opposition, has sparked multiple rounds of protests domestically but eventually succeeded in the Knesset, the parliamentary approval[\[15\]](#). U.S. President Joe Biden's warnings had little impact on Israel's political evolution, highlighting further decline in U.S. control. Therefore, the division and further fragmentation of the six major segments in the Middle East are likely to continue. Additionally, due to Brexit, the dream of a unified European market has shattered, which is also an expression of spatial fragmentation under the overarching trend of anti-globalization. Hence, various spatial levels, including political and economic, are experiencing fragmentation.

"Spatial fragmentation" here refers to the world not consolidating into two monolithic blocs as in the Cold War but rather fragmenting into more self-contained regional spaces[\[16\]](#). This is also a key feature of how globalization is expected to evolve in the future - a major expression of regionalization. The evolution of spatial fragmentation

and regionalization trends opens the door for the rise and division of various regional hegemonies.

### **3. Basic Trends in the Future Divisions of Regional Hegemony**

Regarding the rise of regional hegemonic states, Andrew Hurrell wrote that the future rising regional hegemonic states will primarily be Russia, Brazil, India, and China. He emphasized that the main reasons for these countries' prominence are their significant economic strength, non-formal alliance with the U.S., considerable differences in their international order ideologies compared to the West, and gradually closer cooperation mechanisms among them (i.e., the BRICS countries)[\[17\]](#). However, under the overarching trends of anti-globalization and spatial fragmentation, coupled with the relative decline in U.S. control and a decreasing focus on external affairs, the future trend of regional hegemony division is bound to be more diverse and complex than the rise of the BRICS quartet. Countries like Israel and South Africa also have opportunities to assert themselves, and Japan's remilitarization is not out of the realm of possibility.

**North America:** As the sole superpower, the U.S. holds comprehensive and overwhelming advantages over its major neighboring countries like Mexico and Canada. With the advancement of U.S. "nearshoring", economic and trade relations between the U.S. and these two neighboring countries will further intensify, both in high-tech research and development and basic industrial production. Based on similar political systems and ideologies, deepening economic and trade relations will only increase Mexican and Canadian dependency on the U.S., allowing the latter to have de facto control over North American affairs. In the past two years, concerning China-related affairs, from the downing of "stray balloons" to alertness regarding "stray buoys," and further to technological decoupling from China, Canada has closely followed the footsteps of the U.S., and Mexico is likely to do the same in the future.

**Europe:** The possibility of the European Union (EU) acting as an independent pole in world politics is close to zero. Due to the impact of the Russo-Ukraine conflict on European security and the siphoning effect of U.S. capital from Europe, coupled with the impact of the process of anti-globalization, the existing economic and technological advantages of the EU's core countries, France and Germany, will be weakened. In terms of security affairs, due to the resolute anti-Russia stance of many Eastern European countries, and the significant contributions of countries like Poland during the Russo-Ukraine conflict, voices of Western European countries such as France and Germany on European security affairs will also tend to weaken. Furthermore, Hungary, which increasingly adheres to its own demands, will make it more difficult for the EU to coordinate its internal positions, and internal cohesion will decline. The EU will become more dependent on NATO for security and on the Anglo-American axis for economic and energy matters. The EU may not necessarily disintegrate and can even engage in diplomatic and strategic activities collectively, such as advancing into South America and Africa. However, its cherished strategic independence is destined to fall short, and France and Germany do not have the ability to fully control internal EU affairs in a genuine sense.

**Asia:** In East Asia, China can roughly maintain its position as the foremost power. However, due to the continued push for decoupling from China by the West, the irreplaceable role of the global economy in China's economic development and technological progress<sup>[18]</sup>, and the ongoing trend of the aging population in China, the momentum of China's economic development will gradually slow down, and its total advantage will face a stronger challenge from India. In terms of diplomatic networks, due to geopolitical demands, ideological contradictions, and historical issues, Japan and India will stand on the opposite side of China for a long time. Because of the importance of the Taiwan Strait to international trade routes, Western countries like the U.S. will not completely withdraw from the Asia-Pacific region in the short term. There is still a possibility of NATO's pivot to Asia-Pacific to continue for a certain period. Even if the



U.S. is prepared to further reduce its involvement in Asian affairs, it may allow Japan to continue its remilitarization to counter China. Due to the complexity of territorial conflicts in the South Sea, it is unlikely that Vietnam and the Philippines will be fully won over by China. The confrontational nature of the ASEAN-China relationship is difficult to completely eliminate. At the same time, due to the intervention of major powers, Taiwan's substantive "international space" will expand, and the difficulty of a final peaceful resolution of the Taiwan Strait issue will greatly increase. India, due to its strengthening economic power and enhanced diplomatic status, is also expanding its diplomatic network in the South Asian region. It is strengthening financial and defense cooperation with the Philippines, increasing investment in Sri Lanka, and gifting missile frigates to Vietnam. It will create a competitive and squeezing effect on China's influence in the Asia-Pacific region, becoming a bridgehead for Western containment of China for a certain period.

Due to the unfavorable situation on the Russo-Ukraine battlefield and the intensification of internal conflicts, Russia's position will further decline in the future. Although Russia may not necessarily plunge into total turmoil, its ultimate failure on the Ukrainian front will prompt it to seriously contemplate and implement an alliance with China. However, this will take time. If Russia eventually fully implements an alliance with China and meets all of China's geopolitical demands, the latter's geopolitical influence in the entire East Asian region will be strengthened. Nevertheless, China may still find it difficult to achieve comprehensive influence and establish a regional order to its liking. This is because the balancing effect of regional powers like India and Japan will still be present, and the formal and informal alliance system of the U.S. will continue to be effective. In the future, in Asia, there will be a situation where major regional powers like China, India, Japan, and South Korea stand in opposition to each other. India is expected to truly become the hegemon in South Asia.

**Middle East:** As mentioned earlier, the Middle East has already and will continue to exhibit a situation where six major segments coexist in opposition. It is likely that the U.S. will eventually lose its control over the Middle Eastern region. Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other countries will become dominant regional hegemonic powers [\[19\]](#).

**Africa:** Because of the impact of the Arab Spring and existing religious and ethnic conflicts, coupled with the high inflation and financial instability during the phase of anti-globalization, most regions of the African continent are in continuous turmoil, with the most prominent being the ongoing unrest in Sudan. As the most developed and politically stable country in Africa, South Africa is expected to become the regional hegemon in Africa. However, based on the complex and intricate conflicts within Africa and the increased competition by Western countries in Africa for influence against China, South Africa is unlikely to achieve dominant control over regional affairs in the short term. The trend of fragmentation on the African continent will further deepen, and the growth of South Africa as a regional hegemon will also take time.

**South America:** With its territorial size, population, and total economy, as well as the diplomatic initiatives taken after Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva came to power, especially the further deepening of economic and trade relations with China, Brazil is poised to truly grow into the regional hegemon of South America. However, it is worth noting that Argentina also has a series of important moves in terms of diversifying its diplomatic and economic trade relations, such as strengthening economic, trade, and financial relations with China. There are deep historical rivalries between Argentina and Brazil. In recent years, both the U.S. and the European Union have been trying to further penetrate South America to counter the influence that China has developed in the region since the 2000s and to compete for key mineral resources. Using existing historical conflicts for division is an inevitable operation. Brazil's continued increase in influence in South America will inevitably face resistance or even confrontation from

Argentina, and it will still take time for Brazil to fully establish its regional hegemonic status.

#### 4. Conclusion

The formerly interconnected global system has undergone a notable reversal. The substantial realignment of industrial and supply chains is poised to necessitate the recalibration of strategies among major powers, thereby precipitating a discernible weakening of the U.S.' erstwhile status as a global hegemon<sup>[20]</sup>. While the precise temporal trajectory of this transformation remains a protracted affair, prospects suggest that globalization, as a prevailing paradigm, will regain prominence in forthcoming years. Such a protracted trajectory of anti-globalization could persist over the course of a decade, or conceivably, multiple decades. In this unfolding dynamic, global space will invariably undergo further fragmentation, marking the emergence of regional hegemony as a foundational motif in the landscape of world geopolitics.

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#### Endnotes:

- [1] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1991/12/01/russian-renaissance/e20559f3-5f83-4300-b85b-121939b319ec/>
- [2] <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/what-the-prospect-of-a-prolonged-war-means-for-russia-ukraine-and-belarus>
- [3] <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/6/25/the-wagner-rebellion-revealed-putins-weakness>
- [4] <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/wang2006.pdf>
- [5] <https://www.theasset.com/article/50134/china-gdp-higher-than-most-despite-slowdown>
- [6] <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/China-s-GDP-unlikely-to-surpass-U.S.-in-next-few-decades-JCER>
- [7] <https://www.thinkchina.sg/internal-conflicts-will-be-downfall-us>
- [8] ANBOUND's Strategic Observation No. 599 pointed out that following the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal, the easing of Western sanctions led to the rapid expansion of Iran's regional hegemony.
- [9] <https://finance.sina.com.cn/hy/hyjz/2022-06-25/doc-imizirav0497667.shtml>
- [10] [http://www.anbound.com/Section/ArticleView\\_8003\\_1.htm](http://www.anbound.com/Section/ArticleView_8003_1.htm)
- [11] <https://www.axios.com/2023/07/12/us-top-trading-partner-mexico-china>

[12] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-money-flees-the-western-world-673d9bbb>

[13] <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001097152?full=y&archive>

[14] ANBOUND's Daily Economy Briefing No. 6828 pointed out that the increased importance of the Ukraine grain issue has contributed to Turkey's regional hegemony.

[15] <https://www.vox.com/2023/7/23/23804795/israel-protests-judicial-reforms-netanyahu-likud-idf>

[16] [https://k.sina.cn/article\\_2880405760\\_abaf810000100v2d7.html?from=news](https://k.sina.cn/article_2880405760_abaf810000100v2d7.html?from=news)

[17] Andrew Hurrell, Hegemony, liberalism and global order: what space for would-be great powers? *International Affairs*, Volume 82, Issue 1, January 2006, Pages 1–19

[18] [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?\\_\\_biz=MzIyNjgzNTc0NQ==&mid=2247492709&idx=1&sn=fd9dae43738b0e5b9a957144bbdf0c79&chksm=e868c82bdf1f413dddbbc344839706142a6b43e403389128bbbcf5563d274a355bce29ecbe4e&scene=21](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzIyNjgzNTc0NQ==&mid=2247492709&idx=1&sn=fd9dae43738b0e5b9a957144bbdf0c79&chksm=e868c82bdf1f413dddbbc344839706142a6b43e403389128bbbcf5563d274a355bce29ecbe4e&scene=21)

[19] ANBOUND's Daily Economy Briefing No. 6078 analyzed that the United States' longstanding strategic goal has been to prevent the emergence of regional hegemonies that could challenge its own status. However, it is gradually relinquishing its dominance over Middle Eastern affairs, relying more on speculation and strategy.

[20] The emergence of regional hegemonies is the real change in the future world. Regional powers like India, Turkey, Israel, and even countries like South Africa and Brazil will challenge the past and create a new world order. They will solidify their national positions and continue to contribute to the decline of American global leadership. The U.S. has no effective countermeasure to this trend.