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"Waving Goodbye to Hegemony" by Parag  
Khanna*

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## Goodbye to Hegemony-Hello to Thinking Globally

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## Goodbye to Hegemony-Hello to Thinking Globally

### Abstract

While I was pleased to see a knowledgeable commentator offer the promise of a fresh approach to the decline of American empire, alas Parag Khanna's provocative essay does not escape the delusions of your father's *realpolitique*. What purports to be a broad-minded analysis of the quest for "global equilibrium" under changing conditions, ends up being a playbook for the scramble for global goodies—with a disturbing dash of Huntingtonian Yellow Peril China-bashing. The real lessons here are deeper: the danger of asking the wrong question, and the need to bring global knowledge into a global framework to understand 21 st-century realities.

### Keywords

Human rights, Globalization, World powers, Hegemony

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## Goodbye to Hegemony-Hello to Thinking Globally

by Alison Brysk

While I was pleased to see a knowledgeable commentator offer the promise of a fresh approach to the decline of American empire, alas Parag Khanna's provocative essay does not escape the delusions of your father's *realpolitique*. What purports to be a broad-minded analysis of the quest for "global equilibrium" under changing conditions, ends up being a playbook for the scramble for global goodies—with a disturbing dash of Huntingtonian Yellow Peril China-bashing. The real lessons here are deeper: the danger of asking the wrong question, and the need to bring global knowledge into a global framework to understand 21 st-century realities.

Superpower rivalry is the wrong question, because power is always grounded in purpose, and because old-fashioned national interest is no longer the primary determinant of our fate. The Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci identified an important dual meaning of "[hegemony](#)"—both material dominance and moral suasion. Purpose and principle translate into the ability to set agendas and guide institutions, and it is the loss of this kind of hegemony in the latter sense that should concern us far more than the checkerboard of oil supplies in the Stans. Even in the extremity of military conflict, the U.S. has been relatively more successful in Afghanistan than Iraq, in a more legitimate struggle supported by multilateral institutions and allies. As Khanna intermittently notes but does not fully digest, such multi-dimensional power is Europe's secret weapon—along with reducing oil dependence and diversifying energy supplies, this multi-faceted power is a more sustainable basis for economic growth and political influence.

Globalization is the right question, because global connections are not just a reshuffle of resources, but a fundamental change in the determinants of the rights and welfare of the residents of all states. Global climate change and associated natural disasters, pandemics, and border-crossing conflict (including, but not limited to, terrorism) will affect far more people, even heretofore sheltered citizens of superpowers, than the alignments of nation-states. The most important shift is in the basis of identity, the glue and motor of societies, from nation-state loyalties to new zones and balances of religious ideologies, market motives, ethnic tribalisms, cosmopolitan mentalities, and anomic "[failed societies.](#)" Again, the seeds of this knowledge are visible within Khanna's own analysis, when he describes the Latin American leftist backlash in America's assumed zone of influence, and admits that "Chavez's challenge...is ideological." In a globalized world, the power of the American Dream is that migrants still vote for it with their feet.

The ultimate sign of the breakdown of Khanna's hegemonic analysis is that the prescriptions it generates are inconsistent. His initial recommendations of the JFK vision of globalism plus "Pentagonization" is just the formula that brought us Vietnam, ground zero for imperial overstretch. Similarly, the author's solution to the repeated refrain that "China is winning" is to sell them our infrastructure, rather than challenge the dysfunctional American neo-liberal distrust of government as a manager of public goods. One of the common features of our disparate European and Chinese economic rivals is the strong role of the state in guiding economic development, and (historically) in protecting the commonweal—American purpose and identity decline every time we allow one of our citizens to die of a preventable disease.

The real solution is thinking globally, in the triple sense of thinking *comprehensively* about power and purpose, thinking like *citizens of the world* as well as of America, and thinking of the *greater good*—a sustainable blend of peace, prosperity, and solidarity, even if it means less American dominance in a better world for all.

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*Alison Brysk is Professor of Political Science and International Studies at the University of California, Irvine. Winner of the 2007-2008 Distinguished Mid-Career Research Award, she has authored or edited six books on international human rights. Professor Brysk has researched and lectured in a dozen countries, and in 2007 held the Fulbright Distinguished Visiting Chair in Global Governance at Canada's University of Waterloo/Centre for International Governance Innovation. Brysk is active in promoting human rights through campus, professional, international, and advocacy organizations and networks. Please visit her website: <http://www.alisonbrysk.org>.*