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Review paper

MEASURED REVISIONISM: ALTERING POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE STATUS QUO STATES AND RISING CHALLENGERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL ORDER

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Abstract: This paper offers a conceptual framework on how rising and revisionist powers perceive their position in the contemporary international order. The argument of the paper is focused on the structure of the unipolar order and how such order produces a hierarchy that is differently accepted by other actors in world politics. Namely, the rising powers as potential challengers to the status quo have different approaches when assessing their future position in the already established international order. However, due to the complexity of the international order and embedded interdependence of the contemporary states, revisionism as a method of altering the *status quo* works differently than in the previous eras of world politics. That is to say, the scope of modern revisionism is heavily limited, which is induced by the structure of the unipolar order as well as the fact that revisionists today lack ideological foundations to alter the core principles of the order. Therefore, modern revisionism is measured or soft, not directed towards changing the core principles of the order, but rather directed towards altering the established hierarchy on which the current leading power operates the international system. The paper addresses the subject from a qualitative perspective, analysing the structural constraints of the contemporary order and how it all reflects on the possible revisionist efforts. The goal of this research attempt is to present the differences between rising and revisionist powers and what strategical approaches are available for the modern revisionists in order to accomplish their geopolitical ambitions.

Keywords: Measured Revisionism, International Order, Rising Powers, Unipolarity, Status Quo.

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INTRODUCTION

The international order in the 21st century is wider and deeper than those of previous times. Rising powers and potential revisionists have a myriad of complex relationships with the ruling hegemon; in other words, they are both constrained by and tied to the contemporary order. John Ikenberry rightfully states that the complexity of the contemporary international order does not allow a straightforward cyclical method of change (Ikenberry 2014, p. 16). Rather, it requires a different approach corresponding with the already established pillars of democracy and capitalism, while forcing alterations in particular spheres of the hegemon's rule. Measured revisionism, which will be further discussed in this article, is a new method in great power politics that allows particular alterations of the international order without creating deeper distortions to the international system as a whole.

The main hypothesis driving the research effort in this article is that current revisionist attempts made by some rising challengers are not aimed at altering the basic principles of the current international order based on a free-market economy and capitalism. Rather, they are directed towards the structural hierarchy of the international order, forefront by the US primacy and the dominating power's authority that is not equally accepted by the rising actors. Therefore, current revisionism is "soft" or "measured" because temporary revisionists have no actual ideological alternative or "ideational package" to replace the structural framework that has benefited their rise in the first place (Kupchan 2014). The idea of measured revisionism comes from the works of Michael Mazarr, and it is somewhat present in Randall Schweller's concept of rising powers in terms of "supporters, shrikers and spoilers" (Mazarr 2015; Schweller 2014). Their prominent works have served as a primary basis to further examine this phenomenon, which will be an interesting matter in the forthcoming alteration of the unipolar order. Since we are debating the issues of international order, the author does not strictly confine his approach to a single school of international relations, for example, realism. Due to the complexity of the subject of international order, the author refers not only to the works of prominent realist thinkers, whose concepts are fundamental for understanding global politics, but also refers to the authors who are exploring status-orientated issues in international relations. At the same time, the author also includes the works of some institutionalists whose ideas are essential in understanding order in its full spectrum and not only as a struggle for power among actors.

In the first part of the paper, we will discuss the notions of the rising power and the revisionist power, the differences between them and why these concepts are often regarded as synonyms in the sphere of international relations. The argument here is based on structural premises, meaning that the structure of

international order is the definitive factor that initiates revisionist behaviour among the actors of international politics. The second part of the paper will examine the hierarchical structure of the unipolar order and how it reflects on the rising powers' ambitions. In the third part, we have tried to conceptualize the idea of measured revisionism as an attempt made by the rising challengers to delegitimize the leading power's authority and rearrange the hierarchy apparently unsuitable for the rising powers' needs and ambitions.

At the outset, a few general remarks should be made for the readers. In this paper, the term hegemony is used instead of imperialism, which is present in some non-western literature regarding the US global primacy. Although the US global authority is based on coercion, prevailing institutions and norms indicate that the authority is legitimate to a certain extent. Thus, the term hegemony corresponds with the idea presented by Robert O. Keohane, which implicates that such a method of international governance requires the established rules and institutions as well as a certain level of consent from other sovereign states (Keohane 1984, p. 46).The research approach used here represents a starting point in the attempt to tackle this serious scientific question. Though the approach may be criticized as insufficiently coherent, exploring the issues of international order requires a diversified methodology that is not rooted in a single school of academic literature. In that regard, the author believes that this is not the only (true) way and that the same conundrum can be explored by other scientific approaches that could yield even better results. It should also be noted that the states, as primary actors of world politics, are depicted as rational subjects. Lastly, this is a humble research attempt to examine a subject that is possibly out of reach of a journal scientific paper and requires a larger format in order to be understood in its entirety.

DIVERGING NATURE AND POLITICAL MISCONCEPTIONS BETWEEN THE RISING AND REVISIONIST POWERS

As Hedley Bull writes, great powers instigate policies that contribute to the world order but, at the same time, exploit their position of preponderance by imposing a central degree of direction to the international society as a whole (Bull 2012: p. 200). For Bull, great powers as bearers of the world order are both "givers and takers", states that seek order in the international system because it benefits their status. However, this kind of political set up is also accompanied by the rising powers whose goal is to reach or get close as much as possible to the power apex of world politics. As Randall Schweller suggests, efforts to preserve the *status quo* by temporary dominating states eventually slows down, thus allowing other rising powers to gauge and explore the possibilities of potential change in the current system (Schweller 2014, p. 45).

Change to the international order is a somewhat inevitable phenomenon that will occur sooner or later, whether the bearer of the old order starts to decline or other actors accumulate enough power and gain capabilities to reorganize the temporary state of affairs. Although power is essential for an order changing ventures, those who accumulate enough power and ascend further in international politics do not necessarily have to be the actors who will participate in order changing ventures or so-called revisionism. The definition of a "rising power" has no clear outlines; therefore, debating over a riser and a revisionist to the international order can sometimes be a confusing matter leading to inconclusive answers. A lack of clear definition of such terms derives mostly from the academic literature that has often identified a rising power and a revisionist as similar constructs that follow the same strategic choices in world politics (Gilpin 1981; Organski and Kugler 1981; Kennedy 1988; Modelski 1987; Goldstein 1989).

The concepts of power transition and hegemonic war theory, which argue that change in the temporary international order is inevitable since rising states will challenge the hegemon and its order as soon as they accumulate enough power or when the power of the hegemon declines to a sufficient extent, suffer from some illogicalities regarding the temporary material status of a rising power. A rising power, by definition, is doing better than everyone else in the current order; therefore, it is illogical to assume that (of all states) a rising power that prospers will adopt revisionist behaviour and initiate an order-changing war. Countries that prosper in the current international order have no reasonable incentives to engage in a costly global war with uncertain outcomes in order to overthrow the order that has worked for them thus far. Furthermore, changing the ruling coalition with new dominating power is an untested endeavour that can lead to uncertain outcomes in the future (Schweller 2015, p. 4). As we have noted at the beginning of this paper, countries should be perceived as rational actors. Such actors, by nature, should not be prone to risky endeavours that can backfire and endanger their future position in the international order, especially if their current position in the *status quo* promises future growth. As David Edelstein notes, rising powers recognize that their brightest days lie ahead, so they will seek to avoid anything that can prevent them from realizing that potential (Edelstein 2017, p. 23).

Before going further with the debate regarding the differences between a rising power and a revisionist, we should bear in mind that the nature of the riser's expansion or ascendance can impact the perception whether that country will be deemed as a benevolent rising power or a revisionist state from the standpoint of a current dominating power. Emerging powers often see their interest expand along with their capabilities; in effect, revisionist attempts usually correspond with their relative power (Montgomery 2016, p. 25). A.F.K Organski debates, however, that one of the primary reasons why the US had a peaceful

rise and did not provoke the British was due to America's internal rapid growth that did not threaten the interests of the ruling hegemon. Although the Americans won their independence at the expense of the British colonial power, their future aspirations were not directed against the British Empire. The fact that the US did not want to upset the current set of rules, change the already established political and economic institutions or proclaim its own ideology represented a major factor for America's peaceful rise (Organski 1968, pp. 362-363). Michelle Murray further emphasizes that the strategic interests of the US and the UK were not zero-sum, while the collective Anglo-Saxon identity heavily influenced the British perception of the US rapid expansion as an endeavour that would ultimately serve the Crown's overall interest. Murray notes that powers able to identify each other in the same way are also able to build mutual trust and recognition. When their identities align, the hegemon is able to interpret the rising power's true intentions, which are not hostile and, therefore, will not undermine the hegemon's status. Ultimately, the rapprochement between the rising power of the US and the British hegemony was accomplished due to the political intent of the United States, which aspired to be a similar major power as was the UK. (Murray 2019, pp. 176-177, 195-196). Although some could argue that the US after achieving power dominance in the western hemisphere pressured the UK and some other European powers to dismantle their colonial empires, which also hasten their industrial and economic fall from the top tier of great powers, this essentially did not provoke any deeper hostilities between them. Moreover, the whole period of the 20th century led to further cooperation between the western countries that ultimately ended with the United States' legitimate leadership of the regional order.

Thus, we could observe the United States as a rising power that inherited the Anglo-French international order without any trace of revisionist intent. In other situations, the rising power intentions have been usually aggressive or revolutionary as Stacie Goddard notes, which openly threatened the current *status quo* and the power status of the ruling hegemon (Goddard 2018: p. 8). Enthroning itself as a sole global power after the Cold War, the US managed to recalibrate the structure of international politics. With the beginning of the unipolar era, the international order became rigid and hierarchical, seemingly deprived of any kind of competitor that could potentially defy the unipole's political will.

The traditional approach argues that anarchy, as a prevailing condition in international relations, leads to balancing behaviour, which does not allow any state to reign supreme and impose its will on others. As Waltz argues, balancing occurs because states seek to maximize their security in the anarchical structure, therefore, forging alliances against the dominating power (Waltz 1979, pp. 130-133). However, in our contemporary unipolar system, the concept of anarchy

does not neatly correspond with the traditional idea of international order. After the Cold War, many have chosen to bandwagon instead of to balance against the American-led order. William Wohlforth indicates that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the United States' overwhelming power in all aspects (including military, economy, technology and geopolitics) made balancing strategies of the second-tier states increasingly expensive and, thus, out of reach (Wohlforth 1999, pp. 7-8). Moreover, as David Lake underlines, in the post-Cold War era, many have chosen a more benign way of bandwagoning with the US rather than balancing against it. For Lake, this represents a clear sign of acceptance of the US authority and the unipolar structure that is more hierarchical than anarchical (Lake 2009, p. 176). If truth be told, the post-Cold War structure became increasingly hierarchical and organized around superordinate and subordinate states crisscrossed with institutions and norms governed by relatively liberal relationships among actors (Ikenberry 2011, p. 37). In such an international structure, a rising state that does not bandwagon with the current coalition, even if it does not engage in balancing, can be marked as a revisionist because it does not fit with the established hierarchical structure. As a matter of fact, in such a structure, balancing behaviour becomes the very definition of revisionism because in order to restore the balance to the system, it entails overthrowing the unipolar structure and its ruling hegemon. Unipolarity represents the only system where balancing is revisionist and not *status quo* politics (Schweller and Pu 2011, pp. 45-48).

Interestingly enough and in contrast to the previous argument, the stability of the unipolar structure does not solely hinge on the balancing behaviour of other actors and potential competitors to the ruling power. As Robert Jarvis points out, although deemed satisfactory by the ruling hegemon, the unipole structure can also instigate aggressive behaviour towards other potential competitors because of uncertainty that the future may hold. The realist logic behind the argument is relatively simple. However secure states are, only rarely can they be secure enough; and if they are currently very powerful, they will have strong impulses to act and prevent future deterioration (Jarvis 2009, p. 200). The paradox of the unipolar structure is that, although it provides power preponderance to the ruling state (coalition), it can also induce a degree of "paranoia" towards other rising powers, which can be perceived as revisionists because they could potentially threaten the future status of the contemporary hegemon as the gap of relative strength between them narrows. In light of the unipolar structure, the hegemon's own perception of the rising powers and their politics may actually determine whether the actor will be marked as a benevolent rising power or simply a revisionist.

In his predation theory, Joshua R. Shifrinson brings an interesting twist to the idea of the *status quo* powers and their perception towards new rising states. In his work, Shifrinson argues that the rising power's perception of a declining hegemon

actually determines whether the country will behave like a benevolent-supportive "riser" or whether it will partake in a revisionist endeavour. According to him, rising powers usually prey upon the declining hegemon in order to secure their ascendance in world politics. Rising powers can either support the declining hegemon in order to secure the balance and their position in the upcoming order, or they can intervene aggressively against the hegemon if his posture proves to be hostile and there are no sufficient reasons to further delay his decline. In Shifrinson's theory, the political posture of the rising state is actually formed by the state's own perception of the role which a declining hegemon might play in the coming international order (Shifrinson 2018, pp. 13-22). The problem with the theory is that predation does not leave much space for other factors, such as the character of the international structure, participation in the international government organizations, equal institutional development or any kind of cooperation that could influence the perception and relations between the established power and the rising one. Shifrinson's theory perceives rising powers as the de-facto revisionist states with more or less subtle revisionist intent. The theory essentially views the international structure in ultra-Hobbesian fashion, in which all actors are prone to aggression in order to accomplish more power and security.

On the other hand, Steve Chan writes that although some of the states can be described as "dissatisfied", which may propel some of them to expand or change, their revisionist or "anti-status quo" behaviour should essentially be determined on the basis of their attitudes towards the prevailing institutions and rules of conduct in the international relations. For Chan, a revisionist power is one that exhibits clear opposition when seeking to change and replace current institutions and rules of the contemporary order, thus mitigating the adverse effects the structure can impose on its future development. He notes that such regimes express ideologies that challenge the established values, expectations and ordering principles espoused by the existing international system. Unlike Itkowitz, Chan bolsters the idea that not all rising powers should be treated as default revisionists. In his view, treating a state that gains power and status under the existing order as a revisionist state (simply because it closes the power-gap between the state and the ruling hegemon) actually creates an analytical constant that focuses exclusively on power shifts, disregarding the actual political intent of the belligerents (Chan 2008, pp. 28-30). Jin Kai also confirms this reasoning to a certain extent. For Kai, a rising power can turn revisionists if the system fails to accommodate sufficient changes to the newly established power structure. Namely, the revisionist intent does not originate from the internal structure of the rising state, but rather from the external structure of the system that cannot satisfy the rising power's needs in terms of established rules, norms and mechanisms that prevent its further accomplishment of national interests (Kai 2017, p. 36). As long as the ruling powers, as bearers of the system, are willing to accommodate rising

powers legitimate interests, the latter should have no reasonable motive to oppose the hegemon and initiate an order changing politics. Moreover, rising powers fear the disturbances in the contemporary order since it can provoke unforeseen consequences, such as balancing coalitions, which can ultimately disrupt their further ascendance (MacDonald and Parent 2018, pp. 65-66).

Although the mentioned authors and their respective works, which represent new research endeavors in the sphere of revisionism, make excellent arguments regarding the dilemma between revisionist states and rising powers, we should not forget about an older scientific theory which finely depicts the structural problem that is present in our contemporary politics. Johan Galtung's theory of aggression can help us summarize the dilemma between a rising state and a revisionist one. In his theory, Galtung argues that, although the individual or in our case one's internal characteristics can be important, the social environment or structure is the primary propellant for change or for aggression which propels change. Aggression actually represents a way out of the dissatisfactory or frustrating situation, which essentially harbors change to the temporary position of the perceived entity. The international structure, however balanced, is largely in a state of disequilibrium which exists between the structure's elements, in our case countries. Disequilibrium, which by default imposes ranks among nations, also suggests that some of them will be ranked as top dogs and some of them as underdogs of the system. For Galtung, the rank-disequilibrium system propels aggression among actors. In time, some of the lower-ranking nations will compete and eventually catch up with the top dogs of the system; however, their efforts or newly gained status do not automatically mean that they will be recognized as powers and integrated into the established order. The aggression and the revisionist intent of these actors will further excel if the system's integrational character is low or mobility channels blocked. Thus, a rising power that manages to transcend its limitations and its underdog status also expects to be integrated, or at least recognized, as a top-dog rank nation. If that nation is voted out of existence and denied membership in the great power club, it can be expected that the revisionist character and aggression will develop within a reasonable time span (Galtung 1964, pp. 95-99, 110-114).

The revisionist attitude, although partly based on the countries' intent to accept or oppose the temporary international order, is mainly determined by the rigidity of the order itself, regarding the willingness of the ruling hegemon (coalition) to accommodate the rising powers' needs. In contemporary world politics, there are no counterweights for the ruling hegemon; therefore, internal impulses may prevail, resulting in politics governed by unchecked power. Waltz notes that a state stronger than any other can decide whether to conform its policies to structural pressures and whether to avail itself of the opportunities the structural change may offer (Waltz 2000, p. 24). As with all monopolistic

structures, paying rents does not necessarily improve the relations inside the monopoly; on the contrary, it usually provides further incentive for the holder to widen its monopolistic reach. As such, the whole structure becomes extractive in essence. The structural inability to redistribute effectively the proceeds of the global status is a major incentive for rivals to seek change (Modelski 1978, p. 232). In the end, the hegemon's own hold over the unipolar order and the desire to preserve the *status quo* drives rising powers towards revisionism.

In a nutshell, rising powers could be designated as relatively content states that do not seek revision at first; however, due to the structure of the international order and the perception of the ruling coalition, their attitudes may change over time. Most (if not all) rising powers have managed to excel and expand their gradient of strength in the framework of the already established system of international norms and institutions; therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the initial drive for revisionism does not necessarily come from their internal structure, nor do the rising powers accept revisionism as a default "work system" on which they operate. Relations between the rising power and the established countries, which constitute the ruling "clique" of international order more often than not, decide whether the rising power will be accepted and recognized, or whether it will be sidelined as a tier-two power that is by nature inferior. As we have noted previously, the frustration which propels aggression and the need for change comes from the social structure that confines the subject while rejecting its newly established status in the international system.

Revisionist powers, on the other hand, are states that have already passed the threshold of "aggressive intent". In other words, they have already singled their intentions to other actors, especially *status quo* states, that their dissatisfaction with the current order demands certain alterations to it. In that manner, revisionists cannot be content with their status, even if that status suggests a rising power position that can potentially prosper further in the future. Therefore, revisionists, unlike regular rising powers, tend to disregard their current position in hope that change will be even more beneficial for their future status in the new-altered international order. Revisionists, though dependant on power, should not be defined solely by that category because power is common for other rising states as well. Rather, revisionists should be judged upon their politics towards the *status quo* and the majority that accepts such order, as well as their power capacities to make changes whether on a regional or global scale.

RISING POWERS' POSITION IN THE HIERARCHY OF THE UNIPOLAR ORDER

In the first part of this article, we have argued that the rising powers do not behave in a revisionist manner by default; rather, it is the structure of the

international order that may induce their revisionist intent. In the second part, we will try to explain how the structure produces a hierarchy that is in contrast with the rising powers' ambitions usually focused on asserting their newly established status. The basic argument here is that the rising powers' position has often been hindered by the already established power structure manifested in the hierarchy of the contemporary unipolar international order.

Power transition theorists believe that a successful dominant power tends to create alliances which include most of the great powers, middle powers and small states, which are satisfied and in principle accept the current structure of the intentional order. (Kai 2017, p. 34) This can be perceived as an attempt by the hegemon to create a hierarchical environment that ultimately serves his interest and status. The effects of security and stability that the hegemon provides within the order, as public goods, represent the means by which other members accept the established hierarchical structure. David Lake, as one of the well-known authors exploring hierarchy in international politics, further argues that the success of the Western-led international order lies within the liberal framework of the US hegemony whose hierarchy is deemed legitimate by the subordinate states. The authority of the liberal hegemon rests on the acceptance of the subordinate states as well as on their perception of the hegemon's credibility in terms of self-restraint and willingness not to exploit or endanger smaller states' interests. Authority as a social construct is based on mutual trust between the dominating and subordinating units, which can, over time, produce incentives for vesting future interests in the international order governed by the legitimate authority (Lake 2014: pp. 64-65). Although Lake argues that possible challengers can be converted into supporters if they become vested into the structure of the contemporary order (i.e., if their interests become intertwined with the hegemon's interests), in truth, many of the rising powers that have benefited from the US-led order are still struggling with the acceptance of the American global authority.

In light of structural theory, the unipolar order seems at least stable of all possible variations regarding the visage of international politics. Waltz, among many, often argued that unipolarity bears great expenses to the leading power, which ultimately ends in failure to properly govern. Moreover, since there are no checks and balances in the unipolar structure, the dominant power is prone to misuse its capabilities, thus worsening the situation with other weaker states that will start to worry about the hegemon's behaviour (Waltz 2000, pp. 1-2). The reach of the US legitimate authority, which Lake writes about, is relatively confined to and embedded within the unipolar structure that prevailed after the Cold War. As noted by Birthe Hansen, a unipolar power is in a unique position to spread its own political model and international agenda, thanks to the prevailing unipolar structure (Hansen 2000, pp. 112-123). Such state of affairs indicates the causal relationship with the Lake's concept of authority and

hierarchy that a dominant power may produce, albeit hierarchy in the unipolar structure is not necessarily produced by the legitimate authority but rather by the structure of the international order and the overwhelming asymmetry of power between the hegemon and other states.

Hence, we can debate that the unipolar moment is a permissive variable that allows the US global authority. Although the dominant power may provide "public goods", much of its authority lies within the security-military capabilities and power projection capacities. In truth, by establishing its global military reach, the US has managed to impose its authority on other smaller countries. However, we should keep in mind that this same authority is not equally accepted by other major players. In fact, the unipole has relatively limited authority over other great powers that are not willing to accommodate such a state of affairs. Moreover, we can say that between the unipole and some major powers, relations are still relatively anarchic (Monteiro, p. 41). As Ikenberry underlines, the American-led order is governed by a distinctive mix of liberal and imperial characteristics that reinforce the overall international hierarchy (Ikenberry 2011, p. 15). For that reason, the idea of the United States as a legitimate bearer of the international hierarchy whose authority is mostly based on democracy and liberal foundations is somewhat questionable. Referring to the uniform approach to emerging issues, Lake does underline the importance of coercion for the dominant power's overall success in establishing effective hierarchy. By deploying troops on other country's soil, the dominant power by default provides security to the subordinate state while making it an integral part of its hierarchy. The integrated subordinate state also becomes an important part of the overall strategic design of the dominant power, especially if the possibilities of making alternative security choices by the subordinate are absent (Lake 2007, pp. 62-63). The absence of an alternative choice is the central point in which the hierarchy of the dominant power culminates.

Lake's concept of hierarchy based on legitimate authority in the context of unipolar international order is debatable in terms of whether the authority is welcomed or must be accepted by smaller actors who are compelled to "get along with it" simply because there are no alternatives. That is not to say the US hegemony is based solely on coercion; however, we should not ignore the temporary dominant power willingness to sustain the unipolar structure by excluding other potential competitors on whom the leading power cannot impose its will. Although the hegemon's order is certainly beneficial and attractive, the success of such international order has been accomplished partly by aggressive expansion or by filling the vacuum left by the end of the bipolar system. The NATO expansion in Eastern Europe and more recently in the Western Balkans is probably the most obvious example, although we can see a somewhat similar trend in East and Southeast Asia, where US efforts are aimed at controlling the Chinese influence in the region that bears great economic and strategic

significance for the United States hegemony. As a matter of fact, when certain rising powers make the bid for their own hierarchy or try to establish authority in certain regions, the US as a leading power does not act with restraint as a benevolent hegemon would; rather, it acts assertively and (in some cases) preventively in order to contain and control the rising powers' ambitions. Therefore, we should bear in mind that the *status quo* does not represent a neutral position. On the contrary, it constitutes a set of acquired interests which the *status quo* states seek to maintain along with their advantageous position in the contemporary system (Buzan 1983, p. 178). Thus, the United States' actions are to be expected, especially if Washington's temporary standing in international politics seems to be threatened by the perception of the rising state. The US constant military presence in the rimlands of Eurasia, which does not subside despite the ideas of American retrenchment, is probably the most obvious example of the hegemon's desire to stay present and deny the potential outreach of some rising powers.

The structure that has benefited the current dominating power thus far is gradually being altered; however, changes are slow while the global hegemon is still persistent in sustaining its leading position and status. Liberal capitalism, which represents the ideological core of the Western-led order, is accepted as a default operative system on which states interact with each other in international society. However, this does not mean that such an "ideational package" is equally accepted as a working environment in the domestic field of politics of some rising challengers. Namely, Russia during the last decade became much more traditionally orientated, propagating traditional values that are not in line with the Western liberal mindset. These ideological traits based on tradition are viewed as a blessing not only in Russia but also in some other Asian and Eastern European states. Moreover, the need and importance of traditional values in the Russian society is regarded as an essential-strategic objective for the upcoming decade, which is also defined in state documents such as "Strategies of development of education in Russian Federation" and somewhat briefly explained in "National security strategy of Russian Federation" (Patrušev 2020, Dugin 2016). Though at the first glance, these value-oriented traits may seem marginal since they are not directly focused on the idea of a market-based economy and capitalism, essentially they are challenging the American overall ideological narrative.

Although Ikenberry is right when he describes the post-Cold War order led by the US idea of the free-market economy as effective and accepted by all participants of international politics, the idea of the order's durability led by the current hegemon is less sustainable (Ikenberry 2008, p. 28). Namely, some rising states (as undercompensated states) have difficulties accepting the hierarchy of the dominant power simply because it will only widen the gap between their current position and their future ambitions as great powers. The logic which

follows is: if the risers accept the hierarchy of the dominant power, they also accept the legitimacy of the order as well as their current position in that order, which they are trying to change in the first place. The problem that derives from this is that the unipolar order does not recognize the alterations in power capabilities among the actors; this problem essentially calls for change in the distribution of authority as one of the central benefits wielded by great powers. Since such alterations are absent, rising powers have further incentive to change the order or dislodge the dominant power as the primary holder of the system.

The problem with the acceptance of the hegemon's authority can be traced back to Galtung's notion of top-dog and underdog relations as well. Although the smaller states may accept the hierarchy and see clear benefits stemming from it such as maritime security, trade, production and secured exports to bigger markets, access to energy sources, etc.; the rising challengers, on the other hand, can perceive hierarchy as a potential constraint that can limit their future ambitions such as reclaiming former territories, expanding economic and industrial reach, expanding military capabilities and lastly altering the visage of regional or global order to better suit their growing geopolitical needs. Furthermore, agreeing to external hierarchy one must also acknowledge that his position in that system will remain inferior, given that the rising power would need to align its future goals with the already established political framework of the leading authority in that hierarchy. In the contemporary unipolar structure, this is relatively obvious. Leading European powers ceded their authority to the US in order to survive the Cold War; however, once they accepted the external authority, their political behaviour remained mostly unchanged despite the dramatic structural alternations after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The hierarchy once accepted as legitimate can hardly be altered, especially if the bearer of the system remains strong or his position is unchallenged by other potential authorities. Contemporary rising powers are well aware of such a "trap". Furthermore, their reserved behaviour regarding the temporary institutions of the international order as well as their steady efforts to build parallel institutions are a fine representation of the rising powers' intentions on how the structure of the international order may be changed. In the next part of this article, we will examine different strategies and traits of contemporary revisionist states and how their revisionist efforts challenge not the international system but rather the leading power authority in that system.

STRATEGICAL OUTLINE OF MEASURED REVISIONISM

Explaining the idea of measured revisionism, Mazarr writes that the concept is not an overly aggressive or adventuristic worldview, essentially given that such states recognize the value of the rule-based order. As previously argued, most

of the rising powers did excel in an already established system of rules and relations. However, their rising ambitions and power capabilities drive them to demand the transformation of certain elements of the contemporary order, which consequentially invokes revisionism in some aspects of world politics (Mazarr 2015, p. 11).

If we could compare measured revisionists to an already established categorization of revisionist states, presented by Randall Schweller, they could be placed somewhere in between jackals and wolves, or between spoilers and shirkers (Schweller 1994, 2014). Schweller, as a well-known author who has extensively explored the idea of revisionism, did suggest the concept of limited revisionism in his earlier book "*Deadly Imbalances*". However, the idea was developed in accordance with the Second World War environment, in which limited revisionist states were dependent on the so-called "wolves" or powerful revisionists, with whom they (limited revisionists) could bandwagon and hope for a beneficial change in the international order (Schweller 1998,p. 22). Measured revisionists, on the other hand, represent some of the contemporary rising powers, which are only second in line behind the dominating *status quo* coalition. These states cannot bandwagon simply because they have no one to bandwagon with. Today's revisionists are at the forefront of the venture that is trying to alter the political layout of the international order. Measured revisionists can be defined as states that are eager for change, but they lack sufficient power capabilities and, more importantly, ideological foundations to seriously alter the contemporary international order. Nevertheless, it does not mean that they cannot change the magnitude of the hegemon's authority and hopefully create a more favourable environment for their own geopolitical development. Ikenberry provides a fine depiction of measured revisionism: "They (potential revisionists) wish to enhance their position within the system, but they are not trying to replace it" (Ikenberry 2014, p. 8).

Delegitimizing the leading power's authority is one of the primary tools of measured revisionism that could indicate the beginning of the power transition process, in which rising powers voice their dissatisfaction with the current order while laying the foundation for a new one (Schweller and Pu 2011, p. 44). Although we could argue that the process of measured revisionism starts before delegitimation, for example, when there are first glimpses of power shifts, essentially such occurrences bear no clear intent. As we mentioned in the first part of the paper revisionists signal their intent and dissatisfaction that leads towards other actions that can potentially change the visage of the particular order. Delegitimation, however benign it may seem, does signal certain intentions towards the subject and its given status in the international society.

According to Stephen Walt, the strategy of delegitimation is not intended to challenge the US power directly; instead, it is focused on undermining the belief

that the United States primacy is "automatic" or morally acceptable (Walt 2005, p. 125). Delegitimation, in truth, seeks to make others resent the hegemon's dominance, thus making it harder for the dominant power to maintain its authority. Though the concept of delegitimation is focused on disproving the hegemon's position on moral grounds, we should note that delegitimizing one's position can also imply its incapability to maintain the former line of work and its overall capabilities to deliver on promises and fulfil obligations. By practicing such strategies, revisionists do not necessarily alter the founding principles of the international order while still being able to undermine the hegemon, which ultimately allows them to transform the power relations as well as their own position in the future international order.

As a strategy of measured revisionism, delegitimization can also be a byproduct of great power asymmetry between the hegemon and the challengers. Since potential revisionists cannot reach power parity with the dominant power, they are inclined to probe the hegemon's resolve and his political commitment in different world regions or different spheres of international politics. The process of gauging the hegemon's resolve includes complex strategies, "campaigns in the grey zone" as Mazarr calls them, comprising a variety of state and non-state instruments of power, which are all essentially ambiguous and very elusive in their core (Mazarr 2016, pp. 43-53). The reason why contemporary revisionists choose not to openly engage with the *status quo* power is not solely based on great power asymmetry and lack of power parity but, it also indicates that modern revisionists recognize the increasing interdependence in the global society and the importance of the leading power's position for the stability of the system. Therefore, modern revisionists can also be described as spoilers or disruptors that question the legitimacy of the current order; however, due to their embeddedness in the international economy and institutions, their revisionism is ultimately held in check (Duke 2017, p. 76).

The concept of probing represents the next aspect of measured revisionism and how modern revisionists attempt to challenge and possibly make changes in the *status quo*. Wess Mitchell and Jakub Grygiel define probing as a low-risk and low-intensity endeavour aimed at gauging an adversary's power and will to maintain influence and security over a region. Such action avoids direct military confrontation while being focused on the outer rims of the adversary's (hegemon's) commitments and interests. Probing is used by rising actors that wish to challenge the great power, and it is used at times when the great power is seemingly beginning its retreat (Mitchell and Grygiel 2016). Though when examining this strategic behaviour, we should keep in mind the political background of the authors, there is no doubt that the rising challengers are partaking in such probing politics that test not only the United States commitment but its authority as well. By targeting the hegemon's outer reaches

of power, the adversaries focus on the weak spots and less attractive points in the hegemon's strategic planning. From the dominating power's standpoint, this may not seem important; on the other hand, for allies and other inferior states that seek protection from the hegemon, this can result in a change of strategic orientation. Thus, the leading power's authority in outer regions may be compromised, which will consequentially reflect on the perception of hierarchy among subordinates and whom they should really rely on in the future.

Hybrid warfare is probably the most visible manifestation of probing behaviour. This type of warfare can be designated as a conflict that has a starting point without the exact moment of victory, which combines a wide spectrum of "measures other than war" with the usage of conventional armed forces that direct their operations towards other combatants and non-combatants in a specific theatre of war. (Hoffman 2017: pp. 43-44, Vuković 2018: pp. 15-18, Pejić 2019: pp. 429-431). Though the term is closely related to the Ukrainian crisis and Frank Hoffman's new definition of this phenomenon, which directly binds it to the Russian operations in Ukraine, in truth, this type of warfare tactics has also been practiced by other powers, such as China and Iran. However, we should keep in mind that though hybrid warfare is becoming a somewhat *modus-operandi* for rising challengers in their efforts to quell the American influence in some parts of the world, there is no clear evidence that the US is capable or willing to practice such type of warfare for the time being (Khodarenok, Zinchenko 2016).

The Chinese growing geostrategic assertiveness in the South China Sea, which is reflected in its maritime infrastructure projects on the disputed islands, also corresponds with hybrid and probing tactics (Deutsche Welle 2017). Though there is no open military confrontation, both sides in this maritime region have been wary of each other's moves and how it can potentially reflect on other smaller countries, ultimately impacting the regional order. Lastly, Hezbollah's dedication to the Syrian president, the growing Iranian influence in the Middle East, as well as Tehran's unrelenting politics that are targeting the Saudis, represent political practices that also belong to the family of hybrid warfare. Similar to other challengers, Iranian ambitions are directed towards reforming the regional hierarchy, pushing the United States out by focusing pressure on its regional allies.

The process that also corresponds with delegitimation of US authority and probing tactics is the idea of soft and internal balancing. In a traditional sense, states balance against power or, as Stephen Walt argued in his older work, states can also balance against threats (Walt 1987, pp. 17-50). Soft balancing is a subtle strategy that allows other actors to limit the US abilities to impose its preferences on others by employing conscious and coordinated diplomatic action (Brooks 2012, pp. 36-39). Robert Pape writes that soft balancing basically signals a commitment to resist future ambitions of the current superpower (Pape 2005, pp. 36-39). Internal balancing also represents a viable political strategy, somewhat

similar to probing, which allows potential revisionists to contain American power. According to Walt, internal balancing is focused on challenging the hegemon with asymmetrical measures in the spheres where his overwhelming power has no greater effect (Walt 2006, pp. 99-106). Although terrorism or guerilla warfare are usually marked as frequent tactics for internal balancing efforts against the US, contemporary military efforts in the form of hybrid warfare may also represent viable strategies for this type of balancing. The effectiveness of these strategies lies not only in their subtle form of utilization but also in their self-reinforcing nature. Both soft and internal balancing may or may not provoke the hegemon to extend its efforts to suppress the adversaries' political intentions. If the hegemon chooses not to react, he might be marked as a declining power, thus giving the challengers further incentives; on the other hand, if the hegemon reacts, he risks potential overextension in areas or spheres which are not in his primary domain.

For some challengers, balancing seems to be a rather efficient strategy in curbing the American presence in some regions of the world. Russia is probably the best example here since it successfully managed to "outplay" the American strategic efforts in Georgia, Syria and Ukraine while positioning itself as a reliable partner in the MENA region. Restoring its strong role in the "Near Abroad" as well as providing military support for the Syrian legitimate government, Russia made its intentions public regarding her interest in these vital regions. Moreover, Russian military actions in these regions, which were mostly based on employing conventional forces, also indicated that Russia is capable of balancing the external-western presence in a more traditional manner. The problem that Russia faces, as well as some other rising powers, is the lack of cohesiveness among the rising powers and their actions that makes broader balancing efforts against Washington a rather complicated task. Although some of the rising powers participate in certain international forums, the SCO and the BRICS being the most prominent ones, there are no wider efforts in terms of establishing a unique political front as it exists among the *status quo* coalition.

The problem with this lies in unequal power distribution among the challengers, which Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth explained in their book "*America Abroad*". Based on Barry Buzan's previous model, they established a framework of 1+1+X, where 1 represents the dominating power or the US; China, the first leading rising power, is also depicted as 1, while all other rising powers are categorized by X (Brooks and Wohlforth 2016, pp. 64-72). In this manner, the changing unipolar order will be delegated among the *status quo* state and a leading rising power, while all others will most likely have to follow in their footsteps. Although this formula is questionable, regarding the X position, it does explain why there is no deeper political engagement among the revisionists. While the potential challengers want to change the hierarchy of the temporary order,

essentially they do not view any of their "compatriots" as a suitable replacement for the current hegemon. Apparently, replacing one unipole with another one is not the solution the challengers are searching for. As the matter of fact, the Russian insistence on multipolar discourse in international politics, which is often being pushed in their foreign policy agenda, is probably the best representation of how modern-measured revisionists see the future of world politics. Furthermore, in Chinese foreign politics, the discourse of the multipolar world is also relatively present. China, as an economic giant, sees herself on the same level as the West in terms of overall industrial capacity. However, in aspects of governing relations even on the regional level, China is not perceived as a trustworthy subject (Johnston 2003, pp. 25-38). The "trustworthiness" issue with China primarily stems from her relations with regional countries and growing Chinese assertiveness towards territorial claims with her neighbours. Besides the well-known disputes in the South-China Sea, Beijing also holds territorial disputes with almost all of its land neighbours. Although the Chinese government did practice peaceful ways in resolving these issues through diplomacy, in recent clashes with Indian armed forces, many smaller countries in the region raised serious concern regarding the Chinese efforts in reclaiming some of its disputed territories (Jokanović 2014, Krishnankutty 2020, Peace Palace Library 2016, Council on Foreign Relations 2020). In that regard, Beijing's political attitude towards the region is somewhat similar to the American approach towards some smaller countries that did not follow the narrative of great power. We had witnessed on numerous occasions that American democracy and liberalism are relatively reserved concepts if the country in question does not abide by the rule of the hegemon. Though American and Chinese approaches are not equivalent, neither in scope nor intensity, they certainly raise a similar amount of suspicion among smaller regional actors that are or were hoping for a different kind of leadership. That being said, we should keep in mind that the strategies implemented by some rising powers are not "brand" new nor exclusive for the contemporary challengers. Similar strategic behaviour could have been observed in the politics of other western powers when they strived to position themselves as great powers in the system.

Reluctance to openly balance against the US authority can also demonstrate a lack of trust among the challengers. In other words, the rising powers do not have enough confidence in their allies or partners and their commitment to actually contribute to the same objective, which is to change the current political layout. As Walt argues, forming any kind of anti-American coalition would be a frustrating effort. Such an alliance would still be substantially weaker than the US, which could induce rifts and uncertainties among the members (Walt 2005, pp. 98-99). Therefore, adversaries engage in soft balancing, the probing of the hegemon's power and campaigns in the grey zone, which all represent different

strategies of measured revisionism, i.e., an effort to limit the hegemon's authority while not directly provoking it or creating unnecessary distortions across the international system.

Delegitimizing authority in such a manner implies that modern revisionists, unlike their predecessors, are not risk-takers but rather risk-averse states. This comes from the already mentioned asymmetry of power, as well as from their uncertain perception of the hegemon's actual decline. Despite various predictions on US hegemony decline, regarding its economic and military capabilities of sustaining its global presence, the United States is still actively present in almost all spheres of international politics that bear some kind of strategic significance for the hegemon (Симић and Живојиновић 2011; Joffe 2009; Nye 2010; Cox 2007; Strange 1987). Nevertheless, the last two American administrations have already hinted and even proposed that the US global presence is becoming a burdensome task and should be reassessed. Both Obama's and Trump's election campaign narratives had been focused on the idea of limiting American engagement in Eurasia, which suggested that the American government will implement retrenchment strategies. Yet, once the President is in office, hegemonic policies seem to be in check as usual. American engagement in the Ukrainian and Syrian crisis, the back and forth politics with China and North Korea, the newly asserted stance toward the Iranian nuclear problem, as well as the US military covert operations in Afghanistan and the Middle East, represent mixed signals whether the US is actually implementing the politics of retrenchment or not.[2]

[2] See: Michael E. O"Hanlon, "Obama the Carpenter: The President's National Security Legacy", Brookings, Washington, DC., May 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/research/obama-the-carpenter-the-presidents-national-security-legacy/; Derek Chollet, The Myth of American Disengagement, Defence One, 20 May 2016,https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/05/myth-american-disengagement/128483/; Kim Ghattas, Obama's struggle to realise anti-war rhetoric, BBC News, Washington, 21 December 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/ world-us-canada-35123915/; George E. Condon Jr., Obama's Legacy and the "Endless" War, the Atlantic, 15 October 2015; https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/obamas-legacy-and-the-endless-war/443193/; Michael Crowley, Obama's Ukraine policy in shambles, Politico Magazine, 02/29/2016, https://www.politico.com/story/2016/02/obama-ukraine-russia-putin-219783; Steven A. Cook, Trump's Syria Policy Isn't Retrenchment. It's Pandering. Foreign Policy, 9 April 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/09/trumps-syria-policy-isnt-retrenchment-its-pandering/; Peter Harris, Why Trump Won't Retrench: The Militarist Redoubt in American Foreign Policy, Political Science Quarterly, Volume 133 Number 4 2018, pp. 611-640; Quint Forgey, Trump warns U.S. 'may have to get in wars',Politico Magazine, 10/21/2019; https://www.politico.com/news/2019/10/21/trump-united-states-wars-iran-053341; Stephen Collinson, Trump's warning to Iran raises fears of war — and confusion, CNN, 16 Sept. 2019,https://edition.cnn.com/2019/09/16/politics/us-iran-saudi-arabia-yemen/index.html; Sam Meyerson, President Trump's Iran Policy: The Specter of a Needless War, Harvard Political Review, 18 October 2019, https://harvardpolitics.com/world/iran-war/.

Retrenchment as a strategy implies a policy of retracting grand strategic commitments in response to a decline of relative power (MacDonalnd and Parent 2011, p. 11). Most commonly, retrenchment strategies may occur when there is disequilibrium between states' global commitments and available resources, in other words, when states experience the so-called "Lippmann Gap" (Lippmann 1943, pp. 7-8). In addition, retrenchment policies may be initiated by the rising power or other actors, which by default induce the perception of the relative decline of the dominating state (Haynes 2015, p. 492). Although the decline may not be the primary case for revisionists growing assertiveness, the rise of power among other actors certainly contributes to the notion that the gap of relative strength has grown thinner. As Fareed Zakaria notes, "every year the balance shifts"; and while American power is still unparalleled, many of the rising actors and potential challengers have grown at the expense of western countries, which are locked in a slow demographically determined decline. As Zakaria further underlines, in every realm except the military, visible shifts in power are more than obvious (Zakaria 2008, pp. 41-42). In that respect, measured revisionists are aware that the hegemon will not be able to hold equally on all fronts of power; therefore, small mistakes can overtime cumulate to a larger strategical difficulty. As Professor Dragan Simić writes, none of the great powers that were facing a relative decline had managed to preventively stop the rise of other powers; moreover, entering such a race, the leading power would only hasten its demise. For a dominating power, facing an increasingly rising competition-opposition, the strategic resemblance of its interests and commitments can represent a crucial step that can prevent further aggression from such challengers that are constantly rising on the world's power ladder (Simić 2012, p. 320).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research results of this paper can be summarized by referring to a couple of key aspects of the subject matter under consideration. The first aspect points to the differences between rising powers and revisionist powers. These two categories, which have been mistakenly presented as synonyms in some of the older academic literature, actually differ in terms of strategic choices and political behaviour. While the latter cannot go without the former, meaning that a revisionist power must be a rising power as well, their strategical incentives differ in terms of politics and relations towards the ruling hegemon or coalition. We should note that revisionist politics do not necessarily derive from the internal structure of the rising power, but are rather provoked by the structure of the order itself. As Galtung had already explained in his theory of aggression, the restrictive structure of the environment can invoke aggressive behaviour, which propels change. The rigidity of the unipolar order and its monopolistic nature

could be a major incentive for the rising powers to adopt revisionist policies in order to change the scope and reach of the hegemon.

Unipolarity as a system, in contrast to traditional understating of anarchy and the international order, is based on a hierarchy of the leading power and its authority seemingly established as a default "work environment" in international politics. Although the authority of the United States is accepted to a certain extent, we should keep in mind that the absence of other poles of power has largely contributed to the overall legitimacy of the dominating power's authority. In other words, unipolarity represents a permissive variable that allows the growth of the US authority. In such an environment, it is debatable whether the authority is welcomed or whether it is accepted simply because there are no other alternatives. The unipolar power has the interest to preserve such a state of affairs, excluding other potential competitors or curbing their attempts to change the current state of affairs. The dichotomy that propels change in the contemporary international order can be seen in the hegemon's will to sustain its position as a wielder of global authority and in the rising powers' growing ambitions to create a more suitable political environment in which they are not constrained by the imposing hierarchy of the unipolar order.

Measured revisionists, due to their limits in power and the overall structure of the contemporary global political-economic environment, cannot hope to change the visage of the international order as it was done in the past. Modern revisionists are primarily interested in changing the scope and intensity of the United States authority and how it functions in different regions of the world. The main problem from the revisionists' perspective is not in the fundamental layout of the contemporary order, which helped the rising powers in the first place, but rather in the hierarchy that is deemed detrimental to the rising powers' future interests. However, the predicament that the revisionists are facing is based on their dependency, especially in economic terms, on the hegemon and his ability to sustain the framework of the international order. In other words, contemporary rising powers dissatisfied with the American global governance have neither the capacities nor political will to govern over the global society, henceforth the attribute "measured". The revisionists (though eager to initiate change) are only aiming at particular aspects of the international order.

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ODMERENI REVIZIONIZAM: PROMENA ODNOSA MOĆI IZMEĐU STATUS KVO SILA I IZAZIVAČA U SAVREMENOM MEĐUNARODNOM PORETKU

Apstrakt: U ovom radu pokušaćemo da upostavimo konceptualni okvir kako sile u usponu i revizionisti sagledavaju svoju poziciju u savremenom međunarodnom poretku. Problematika rada fokusirana je na strukturu unipolarnog poretka i pojavu hijerarhije u takvom poretku, koja različito utiče na aktere svetske politike. Naime, sile u usponu kao i potencijalni izazivači na različite načine procenjuju svoju buduću poziciju u međunarodnom poretku. Ipak, s obzirom na složenost savremenog međunarodnog poretka kao i sve veću međuzavisnost svih aktera u njemu, revizionizam kao metod promene status kvo-a drugačije funkcioniše nego što je to bio slučaj u prethodnim epohama međunarodne politike. Opseg savremenog revizionizma je u mnogome ograničen što je inače posledica strukture unipolarnog poretka, ali takođe proizilazi i iz činjenice da savremeni revizionisti ne poseduju ideološku potporu koja bi služila kao alternativa fundamentalnim principima na kome počiva savremeni poredak. Zbog ovoga savremeni revizionizam se može odrediti kao odmeren ili mek, koji nije usmeren ka promeni glavnih principa poretka, već je fokusiran na promenu hijerarhije koja omogućava vodećoj sili da rukovodi međunarodnim poretkom. Problematika strukture unipolarnog poretka i kako se ona odražava na potencijalne revizioniste analizirana je iz kvalitativne perspektive. Cilj ovog rada je da sagleda razlike između sila u usponu i potencijalnih revizionista kao i da predstavi strateške opcije koje su dostupne revizionistima u cilju ispunjenja širih geopolitičkih ciljeva.

Ključne reči: odmereni revizionizam, međunarodni poredak, sile u usponu, unipolarnost, status quo.

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