

Analysis On the Reconstruction of International Order in The International Systems: A Case Study of Britain's Role

Kaitai Ding ^{1, *}, Baiyi An ²

¹ School of Foreign Language, University of Sanya, Sanya 572022, China

² School of History and Culture, Qufu Normal University, Qufu 273100, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 1912100429@mail.sit.edu.cn

Abstract. This paper takes the role of the UK in the international systems as an example to analyze the reconstruction of the new international order in the current international system. Since the complex cognitive path of the concepts of the international system, international order, and international governance system in the academia of IR, this study only analyses the framework based on the previous theories. On the whole, a new order in the international society is positively correlated with the international system because, with the reconstruction of the international order, the internal elements of the international system tend to change, which is likely to lead to the transformation of the international system. After the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the power elements in the international system are redistributed due to diffusion and shift, and the process of power reallocation is a de facto construction process of the new order in international society, which is also likely to lead to structural changes in the international system. As a traditional hegemonic state, Britain has constantly exerted the advantages of the national systems in the evolution of the international systems to provide public goods and flexibly applied its balance of power policy. After the conflict, the rise of British power also brought new changes to the equilibrium pattern in the previous international system, which, to some extent, impacted the hegemonic system dominated by the United States. Furthermore, as a “declined erstwhile hegemon”, its “global Britain” strategy is very likely to affect the current pattern of the international system.

Keywords: International system; new order; power shift; Britain.

1. Introduction

The international system changed significantly after the end of World War II; the antecedent Versailles-Washington System was replaced by the Yalta System, which has been dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union since then. Although the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the current international system is still a variant of the bipolar pattern under the Yalta System: the “bipolar” confrontation pattern with the United States as the center and other states as the periphery. The conventional international system mainly comprises the capitalist international political, economic, military, and cultural system dominated by the United States. However, when the United States established the dominant power in the international system, other states also sought their political power.

States in Europe began to move towards the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952, the establishment of the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Community in 1958, the establishment of the European Community in 1967, and the establishment of the European Union in 1993, which strengthened the political power of Western Europe in the world and distributed some international political power to Western Europe. As the most independent link in European integration, Britain owes a considerably vital status. The relative independence of the United Kingdom has also created its particular position in the world, and it could formulate its national strategy relatively independently. Moreover, the relative independence of the United Kingdom could be regarded as a part of Western Europe and an independent individual. From the end of the Cold War, Britain's independence was significantly greater than its European unity, and it launched a Brexit referendum in 2013 and officially left the EU in 2020. After the outbreak of

the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the United Kingdom took advantage of its great power status and played its unique role.

These situations reflect the demand of the rising subjects for the reallocation of international power and the provision of “public goods”, which further impacts the erstwhile international system, and promotes the establishment of a new international order in the current international system. Within the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, various actors have changed their strength. At the same time, they have the ability to provide new “public goods”, which in turn has impacted the previous international system, and triggered the reallocation of power. Therefore, this paper takes Britain as an example to explore the influence of Britain's reallocation of power in the international system.

2. Literature Review and Research Gap

Along with the consecutive development of the theory of international relations, the institutional mechanism of the discipline has been improved by the collapse of time, and the theory of international relations is also intertwined with various disciplines, which causes the subject to show a diversified development trend at present. Since the 1990s, the reconstruction of international order began to trigger the discussion in the academia of IR and has gradually become a permanent topic of IR and IPE research. But nevertheless, in the new century, scholars from the English school proposed that “to establish the study of international relations as a distinct field, the concept of the international system is required [1]”, thus the research on the new international order in the 21st-century has also been brought into the framework of the international system, and the theory of international relations has formed a unique social science theory system.

In the 21st-century, the study of the new international order has been brought into the framework of the international system, and the theory of international relations has also developed into a unique social science theory system. Scholars have explored the new international order in greater depth, and more studies have been analysed within the framework of the international system. In 2005, Richard Little brought international relations into the framework of the international system in his book *‘World History, the English School and International Relations Theory’* (Little, 2005), he also brought international relations into historical studies, distinguishing the nature between the international system and international society [2], and laying the foundation for the development of the doctrine of the international system in the 21st century.

Immediately after, Barry Buzan elaborated on the construction of a new international order after the end of the bipolar pattern in *“An English School Perspective on ‘What Kind of World Order?’”* (Buzan, 2006), he updated the theory of international system and noting the impact of environmental issues on the international system [3]. The international system has been a major source of inspiration for many Western scholars in the past few years. In 2007, groups of Western scholars in *‘Testing Balance-of-Power Theory in World History’* (Wohlforth, Kaufman & et al., 2007) affirmed the importance of balance-of-power theory in post-Cold War international relations, in which the concentration of power for a long period of time was “unnatural”[4]. This improved the perspective and increased the focus on the balance of power for the study of the affairs of today's international community.

Since 2010, the theoretical research on the new order of international society has become more rounded. Professor Barry Buzan of LSE, in order to make up for the shortcomings of previous theories, in *‘Power, Culture, Anti-hegemony and International Society: Towards a More Regionalised World Order’* (Buzan, 2010) proposes the idea of a regionalised world order and arguing that American hegemony is untenable, and a new order is about to emerge [5]. By analysing the international order in different periods of history, it concludes that the highly centralised pattern of power allocation will disappear in the international system. However, the study failed to provide a clear explanation of the process of constructing a new order in the transformation of the international system, and merely interpreted the development history of the international community.

Thus, four years later in *'Rethinking Great Power Relations in a Time of Epochal Transformation'* (Buzan, 2014), the paper remedied the shortcomings of the theory of the construction of a regionalised world order three years earlier by suggesting that since the 19th century, the Western-centred globalised international political and economic order has gradually evolved into a more decentralised 'globalisation without centre' order, and the reconstruction of the order needs to take into account the relationship between conflict and co-operation in the process of constructing a new type of great power relations [6]. The article explains the characteristics of the new international order through the history of great power relations and puts forward principled proposals for the development of a new type of great power relations. Whereas, today, due to the limitations of the times, this article believes that the transition will make the international society solid but does not point out the specific factors leading to conflicts in the process of constructing the new order.

Professor Yan Xuetong, on the other hand, elaborated on the relevant issues of previous scholars in *'The Shift of the Centre of Power and the Transformation of the International System'* (Yan Xuetong, 2012), in which the paper clarified the sufficient conditions for the transformation of the international system: two or more of the three elements of the system, namely the international actors, the international pattern, and the international norms, must be transformed [7]. In addition, by comparing the international system in world history as well as the definitions of the international system doctrine by different scholars, this study reflects the confusion in the understanding of the concept of the international system in academia, which provides a valuable reference for the subsequent research. The only shortcoming is that it focuses system construction only on China and ignores the more transformative element of external actors.

In 2018, Joseph Nye in *'U.S. Leadership and the Future of Global Liberal Order'* (Nye, 2018) takes the leadership development of the United States as an example to explain how the external power shifts and internal populism have contributed to the growing decline of the U.S.-led liberal order. It also proposes a path to maintain order with emerging powers and produce global public goods to sustain the order by analysing the United States as a constructor of order over the course of history [8]. However, the external factors shaking the US-dominated international relations order are not only due to power shifts caused by the rise of Eastern economies and technological revolutions, but also the instability of the system structure itself.

One year later, *'Paradigm Synthesis and International Relations Theoretical Reconstruction-An Analysis of Realism as an Example'* (Liu Feng, 2019) summarises the reform of the "paradigm" issue in the academic world, pointing out that the emphasis on non-Western international relations, the combination of multiple paradigms, and the method of paradigm synthesis break down the barrier between paradigms, which is conducive to the comprehensive consideration of the issue of international relations, and injects new vitality into the theory of international relations [9]; and in the same year, the *'Centripetal Movement: Imbalance and Re-equilibrium in the International Political-Economic Order'* (Meng, 2019) constructed the theory of "centripetal movement" from the perspective of welfare society, economic integration, and global governance system [10]. Its theory reveals the influencing factors of the international political economic system through internal as well as external this and that of the three.

In recent years, with the gradual deepening of research, Richard Haass, in his article *'How a World Order Ends: And What Comes in Its Wake'* (Haass, 2020), analyses and compares the end of the international order in different periods of history. The path of the decline of the stable order reveals that the stability of the order depends on the balance of power-allocation, widely accepted international norms, and the effective operation of international mechanisms [11]. The article also discusses the process of establishing the European Coordination Mechanism, and finally concludes that the decline of an order is inevitable and irreversible, while the rise and fall of great powers determines the sustainability of an order. Hence, in the face of the current situation, although the study brings the international order into the historical research, it is only limited to Europe and is not analysed on behalf of the international system. It therefore considers only the interaction between political units, ignoring the broader dimension and falling into Eurocentrism.

Thereby, the construction of a new international order discussed by the author in this dissertation is de facto a kind of ‘reallocation’ process in the international system, because when there is a mismatch between power and strength, it causes structural changes in the actors that affect the world pattern, and in order to maintain the stability of the international order it is necessary to reallocate power, which requires the construction of a new international order. The reason for placing it in the framework of the international system is due to the fact that “a systemic perspective assumes it is possible to abstract patterns and regularities that demonstrate the existence of international systems from the numerous events that make up international relations [1]”, which is exceedingly necessary to fill the gap at this stage of the research. In this dissertation, we presuppose the international system as a whole which constitutes the entire international community, while the international order mirrors the nature of the international system in anarchy. The author takes the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as an example of the reconstruction of international order, meanwhile, in order to make up for the problem of complexity of analysis perspectives caused by the inconsistency in the understanding of the "international system", "new international order" and "global governance system" in the academia, this article analyses the reconstruction of order in the international system via the vicissitudes of Britain’s role. It aims to render reference value to the subsequent relevant theoretical research.

3. Principal Argument

3.1. Vicissitudes of Power and Equilibrium in the International Systems

At present, an increasingly uncoordinated trend of the multilateral management system could be seen in the international society with the emergence of the trend of “decentralization” in the international system, and the anticipated efficiency of order in the international system is far from meeting expectations. Thus, by and by, the increasing imbalance of the pattern of equilibrium has gradually highlighted the factors of instability. Ipso facto, the decentralization trend of the international system reflects the change of the international pattern within the international system, which is rooted in the historical development process of the international systems.

After the end of World War II, the Yalta system, as the cornerstone of maintaining the balance of power among prominent national actors and promoting the construction of a global governance system, has shaped a significant power governance system dominated by bipolar hegemony. However, since the collapse of the Yalta system caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the international political and economic order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union has been constantly seeking new reconstruction paths in the collapse. In this process, the author finds that the reconstruction of international order reflects the adjustment of political and economic relevance between different units within the international system, essentially a reallocation process of power among state actors. Some scholars have proposed that “after the end of the Cold War, hegemonic powers obtain and maintain their dominant power over the rest of the world through the international system [12].” This site reflects that since stepping into the new era, despite the disintegration of the original international system and the reconstruction of the balance of power order, the international pattern still shows a trend of ‘polarization’. Because the original US-Soviet bipolar structure after the collapse of the Soviet Union turned into a “core-periphery model” bipolar structure with the United States as the core and the rest of the world as the margin, this changing process is accompanied by both the adjustment of the international power structure and the power distribution resulting from the change of the interaction mode between states.

With the shift and diffusion of power within the international system, a new international order has been formed, and the global governance system has been reconstructed. The governance mode has changed from power governance to the governance mode of consultation and cooperation, and the governance subject has also spread from state entities to non-state actors. This change also substantially impacts current international relations, the most obvious of which is the decline of the governance model in the international system.

The international pattern of a single central structure formed at the end of the last century has promoted the effectiveness of the global governance system. Conspicuously, a single hegemony plays a vital role in stabilizing the internal pattern of the regional, national, and overall international systems. Because of the deployment of the United States' "superior strength" globally, it has assumed some global governance responsibilities that align with its interests in a certain period. Meanwhile, as a single dominant political actor in the international society at that time, the United States also briefly stabilized the stability of the international system structure and promoted the benign interaction of the remaining units to a certain extent. However, with the power shift to seize the world's best interests, the United States gradually abandoned its original responsibility and became a predatory hegemonic power. The process of power shift is bound to lead to a war of balance of power in specific regions and even the whole system.

After the reallocation caused by the power shift, the sovereign political actors within the international system interact to produce a new order of international society that responds to the trends of the times. This reshaping process inevitably leaves the specter of the previous international order. Taking Eastern Europe as an example, many sovereign political actors produced after the collapse of the Soviet Union belong to different spheres of influence, which has laid a hidden danger for future international conflicts in Eastern Europe. Especially in recent years, the United States has used the complexity of the historical ins and outs of the eastern region of Ukraine to bind the interests of Ukraine to make it a strategic vassal and then let NATO expand eastward and expand its sphere of influence. Because the reallocation of power has led to an unbalanced international pattern, emerging countries have increased the strength of peripheral states in the "core-periphery" structure after years of development, which means that many rising nations will break the original "bipolar" status quo and reshape the international political and economic order. At the same time, after the reallocation of power, it is not only owned by the state. State power is declining while non-state power is rising—power shifts from the state to the market and then to non-state authority [13]. Therefore, with the support of the interests of non-state actors, the Ukrainian government interweaves its national interests with internal transnational economic organisations to cater to the West and attempt to merge into its dominant economic system.

In addition, in recent years, Russia has continuously adjusted and improved its foreign strategy to realize its national interests, and the positioning of its international status has transformed from a "great power" to a "mighty state". As a developing country with the most significant political influence in the world today, Russia's rising development has made it maintain a particular influence in the international arena during the decline of American hegemony. Nonetheless, due to the structural contradictions between states, the strategic game between Russia and the United States has intensified, eventually leading to local armed conflicts in east Ukraine. In a sense, the geopolitical conflicts of interest between Russia and the United States and other conflicts of interest have also led to a significant reduction in Russia's activity space on the world stage. For the United States, Russia has also changed from the original great power to the United States' "largest strategic adversary". From the early 1990s to the present, Russia and the United States have launched a series of strategic games. Although Russia has been constantly adjusting its strategy in developing relations with the United States, the United States still regards Russia as its most prominent strategic adversary. It uninterruptedly exerts pressure on it, trying to weaken Russia's strength through political, economic, military, and other means to ensure that its position in the world is not shaken during the power shift. To sum up, the strategic game between Russia and the United States will continue to affect the international pattern and regional stability. Thus, deterrence and containment shall continue to be the theme between the national systems of the US and Russia.

To some degree, "the United States has lost interest in fulfilling its hegemonic 'responsibilities' unless its own direct and significant interests are at stake [14]." Therefore, since the late Cold War, the United States has changed from a generous hegemon that initially provided public goods to the world and maintained the stability of the international order to a predatory hegemon that defended vested interests. With the rise of emerging countries in recent years, the reallocation of power in the

international system has begun. The previous “center-periphery” pattern is gradually unbalanced between the dominant and subordinate balance of power due to the power shift among its internal state actors. That eventually induced local armed conflicts in east Ukraine and promoted the construction of a new order in international society, indirectly impacting the structural stability of the US hegemony system thus weakening it.

3.2. Britain’s Role in World Order

The United Kingdom has reinvented its image as a significant power and molded itself as an “envoy” to preserve international fairness and justice during the Russia-Ukraine conflict 2022. The United Kingdom does assume that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is a breach of international legislation and justice and a deliberate provocation to the liability of the Commonwealth. The reasoning for Britain’s final decision to join World War I in 1914 is the same as the justification for its engagement in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2022. According to the Schlieffen Plan, Germany needed to borrow Belgium’s resources in 1914 to invade France from the Marne River and end the war in three months. Britain demonstrated that it would declare war on Germany if it entered Belgium when it made a general mobilization in Germany as its protector of Belgium. At that time, Britain made decisions based on the principle that it was responsible for upholding international justice and fairness.

After World War II, the United States became the hegemon of the capitalist world. Britain experienced the consumption of long-term wars, its national strength declined seriously, and it could not compete with the United States. However, Britain did not give up its efforts to maintain its great power status, actively intervened in the situation in the Middle East, affected the first Middle East, and carried out a series of measures such as the Falklands War against Argentina and trying to maintain its image as a great power.

The UK’s economic decoupling from Russia was earlier and more thorough. In the 28 EU countries’ trade with Russia, the proportion of the UK does not match its size. In 2013, exports to EU countries accounted for 57 % of Russia’s total exports, of which the UK accounted for 4 %; Russia’s total imports from the EU accounted for 46.5 %, but the UK accounted for only 3 % [15]. Moreover, since 2000, the UK’s trade with Russia has generally shown a downward trend, and British and Russian trade interdependence is low. Therefore, under the premise of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2022, the UK has less economic impact; this situation preserves its strength and sets a tone for its relatively increasing national power in international society (Figure 1).

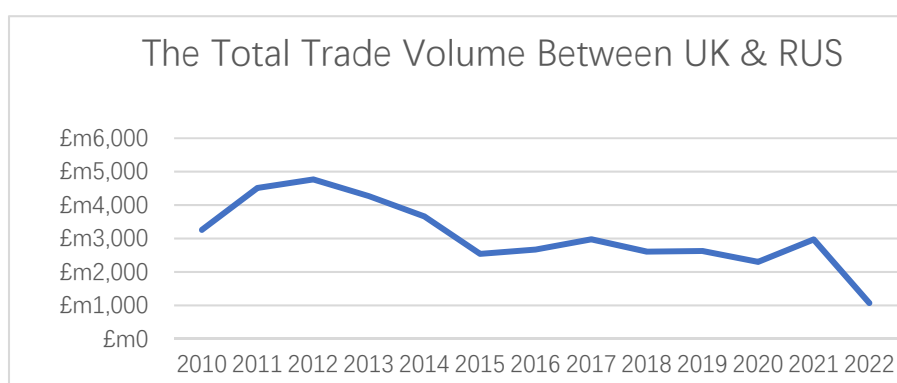


Fig. 1: The total trade volume between UK & RUS: From 2010 to 2022 [16]

After the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2022, Britain has achieved more strength through the reallocation of power within the scope of Western Europe. In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2022, Britain has achieved more strength through the reallocation of power within the scope of Western Europe. In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Britain not only used direct financial assistance, sanctions against Russia, and other ways to support Ukraine. In addition, the UK has fully demonstrated its role as a great power. The UK regards itself as a defender and practitioner of international law in the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022. On March 17, 2023, the International Criminal Court issued President Putin an arrest warrant, believing he committed a “war crime of

illegally transferring people” in Ukraine [17]. The UK believes this action marks an important step towards accountability and international justice. The maintenance of international law needs to be promoted by the state. In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the United Kingdom has played a good role as a promoter of international law, providing public goods for maintaining and implementing international law and improving the international power of the United Kingdom in international law.

Moreover, when the UK was involved in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2022, the UK once again strengthened its position in European integration. In 2022, the Joint Expeditionary Force, a British-led rapid reaction force, held three leadership meetings and joint military exercises to strengthen security in Europe’s high north, the North Atlantic, and the Baltic Sea. At the same time, the United Kingdom is committed to strengthening the coordination of major powers in Europe and strengthening the construction of political integration in Europe through the summit of major powers. The United Kingdom actively strengthened the construction of the “Anglo-French Joint Expeditionary Force,” hoping to strengthen the cooperation between the two major European nuclear deterrent militaries, Britain and France, and obtain Europe’s political, military, and security voice. As the main “storyteller” of Europe’s military, political, and security, Britain’s international status will rise and be allocated more international power.

4. Conclusion

The internal pattern of today’s international system is changing due to the power shift. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bipolar structure centred on the United States and the Soviet Union has evolved into a new bipolar structure of “centre-edge” structure with the United States as the centre and the rest of the world as the edge. Therefore, with the development of an array of states, the power shift will promote the change of the international pattern. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict is an armed conflict based on the transfer of power because the United States, as an established power, to maintain its original superior strength, has allowed NATO to expand eastward and prevent the lack of sphere of influence after the power shift. Nevertheless, the attachment structure accompanied by the “core-periphery” fails due to the reallocation of power, and the redistribution of responsibilities will also occur; that is, the construction of a new order in international society will inevitably lead to the reconstruction of the global governance system.

In the international system, when the original hegemon is unable to resume to provide public goods on a large scale due to the decline of itself, in order to make the benefits more significant than the costs, the hegemonic states will carry out the “role transformation”, they shall expand the scope of strength through the power of external organisations, and then grab benefits and maintain the deployment of superior strength, to achieve offshore balance. If the hegemony cannot be transformed, the elements of power in the international system will be reallocated due to proliferation and shift. The process of power reallocation is building a new international order and the collapse of the liberal international order centred on the United States.

Authors Contribution:

All the authors contributed equally.

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