

In Defence of the Multiplex World

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I thank the contributors to the discussion on the American-led world order for their insightful comments and criticisms. Below are my brief responses to them.

But first, it should not be ignored that the positions of Ikenbry and myself converge on one critical point. Like him, I think the unilateralism of the Bush Jr era, led by the neo-cons, had a disastrous impact on US foreign policy. Indeed, to the extent that his book is partly directed at the American domestic audience, especially as a counter to those who oppose multilateralism, I am deeply sympathetic to it. I do believe, however, that his account of the American World Order (AWO, or American-led liberal world order) might have taken more cognizance of the physical and moral limits of that order, its excesses and contradictions (such as support for undemocratic regimes and interventions outside a genuine multilateral framework), the important role of other Western and non-Western actors in developing the post-war world order and its institutions, and the role of regionalism in building the contemporary global order.

Churgov says that my allegory of the multiplex cinema is challenging, and wonders how the contents of one movie in a large theater might relate to another. My answer is that they are not the same or necessarily similar whether in style or substance. Some are Hollywood action, some are Bollywood romance, others may be Chinese fantasy. Of course, there can be some broad similarities among different categories of action, romance and Western films and their contents may overlap to some extent. But, in general, a multiplex allows for a greater diversity of plots, actors, directors, and producers than a monoplex.

Churgov points to some of the failings of the liberal order, especially its triumphalism. Russia was subjected to disrespect if not humiliation after the Cold War, and the West missed a major chance to bind Russia permanently into the AWO. My book agrees with his proposition that: ‘The world is becoming more multiplex and multi-vectored, as it turns out, it is not linear.’ I am also sympathetic to his view that ‘our globolocal non-linear world is developing simultaneously within different paradigms – as a *Realpolitik* and a postmodern multiplex movie theatre’.

Lida wonders if my view, like Ikenberry's, has any affinity with the Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST). In *The End of American World Order*, I note that Ikenberry's *Liberal Leviathan* revives, albeit in a modified form, the HST. But the same is not true of my book. It argues that the emerging world order is likely to be much more decentralized than even a modified HST of Ikenberry or the 'After Hegemony' perspective of Keohane implies. Lida thinks I have neglected East Asia in my discussion of the Multiplex World. While my book is global in scope, I do discuss and dismiss Chinese hegemony as a successor alternative to the American-led Liberal Hegemonic Order.

Lida also raises the question how flashpoints and crises such as those in East Asia might affect world order whether it is a revised AWO or the Multiplex World? This leads to the question: If the AWO ends, will it cause widespread chaos and disorder, as many leading Western pundits fear? Ikenberry and I disagree on this point. I argue that while a Multiplex world is not going to be free from instability, there are ways and means to maintain order, including but not solely depending on US power. The US will be a key part of the Multiplex World, but not the hegemon it used to be.

Ultimately, Ikenberry and I would agree that the future of world order and how much stability it could achieve depend on how far the current AWO is renegotiated to accommodate the positions of the rising powers like China and India. I might add that it also needs to accommodate the role of the global civil society and address the challenges of transnational threats such as climate change and Al Qaeda. But I also believe that to produce the requisite degree of world stability, the current world order has to be reconstituted to an extent that it would be no more logical or true to call it the AWO (instead of something different such as the Multiplex World) than to call the Commonwealth a British federation.

Finally, Haas questions the effectiveness of regional governance which takes an important place in the Multiplex World. Let me also take this opportunity to clarify my position on regionalism and regional orders. I do not argue that a Multiplex World that might follow from the end of the AWO will be a world of regions only or mainly. On the contrary, I dismiss such a prospect. But I do believe regionalism and regional orders of varied kinds will have a more important place in a Multiplex World than they had in a bipolar or unipolar world. The end of US hegemony and the unlikely prospect of any other power displacing it as a global hegemon create scope for regionalism and regional orders to play a more important role in order-building.

I agree with Haas that any discussion of the current and emerging global order should not be state-centric. Although *The End of American World Order* discusses the global civil society as part of an alternative conception to the American-dominated multilateralism, I agree that it deserves a much bigger space. And Haas is right that my book does not pay attention to environmental issues. Indeed, addressing transnational issues will be a key test of order and stability in a Multiplex World and they deserve more attention.

I may point out, however, that far from invalidating my core arguments about the end of US hegemony and the birth of a more diversified world order, the analysis of

transnational challenges such as terrorism and climate change would provide further support for my arguments. If we look at such challenges more generally, including terrorist organizations, they pose a more difficult challenge to US security and centrality than many conventional inter-state conflicts situations. And arguably the 'unipolar moment' and American unilateralism served to aggravate, rather than mitigate, the threat of terrorism.

On the issue of the environment, which Haas focuses on, the US is hardly a leader. Indeed, the AWO is marked by a failure of US leadership when it comes to addressing the issue of environment. Other actors, including Europe and the transnational civil society have been much more proactive in dealing with this issue. And the ultimate key to addressing the challenge of climate change rests with the emerging powers such as China and India, whose views and cooperation must be negotiated through dialogue and diplomacy, rather than coercion and pressure. This in itself is a key feature of the Multiplex World.

About the author

Professor Amitav Acharya is the UNESCO Chair in Transnational Challenges and Governance and Chair of the ASEAN Studies Center: at American University, Washington D.C. Previously, he was Professor of Global Governance at the University of Bristol, Professor at York University, Toronto, and at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Fellow of the Harvard University Asia Center, and Fellow of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. His recent books include *Whose Ideas Matter?* (Cornell, 2009); *Beyond Iraq: The Future of World Order* (co-edited, World Scientific, 2011); *Non-Western International Relations Theory* (co-edited, Routledge, 2010); and *The Making of Southeast Asia* (Cornell, 2013). He has contributed op-eds to *foreignaffairs.com*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Financial Times*, *Japan Times*, *Jakarta Post*, *Indian Express*, and *Times of India* and scholarly articles to *International Organization*, *International Security*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, and *World Politics*. He is a past President of the International Studies Association (2014–15).