

# The National Interest *online*

## **Report and Retort: Alternative Leadership Still Requires Ethics**

by Devin Stewart

07.06.2007

*Editor's note: The following is a response to Naazneen Barma, Ely Ratner and Steven Weber's article in the July/August issue of The National Interest, ["A World Without the West."](#)*

Additional commentary on ["A World Without the West"](#):

Devin Stewart, ["Alternative Leadership Still Requires Ethics."](#)

Ian Bremmer, ["A Second Look . . ."](#)

Weber responds, ["Facing the Reality of the 21st Century."](#)

Being number one means you have to constantly look over your shoulder. Groups of bogeymen appear in the shadows and observers looking out for America's interests are justified in assessing the potential threats they pose to U.S. power. Over the past 35 years, China, the Soviet Union, communists, Islamic nations, Japan, Iran, Iraq, North Korea and Asians more generally have played that role.

According to Barma, Ratner and Weber, China, India and Russia comprise the latest group on the watch list. The authors seem to riff off of the acronym "BRICs" that Goldman Sachs's Jim O'Neill "dreamt up" in 2001. While O'Neill argued the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) combined could grow larger than the current G-7 economies by 2050, the authors suggest the accompanying growth in political influence is worth examining. Never mind that O'Neill's BRICs was partly a marketing tool for investors—these authors are rightly concerned about what China's rise and Russia's political backtracking mean for international norms.

The authors' concerns derive from characteristics they see as unique to China, India and Russia (call them RICs)—in these societies, "communal, rather than individual, traditions are strong"; "state stewardship of the economy is the dominant ideology"; and "raw power trumps contract law." But do these perceived characteristics mean that they will create a "World Without the West", with its own set of norms, rules, institutions and "currencies of power?" I offer a few factors that suggest we are not headed toward a world divided into two—the West and the rest—in the near future.

First, the World Without the West argument ignores the inevitability of economic change between the RICs. It is likely that one of the three economies will grow faster than the other two, changing their relationships and shared interests. Even the Goldman Sachs forecast for 2050 has China's economy at 45 trillion dollars, India's at 26 trillion and Russia's at less than 10 trillion. The U.S. economy would be at about 35 trillion dollars. Meanwhile, the United States and Japan would remain the wealthiest (GDP per capita), while Russia would be the only RIC with wealth comparable to G-7 countries.

Second, while the authors mention states' interests in the RICs, the three rising powers face pressures for more transparent, accountable governance from three sources—pressure from their citizens, bilateral partners and the international community. China, the one likely to have the greatest

economic weight, just passed a more serious labor protection law last week and is facing calls from its economic partners all over the world for more transparency and accountability in its exports and foreign direct investment.

Investors, no matter where they are from, demand transparency and accountability. And human rights do matter in economic relationships: One of O'Neill's recent reports talks about the roles and rights of women in the BRIC societies and their impacts on investment environments. Meanwhile, as nations acquire the capacity to contribute to global goods, calls for them to do so will grow louder.

The authors call the RICs communal and state driven, implying a model contrary to transparency and respect for human rights. But I cannot think of a better example of a communal and state driven economic success than Japan. Japan's place in the world suggests that communitarianism is not inconsistent with supporting Western institutions.

Third, the RICs have little in common with one another at present. While China and India are manufacturing centers that are working to improve their human capital stock, Russia is banking on natural-resource-driven growth, making its economic future vulnerable to oil prices. India has a growing population, while Russia's is shrinking and China will face a labor shortage. India is a democracy, Russia a quasi-democracy and China a single-party state. With China and Russia on the UN Security Council and Russia in the G-8, they are to varying degrees enmeshed in Western institutions. In the past week, I have tested the RIC thesis with senior Russian and Chinese experts and they said that lack of trust among the three RICs countries prevents them from teaming up in a meaningful way.

Fourth, the place of ethics in foreign policy has been growing globally for hundreds of years—and not just in the west. Justine Rosenthal and Leslie Gelb wrote in their 2003 *Foreign Affairs* article, "[The Rise of Ethics in Foreign Policy: Reaching a Values Consensus](#)":

**From the dawn of human history, there have been laws about the initiation and conduct of war. The ancient Egyptians and the fourth century BC Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu set out rules on how and why to begin wars and how those wars should be fought. Saint Augustine argued that an act of war needs a just cause, and Saint Thomas Aquinas believed that battle requires the authority of a sovereign power and should be acted out with good intention.**

Most international surveys show popular support for good governance and human rights—the liberal vision that is supposedly threatened by the RICs. Bruce Stokes, who recently gave a talk with co-author Andrew Kohut at the Carnegie Council on their new book [America Against the World](#), reported that, according to their surveys, "Support for democratic values is widely shared across the world." Those values include free speech, a fair judiciary and multiparty elections. Economist Marcus Noland wrote in a 2005 paper that he found a statistical correlation between acceptance of homosexuality and economic performance. Finally, groupings such as ASEAN are grappling with the need they feel for a codification of democratic values and the allowance for humanitarian intervention when necessary.

Barma, Ratner and Weber describe a mode of governing that may be attractive to individual governments but not necessarily to those governments' citizens, the states' bilateral partners and the international community. Moreover, they do not show how the "model" that the RICs are offering improves on current Western-led institutions, nor do they show how the RICs can solve the failures of those institutions. For the RICs to present a cohesive form of alternative leadership, they will need to be more than just big.

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Other articles by Devin Stewart:

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The National Interest is published by The Nixon Center

The Nixon Center  
1615 L Street, Suite 1250  
Washington, DC 20036  
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