

157TH BERGEDORF ROUND TABLE

Hamburg, 7–9 November 2014

RESPONSIBILITIES OF GLOBAL TRADING POWERS IN THE ASIAN CENTURY

KÖRBER FOUNDATION
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

December 2014

Executive Summary

- Most participants agreed that increased power and influence should be accompanied by greater responsibility to preserve public goods and to enforce international regulations. However, the way in which responsibility for specific policy fields should be distributed between established and new global trading powers remained a contentious issue.
- Although the existence of global values was recognized in principle, greater openness to cultural and historical differences is needed.
- Most participants saw a high risk of instability in the new non-polar or multipolar world. In such a world, strengthening the rule of law was considered a critical issue. Another way of reducing instability could be to establish a “rule by technocrats” with individual countries taking on the responsibility for the regulation of specific policy fields.
- However, such proposals would require global trading powers accepting limitations on their national sovereignty and were therefore received by the majority of participants with skepticism.
- Terrorism and extremism, and the maintenance of maritime security were identified as the central tasks for the global trading powers in the Asian century.

Emerging Powers as Global Stakeholders

In terms of their economic strength, sphere of influence, and status as global trading powers, China, Japan, India and South Korea have important stakes in the development of the international system. This was reflected by participants from China, who reaffirmed their country’s readiness to accept greater international responsibility and to contribute both to the reform of the international system and global free trade. They pointed out that China, as a permanent UN Security Council member, had already taken on high

levels of responsibility and is providing large numbers of UN peacekeeping troops.

Chinese participants reassured that China’s rise need not be interpreted as a threat, and reminded that a country’s rise and fall was relative. They reiterated China’s support for the multilateral world order and the understanding that multilateralism necessitated the “full rule of law.” Doing so, however, meant China was entering “new waters.” Finally, they stated that China accepted the universal values of human rights and the rule of law, but also had its own set of values based on Chinese culture and history.

Chinese panelists were also careful to low-

er the expectations that other participants had for China. They pointed out that China is still the world's largest developing country, that about 200 million Chinese citizens remain below the poverty line, and that the country is ranked 80th in terms of per capita income. As such, the "Chinese dream" of increasing prosperity throughout the country and China's responsibility to its own people would remain at the focus of Chinese politics.

The Responsibility of Stakeholders

China's peaceful development was unanimously viewed as a great opportunity. However, the risks and uncertainties associated with China's rise were also brought up by some participants. They pointed out that difficulties could arise at the international level if the fulfillment of the Chinese dream were to be accompanied by a new wave of Chinese nationalism. Moreover, it was unclear which form of international order China was pursuing. China was viewed by some as acting with increasing confidence and infringing international regulations; one participant even characterized Chinese regional politics as revisionist and militarist. However, these views were countered by others who maintained that China had been conducting itself with restraint.

China has yet to take on a leadership role in developing or implementing international regulations. This led some participants to stress that global trading powers must focus on more than just access to raw materials. Global trading powers were then viewed as responsible for the political development

and fulfillment of minimum standards in the countries from which they benefited economically.

The Emergence of a New World Order

Which direction will the world order develop through the interplay of new and old powers? Many participants viewed the current international order as a "no man's world" – a "non-polar," polycentric order with no clear structure. Other participants questioned the necessity of a new world order, advocating a reform and adjustment of the existing system. This included integrating new institutions, such as the BRICS development bank, instead of competing with them. At the same time, it also implied Europe would have to contribute more towards the reform of institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF; as well as to the proper enforcement of existing regulations.

An Asian participant called on the structure of the world order and global governance to be made "as boring as the government civil service." This scenario required individual countries to take on responsibility for specific issues rather than for regions, and placed global leadership in the hands of technocrats. However, as great powers also have to assume great responsibility, they would have to aim for more than mere representation. Consequently, great powers would have to state clearly

"THE STRUCTURE OF THE WORLD ORDER AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE SHOULD BE AS BORING AS THE GOVERNMENT CIVIL SERVICE."

the objectives they wished to achieve through their increased levels of responsibility. This was reflected in one participant's call for "reform for responsibility." In this situation, emerging powers would only be provided with greater influence and involvement in decision-making after having clearly stated those global public goods on which they intended to focus. This initial process would be undertaken as part of an equal exchange with established powers.

Established and new powers were viewed as being equally responsible for the further development of the international order and ensuring adherence to international regulations. Chinese participants stressed that China was also playing an active role in this area. China was engaged in UN Security Council reform, and helped establish additional policies and forums aimed at facilitating conflict resolution. Nonetheless, the Chinese participants reminded that China was continually exposed to criticism. Representatives of other Asian states also defended themselves against accusations that developing countries were uninterested in international law, and instead stressed that weak countries particularly needed international law.

Relinquishing Sovereignty as a Way Out?

One participant argued that international law was only as strong as the will of the largest states, as they ultimately enforce international law. However, it was also clear that weakening or circumventing rules and institutions came with a price. The participant maintained that although international law was often developed at an extremely slow pace and that doing so remained dependent on the will of states, examples such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) demonstrated that establishing and reforming international law was certainly worth the effort. Nevertheless, the ICC also revealed the limitations of international law. The court has been unable to take action on Syria as blockades by certain states – which regularly involve countries such as the US and China – have prevented the UN Security Council from drafting a resolution. This situation, it was argued, weakened the United Nations and clearly illustrated the need for reform. One participant reiterated that the US had a "different attitude" towards international law than Europe and called for "flexible ways" to look at international law and values.

As a way out of the blockade of the UN Security Council, several participants advocated a limited relinquishment of sovereignty. They pointed to action taken by interna-



tional institutions that went against the will of individual member states. Examples included action by the World Health Organi-

“POWERFUL STATES MUST LEAD THE WAY IN RELINQUISHING SOVEREIGNTY AND SURRENDER TO THE RULE OF LAW.”

zation in the case of epidemics or sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council on climate change. One participant reminded that “the powerful states are needed here,” as such action would require them to relinquish sovereignty. The consequences for leading countries were not always pleasant, as the example of Germany showed. Rulings had been given by the European Court that criticized or ran counter to German national interests. Accordingly, “powerful states have to accept that they may lose such court cases” and acceptance of this situation will have to become more predominant in international politics.

Participants from Asia, Europe and the US viewed the likelihood of relinquishing sovereignty in the international context with pessimism. They argued that various international agreements have already failed and that new concepts such as “responsibility to protect” were stagnating because of a lack of willingness to accept limitations on national sovereignty. This led one participant to conclude that, “we will have to lower our aims if we are not to be continually disappointed.” As deepening international law was viewed as unlikely to be successful, these participants advocated a focus on upholding existing international law.

Dealing with Extremism: The New Challenge

In addition to reform of the international system, emerging powers were said to be taking on greater responsibility for dealing with fragile states and growing levels of international extremism. The Chinese delegation reiterated its aim to work together with international partners to combat terrorism. It argued that China has also been the victim of terror attacks and that the country was determined to stop the spread of terror. A senior Chinese representative maintained that: “Terrorism is a threat to the world and we must address the problem together.” Other participants warned that the fight against terrorism must not perpetuate terror. Terror had to be combatted by legal means to avoid strengthening support for terrorist organizations. Moreover, it was argued that the legitimate fight against Islamic extremism should not be used as a pretext for trampling on minority rights.

The participants agreed that greater focus must be placed on understanding why terrorist organizations such as Islamic State (IS) are attractive to young people and particularly to a “lost generation.” Furthermore, appropriate anti-terror early warning systems must be established. IS, it was argued, possessed high levels of “soft power” and this meant that all states had to engage in the “war of ideas.” The participants concluded that extremism’s appeal was to be found in its status as a “revolt against the establishment,” and as a revolt against Western values and institutions. Subsequently, extremism

“THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM MUST BE CONDUCTED BY LEGAL MEANS – OTHERWISE IT WILL RESULT IN NEW FORMS OF TERROR.”

constituted a clash of civilizations, and this implied the need for a fundamental change in attitudes towards the Middle East, including respect for local values.

An Appeal for Greater Cultural Openness

One participant from Europe admitted that the West was prone to forcing its own set of values onto other regions, particularly the Middle East and Asia. This approach was rejected in favor of proceeding with “modesty and clarity”: modesty with respect to Western objectives, and clarity regarding the realities on the ground. This implied that a “geography of values needs to take precedence over the value of geography.” Another European participant also called for a culture of tolerance towards other value systems, but warned against showing tolerance toward those who questioned such values.

The appeal for greater cultural openness towards non-Western values was also supported by an Asian participant. The example of elections in Afghanistan was used to illustrate the argument that the West must accept the existence of different forms of democracy, and that Afghani democracy could not simply be rejected out of hand. Instead, increased

opportunities should be created to discuss different ideas to help break down “cultural misunderstandings.”

The participants agreed that protection for the needy, self-determination, freedom of expression and access to justice belonged to the cannon of universal human rights. However, they also reminded that rights resulted in obligations.

“THE WEST WILL HAVE TO ACCEPT THE EXISTENCE OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF DEMOCRACY.”

Maritime Security

There was general agreement that ensuring free and secure maritime trade routes presented a further challenge for the Asian trading powers. Participants praised international efforts to combat piracy, but stressed that the causes of piracy were to be found on land. Thus, the international community would have to intensify efforts to improve the living conditions of people in Africa so that piracy was no longer viewed by some as a potential form of earning a living.

Some Asian participants criticized China’s approach to maritime issues in Asia. China’s extensive territorial claims and its tough conduct were viewed as endangering security



and freedom on sea routes in the East and South China Sea. These participants argued that the situation along these routes had worsened and risked ending in illegal annexations. Furthermore, the Convention on the Law of the Sea was being ignored and there was an identifiable risk that the current status quo would be disrupted through unilateral action undertaken by force. Consequently, the states in the region had to adhere to

the principles of international law and refrain from unilateral action. Moreover, negotiations on a code of conduct would have to be accelerated.

Chinese participants stressed that China wanted “friendly and sincere” relations with its neighbors and that it would contribute to building these relations through new institutions and structures aimed at promoting peace between Asian trading powers.



HOST Dr. Klaus Wehmeier, Vice Chairman of the Executive Board, Körber Foundation, Hamburg
MODERATOR Dr. Thomas Paulsen, Executive Director of International Affairs, Körber Foundation, Berlin

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Niels ANNEN, MP, Spokesman on Foreign Affairs of the SPD Parliamentary Group, German Bundestag, Berlin

Michael BEHRENDT, Chairman, Supervisory Board, Hapag-Lloyd AG, Hamburg

Comodore (ret.) Chitrapu Uday BHASKAR, Director, Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi

Frances G. BURWELL, Vice-President and Director, Transatlantic Relations Program, Atlantic Council of the United States, Washington, DC

Cathryn A. CLÜVER, Founding Executive Director, Future of Diplomacy Project, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Dr. Lothar DITTMER, Member, Executive Board, Körber Foundation, Hamburg

Stefan DUPPEL, Director, Office of fmr. Federal President Dr. Richard von Weizsäcker, Berlin

Dr. Patricia FLOR, Director-General, Directorate-General for the United Nations and Global Issues, Federal Foreign Office, Berlin

GAO Zugui, Deputy Director, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Party School, Central Committee, Communist Party of China, Beijing

HE Yiting, Executive Vice-President, Party School, Central Committee, Communist Party of China, Beijing

Dr. Jonathan HOLSLAG, Professor of International Politics, Free University, Brussels

John C. HUGHES, Group Political Advisor, BP, London

Prof. Dr. Karl KAISER, Director, Program on Transatlantic Relations, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Minoru KIUCHI, MP, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo

Thomas KLEINE-BROCKHOFF, Head, Policy Planning Staff, Office of the Federal President, Berlin

Stefan KORNELIUS, Head, International Section, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Munich

Prof. Dr. Dominique MOÏSI, Founder and Special Advisor, Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI), Paris

Nora MÜLLER, Program Director International Affairs, Körber Foundation, Berlin

Dr. Amrita NARLIKAR, President, GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Hamburg

Ippeita NISHIDA, Research Fellow and Project Manager, The Tokyo Foundation, Tokyo

Prof. Dr. Kerstin ODENDAHL, Executive Director, Walther-Schücking-Institute for International Law, Christian-Albrechts-University, Kiel

Dr. Thomas PAULSEN, Executive Director International Affairs, Körber Foundation, Berlin

Prof. Dr. Danny QUAH, Professor of Economics and International Development, London School of Economics and Political Science, London

Ambassador Janusz REITER, Chairman of the Board and Founder, Center for International Relations, Warsaw

Dr. Michael REITERER, Principal Advisor, Asia Pacific Department, European External Action Service, Brussels

Wolfgang SCHMIDT, State Secretary, Plenipotentiary to the Federal Government, to the EU and for Foreign Affairs, Representation of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg to the Federation, Berlin

Olaf SCHOLZ, First Mayor, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Hamburg

Ambassador SHIN Bongkil, President, Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Seoul

Dr. Uli SIGG, Vice-President, Board of Directors, Ringier Media Group, Zurich

Dr. Theo SOMMER, Publicist, Die Zeit, Hamburg

Ambassador Nalin SURIE, President, The Association of Indian Diplomats, New Delhi

Dr. Klaus WEHMEIER, Vice-Chairman, Executive Board, Körber Foundation, Hamburg

Ambassador Dr. Shingo YAMAGAMI, Deputy Director-General, Foreign Policy Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo

THE BERGEDORF ROUND TABLE

Initiator	Dr. Kurt A. Körber (†)
Chairman	Dr. Richard von Weizsäcker, fmr. German Federal President
Coordinators	Dr. Klaus Wehmeier Dr. Thomas Paulsen
Program Managers	Laura Bake Dr. Dorothea Jestädt Dr. Janka Oertel
Address	Körber Foundation Berlin Office Pariser Platz 4a 10117 Berlin Phone +49-30-20 62 67 60 Fax +49-30-20 62 67 67 E-mail ip@koerber-stiftung.de Twitter @KoerberIP @paulsen_thomas facebook.com/KoerberStiftungInternationalAffairs bergedorf-round-table.org

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Editor	Dr. Dorothea Jestädt
Translation	Simon Phillips
Photos	Körber Foundation
Design	Das Herstellungsbüro, Hamburg

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