Book reviews on global economy and geopolitical readings

ESADEgeo, under the supervision of Professor Javier Solana and Professor Javier Santiso.
No One’s World: The West, the Rising Rest and the Coming Global Turn

*Kupchan, Charles A. (2012), New York: Oxford University Press*

“It is a very safe bet that the world will be multipolar long before it is democratic.”

“The world is headed toward a global dissensus.”

“The West and the rising rest are poised to compete over principles, status, and geopolitical interests as the global turn proceeds.”

“The challenge for the West and the rest alike is to forge a new and pluralistic order – one that preserves stability and a rules-based international system amid the multiple versions of modernity that will populate the next world.”

Basic Idea and Opinion

The author presents the emerging global landscape and claims that the coming world will be both multipolar - composed of major powers which have different conceptions of legitimacy and just order - and politically and ideologically diverse. There will be several centers of power and multiple versions of modernity. Kupchan firmly states that the next world will be interdependent: the challenge for the West and the rising rest will be to peacefully manage this transition by reaching agreements and forging a consensus. The author proposes a strategy in order for the West to adjust to the world of the twenty-first century, as well as a set of rules to adapt the international order to the coming global turn.

Kupchan’s thesis claims that we are not only shifting toward a more multipolar world - in which no country can exercise global hegemony - but a world in which “multiple modernities” are emerging and Western values and institutions are no longer dominant. Although one might disagree with some of his prescriptions, the book’s ideas is clearly expressed and provide a thorough and engaging analysis, all of which turns this volume into a valuable and accessible guide to understanding the past and current global phase and imagining the future international political landscape.
The author

Charles A. Kupchan received a B.A. from Harvard University and M.Phil. and D.Phil. degrees from Oxford University. He is Professor of International Affairs at Georgetown University and Whitney Shepardson Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Kupchan has worked in the U.S. Department of State and served as Director for European Affairs on the National Security Council during the first Clinton administration. His many books include *The End of the American Era* and *How Enemies Become Friends*.

Western power has peaked

The rise of the West (1500-1800) was the result of two significant events: on the one hand, the weakness of Europe’s political institutions, which were challenged by a growing class of urban merchants, intellectuals and artisans who built commercial networks and became powerful traders and entrepreneurs. On the other hand, the beginning of the Reformation - carried out by a rising bourgeoisie - resulted in the progressive separation of religion and politics. These two developments contributed to the economic and political rise of Europe. While Europe ascended and gained influence in the international sphere, the Ottoman Empire and imperial states in China, India and Japan had centralized and hierarchical structures of rule, which became their main obstacles in order to achieve economic dynamism. Europe, proud of its liberal democracy, industrial capitalism and secular nationalism, exported its own conceptions of sovereignty, law, diplomacy and trade, and tried to establish a global order based on its own values and institutions. The West expanded internationally and dominated other centers of power, forever forcing the rest to play by its rules.

However, the current situation differs significantly from the supremacy that the West enjoyed and benefitted from for several centuries. To illustrate this, Kupchan presents a series of facts that demonstrate that Western power has peaked, such as economic indicators, which predict that China will be the number one economy by 2050; the tendency of growing demographics and an increase of intellectual capital in emerging countries; and advances in key industries such as steel and shipbuilding, energy consumption or high-technology goods, which also indicate the potential for military predominance among emerging powers. According to the author, the West is indeed losing its military and economic primacy and its ideological dominance as new powers rise and assimilate new geopolitical aspirations.
Towards a global dissensus

The author claims the world is not moving toward political homogeneity, but multiple versions of modernity. States around the world will follow their own political trajectories and will have their own views about domestic governance and global order. Even rising powers that are liberal democracies will not want to be under the control of the West, for reasons of both prestige and geopolitical interest. Hence, there will be different variants of political order, which will hinder the states from adopting a unified position on an international consensus. Kupchan presents the main alternatives to the Western model of modernity currently present in the rising rest:

The first variant of political order is autocracies, which neutralize the political threat posed by the middle class, but contribute to educating a professional class that preserves their status quo. Kupchan describes three main types of autocracies: 1) China’s Communal Autocracy: the state attempts to preserve power by delivering distributed gains to a society that prefers stability and economic progress over individual opportunity and personal liberty. Thus, the middle class expands rapidly but democratization fails to advance; 2) Russia’s Paternal Autocracy: there is a hierarchical relationship between the passive and submissive middle-class and the state. In return for political obedience, people expect economic and social benefits; 3) Tribal Autocracy of the Gulf Sheikdoms: the middle class is incorporated into a political community, which is more defined by the concept of tribe than by that of the state. Political leaders are drawn exclusively from royal families, and both Islam and Islamic authorities are spreading into politics. The author mentions there are over one hundred non-democracies in the world, but expects some of them to make the transition to democracy in the coming decades. Nonetheless, he expects autocracies to maintain their authoritative position in the coming global turn.

Theocrats, Strongmen and Populists are other variants of political order. The first kind is found in regions where state and religion are intimately intertwined, such as Iran. Kupchan also dedicates a few pages to the Arab Spring, and states that the West should encourage a tolerant and moderate brand of Islam that is respected by and respectful of the political and religious traditions of the West. He argues that the more democratic the Middle East becomes, the greater role religion will play in public life. According to him, decreased strategic cooperation with the West, as democracy starts spreading in this region, is also to be expected.

Another variant, Strongmen, is primarily found in Africa. These figures concentrate power and maintain control through personal patronage systems and loyal militia. It is a type of authoritarian leadership that emerged in order to bring stability and economic growth to impoverished countries composed of disparate ethnic and linguistic groups in the new independent African states. However, neither democratic
activists nor foreign donors have been able to seriously challenge their politics. Democracy, rather than being consolidated after the introduction of multiparty elections, has served primarily to cover up the continuation of Strongmen politics. Additionally, China is steadily increasing its economic and strategic presence in this region. Kupchan predicts that Strongmen will still run most of Africa in the foreseeable future.

The last variant of political order described by the author is Populists. Latin America has followed its own path of socioeconomic and political development, and the result has been a left-wing populism that serves a poor and unconsolidated middle-class, as well as a strong anti-American sentiment. The author predicts that deep-rooted left-wing populism will still be present in Latin American politics in the next world, setting this region apart from the West.

**The rules of the next order**

Kupchan states that the West has entered an extended period of slow economic growth, political polarization, and self-doubt. More specifically, if Europe and the United States are willing to lead the transition to multipolarity, they will first have to regain their political and economic vitality and retain their cohesion, as well as design and adopt a set of principles in order to reach a consensus with the rising rest. On the one hand, a stronger and more unified European Union is needed, one which will probably have to increase its means if it is to make credible its purpose to become a more capable actor in the international sphere. On the other hand, the U.S. needs an electoral reform to revitalize democracy and to restore its solvency by balancing resources and commitments, among many other political and economic measures.

In the coming world, alternative conceptions of domestic and international order will compete and coexist on the global stage. Due to the onset of global interdependence, it will be the first time that such diverse sets of orders interact with each other. In his attempt to forge a consensus between the West and the rising rest, Kupchan designs a set of principles of the next world, taking into account the numerous challenges countries will face in the future: 1) Arrive at a new and more inclusive notion of legitimacy: responsible governance, rather than liberal democracy, should be the standard for determining which states are legitimate and in good standing; 2) Seek an agreement on the need to invoke the new “responsibility to protect” norm with regard to states that do not set minimal standards of responsible governance; 3) Maintain legitimacy of the main multilateral institutions charged with global governance by reflecting the growing influence of emerging powers; 4) Devolution of greater responsibility, capability and authority to regional actors; 5) Promote a brand of globalization in which prosperity is shared more equally and global growth can be achieved; 6) Manage geopolitical contests, especially the rise of China, by pursuing a
nuanced mix of engagement and containment; 7) Restore U.S. leadership by laying the domestic groundwork for a more modest conception of America’s role in the world.

This set of norms recognizes the need to incorporate new players and alternative ideologies into the global landscape and avoid ideological contention and geopolitical rivalry. The rules are designed in order to help deal with a world in which power is more equally distributed. The correct diffusion of global power – or international responsibility – from the West to a broad array of states in the world will lay the foundation for an era of mutual civility.