

# AN INTRODUCTION: INTERNATIONAL LAW IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

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During the Cold War, international relations and international law were deeply shaped by the struggle for global dominance between the United States and the Soviet Union. The clashes between the superpowers reverberated in legal issues relating to the functioning of the United Nations, the use of force, nuclear nonproliferation, human rights, etc. The many newly independent states, caught in the middle, repeatedly made claims for reform and initiated rule-making initiatives, but with limited results. After the end of the Cold War, the United States, its Western allies, and their shared economic and geopolitical interests remained largely unchallenged in the international arena.

While the United States is arguably still the only superpower and the European Union remains the largest economy, the world is again undergoing major change. China, India, Russia, Brazil, and other states in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa are increasingly active and powerful voices in international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, and have started questioning the dominance of the West in these organizations. These countries are forming alliances in the major international organizations and establishing new institutions to assert their authority and pursue their interests. In short, a new set of actors is moving onto center stage. In the process, these actors are seeking to reshape the international rules governing trade and finance, military force, the environment, and beyond.

How will the international legal order evolve to reflect this new multipolar world? Will the international legal order undergo significant change as the global balance of power and influence shifts? Are there barriers preventing these actors from having a full voice in the international legal order? Can the major international organizations adapt adequately? Will new organizations emerge? How will human rights law, environmental law, trade law, the law of armed conflict, the law of the use of force, and other bodies of law reflect the interests and influence of a new set of actors? Are trends emerging already? How should the legal profession and nonlegal experts—in the fields of technology, finance, trade, climate science, arms conflict, and arms control—respond?

The 2013 ASIL Annual Meeting addressed these questions and discussed the evolution of international law in a multipolar world. The *Proceedings* that follow contain a wide array of views on this fascinating and critically important set of issues.

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