

# The NPT in a Time of Power Transition

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## Introduction:

- There is now widespread agreement that the global distribution of power is either in the early stages of, or has already begun, a period of transition.
- A connection exists between nuclear weapons and the gaining of great power status which is problematic for non-nuclear rising powers.
- Yet a number of rising powers already occupy different positions within the global nuclear order and the NPT is central to creating these differences.

## Theoretical framework:

- **Power transition theory:** both rising and declining powers have the ability to disrupt the international order.
- **Social identity theory:** points towards states competing for status. Material capabilities (eg. nuclear weapons) and privileged positions in multilateral institutions and agreements (like the NPT) can play a key role in this.
- Many approaches to International Relations point to **multilateral institutions as important arenas of contestation for status** in the global power hierarchy.

## Argument & Findings:

- The NPT, like the UNSC and the Bretton Woods institutions, provides a focal point for dissatisfied rising powers looking to highlight the need for global governance reform.
- This means that progress across all three pillars of the NPT can become stymied by disputes between established and rising powers.
- Pressure on the NPT regime can come from both inside and outside as evidenced by Brazil's linking of support for the Additional Protocol with further progress on Art VI and India's attempts at de-facto NWS recognition outside of the treaty.
- If there is to be a degree of unity amongst rising powers seeking to challenge the NPT regime it is more likely to be found in the India-Brazil-South Africa Trilateral (IBSA) than the more high-profile BRICS grouping (but India's position outside of the treaty requires IBSA to remain flexible in how it challenges the nuclear order).

## References & further reading:

- Marco A. Vieira & Benjamin Zala, 'Rising Powers and Nuclear Weapons: Could IBSA Challenge the Global Nuclear Order?', forthcoming – available upon request: bz40@le.ac.uk
- Tom Sauer, 'The Emerging Powers and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Regime', Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, *Security Policy Brief No. 27*, 2011.
- Miles Kahler, 'Rising Powers and Global Governance: Negotiating Change in a Resilient Status Quo', *International Affairs*, 89:3, 2013, pp. 711-729.