

OPEN PEER REVIEW

# The Role of the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union in Regional Policies and Their Impact on Stability and Security

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## 1. Round 1

### 1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the paragraph introducing the research question, the authors ask: “*What are the characteristics of the strategies adopted by these four powers in regional policies, and how do these strategies affect stability and security in the target regions?*” This question is overly broad and combines explanatory and evaluative objectives. The manuscript would benefit from dividing the question into specific sub-questions addressing objectives, instruments, mechanisms of influence, and measurable consequences for regional security. Such refinement would improve analytical coherence and methodological consistency.

The manuscript states that “*the geographical focus is on Central Asia and the Middle East.*” These regions encompass highly diverse political, economic, and security environments. The authors should justify the aggregation of these two regions into a single analytical framework and explain whether the same theoretical assumptions apply equally to countries as different as Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iran. A more explicit rationale for regional selection is necessary.

In the literature review, the manuscript presents realism, neorealism, constructivism, offensive realism, and soft balancing theories consecutively, yet it does not explain how theoretical tensions among these approaches are reconciled. For example, constructivism emphasizes identities and norms, whereas offensive realism assumes power maximization under anarchy. The authors should provide a metatheoretical justification for combining these frameworks and clarify whether one theory has explanatory primacy over the others.

In the Data Collection section, the authors claim that “*semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in international relations, political researchers, and former diplomats.*” However, no information is provided regarding sample

size, participant selection criteria, interview protocol, ethical approval procedures, coding methods, or data saturation. These omissions significantly weaken the credibility and replicability of the research.

The description of the Data Analysis Method indicates the use of “*comparative analysis, discourse analysis, and historical trend analysis.*” The authors should explain how these methods were integrated and sequenced. For instance, it is unclear whether discourse analysis informed comparative analysis or whether historical trend analysis served as contextual background. A methodological workflow diagram would improve transparency.

The temporal scope section argues that the period 2010–2025 was selected because of major geopolitical developments. Nevertheless, several events cited as justification—such as the 2008 Georgia War—occur outside the selected timeframe. The authors should clarify whether pre-2010 events are used merely as historical context or constitute part of the analytical period.

In the findings concerning the United States, the manuscript states that “*signs of declining hegemony are clearly observable.*” This is a major theoretical claim that requires stronger empirical substantiation. The authors should provide concrete evidence, such as military expenditure trends, alliance cohesion metrics, regional influence indicators, or comparative power indices, rather than relying on descriptive assertions.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

## 1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The paragraph beginning with “*The literature review indicates that the interaction of the four main actors can only be understood through a combination of these approaches*” asserts a theoretical synthesis but does not explain the methodological process through which such synthesis is achieved. The authors should develop a detailed analytical framework showing which dimensions of state behavior are explained by each theory and how empirical observations are assigned to specific theoretical categories.

The section entitled “*Research Gap*” argues that previous studies have focused on one or two actors and that the present study analyzes all four simultaneously. While this claim is potentially valuable, the manuscript does not sufficiently demonstrate the originality of the contribution through a systematic comparison of prior research. A more comprehensive gap analysis table should be included, specifying the variables, methods, geographical scope, and limitations of previous studies relative to the current research design.

Table 1 presents a summary of previous studies; however, the table suffers from substantial methodological limitations. The criteria used to select these studies are not explained, the table mixes theoretical and empirical works, and several entries provide only descriptive findings rather than analytical conclusions. The authors should explain the inclusion criteria and consider restructuring the table according to research design, theoretical framework, region, and key findings.

In the theoretical framework section, the authors write that “*this study analyzes the interactions of the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union by relying on balance-of-power theory and the concept of geopolitical competition.*” However, it remains unclear why these two concepts were selected over alternative frameworks such as regional security complex theory, hegemonic transition theory, or power transition theory. The manuscript would be strengthened by a justification of theory selection and a discussion of alternative explanatory models.

The definition of “*stability*” as a condition in which “*sudden or destructive changes in the structure of power are minimized*” is conceptually narrow. Stability in international relations may refer to regime stability, regional order stability, institutional stability, or strategic stability. The authors should specify which dimension of stability is being measured throughout the article and ensure terminological consistency in subsequent analysis.

The conceptual model identifies “*regional policies*” as independent variables and “*regional stability and security*” as dependent variables, mediated by “*geopolitical interactions and competition.*” However, no operational indicators are provided for any of these variables. The authors should specify how each variable is measured and what empirical evidence supports causal inferences between them. Otherwise, the model remains purely descriptive rather than analytically testable.

A significant methodological inconsistency appears in the Research Methodology section. The article initially describes itself as a “*qualitative approach and documentary analysis method*” in the abstract and introduction, yet later states that it employs a “*mixed-method approach*” including quantitative indicators. The authors must resolve this contradiction and clearly explain whether the study is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method, including the rationale for the chosen design.

The statement that “*statistical data and indicators of regional security and stability are used to measure and compare the impact of each power*” raises important methodological questions. The manuscript does not identify which datasets, indices, or quantitative indicators were employed. The authors should provide a detailed list of variables, sources, reliability considerations, and analytical procedures used in the quantitative component of the study.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

## 2. Revised

Editor’s decision: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.