



RESEARCH PAPER

Re-setting World Order: World Politics in Transition

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ABSTRACT

Polar distribution is an important category for the study of international politics. Every polar distribution creates the 'order' for a certain period in human history. This way, studying the 'order' of a certain era is essential for not only understanding the dynamics of politics; but also for making some accurate predictions about them. This is a 'theoretical and conceptual' research article aims analyze the post-Cold War period in international relations, with a significance to contribute in academia and policy making. The central argument concludes that the unipolar moment of the U.S is increasingly being challenged by a rising China, with a possibility of either ending in a bi-polar or multi-polar world order

Introduction

A historiography of world politics shows that the transformative political events of the early decades of each century give rise to the new world order that sets the tone for the rest of the century. These unfolding transformative events offer various collective norms and shared preferences, that frame the structures of the system (order) before they are eventually improved upon or replaced by another order. As Palmer and Perkin (2003) aptly said, that in international relations the 'world community is in transition'. Hedley Bull (1977) suggests that "order is an actual or possible situation of state of affairs" and a desirable target process for a hegemon, which it would not want to be overridden. However, when a hegemon overrides it, it automatically helps it restore its favorite order or state of affairs at any level whether it is at the state level or global level. Bull (1977) refers to Augustine,

who talks about 'a good disposition of discrepant parts, each in its fittest place'. The conflict between order and disorder is brought to the fore by the "good" and "fittest" question, which results in anarchic situations or, to put it another way, hegemonic competitions to overthrow the established order. Waltz (1964; 1969) is of the opinion that system changes happen frequently, but that changes to the structure as a whole or to a particular component take time. When the international order was revised, the transitory phases initially framed a unipolar setting for world politics, which appeared to have reached a breaking point with the reemergence of a multi-polar world, as was the case in the post-Napoleonic Wars period. The same pattern can be observed in the post-Cold-war setting or present as well.

Keeping in mind the rise of China, this paper discusses whether a bipolar world order is an effective system for contemporary world politics or an alternative will be more appropriate. Earlier works on world order like Hedley Bull's (1977) engaged the discussion around the realist perspectives of Hobbes, Machiavelli; universal and moralist view point of Kant; international law and rules based international society by Hugo Grotius and 'law of nations' by Bentham; and many others like Sully, Cruce, St. Pierre who were peace theorists to answer the question of how order is maintained and what are its core values in the contemporary state-system? (Bull, 1977).

This paper has primarily built upon the core arguments based on distinct scholarships between bipolar, unipolar and multipolar to develop a better understanding about the current dynamics of world politics. This paper analyzes the rise of China, particularly the growing trade war, and China's transformation of navy and oil security that is gradually challenging the US global supremacy as the sole power. China's navy transformation is actually a passive reaction to the unmatched US power. This paper argues that during most of the Cold War, a bipolar power distribution provided a solution towards stability; however, it is important to acknowledge that war is always an inevitable phenomenon in politics, extreme in any condition whether bipolar or multipolar (Gaddis, 1993).

The Cold War period is recognized as an era of bipolarity and discussing the Cold war structure is like 'imagining the past' and its applicability for future. The term bipolarity in modern times emerged after the end of World War II (Serfaty, 2008). During the Cold war, the world community became polarized between the then super powers, US and former Soviet Union. Some states preferred to stay non-aligned (neutral), snug in a grey area with lingering fears about their future (realist believe that in politics neutrality is inexpedient). However, both of the superpowers engaged in a struggle to adjust their positions in a re-ordered world. By re-imagining the past, it seems that the bipolar structure during Cold war was a complete 'game plan' between both powers. The bipolar world was basically an ideological struggle between two powers primarily limited to military terms through arms race. As Brzezinski (1986) argues, 'geopolitical linchpin states', became very important for the former Soviet Union, through which the Soviets increased their influence. The key linchpin states in various regions were South Korea, Philippines, Poland, Eastern

Germany, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and many others with geo-strategically important regions. To counter each other's hegemonic influence, the US and former Soviet engaged in both direct and indirect forms of *offshore balancing*, so as to keep the regional and global status quo intact. The two World wars and bipolar struggle made US and Soviet to learn quickly the political fallouts of past events, and seemingly accommodated (in) the bipolar world resultantly, US and Soviets aggressively benefited from their alliances as the most effective way to contain each other (Brzezinski, 1986).

Discussion

As stated at the outset of the essay, the process of transition in world politics, Simon Serfaty (2008) eloquently describes the phases of transition from bipolar to unipolar and, possibly, from unipolar to multipolar in the future. He explains the idea that the current unipolarity is a result of bipolar politics and that it is challenging to replace unipolarity with bipolarity once more in an apt manner. Although some authors think that the rise of the European Union (EU) in the near future may balance out the US and, in the long run, China, bringing about a resurgence of the old phenomenon of bipolarity in practice. Reviewing China's foreign policy stances is interesting, especially during the administrations of Jiang Zemin (1992–2002), who upheld a domestic peace and development agenda, Hu Jintao (2002–2012), who began to advance the idea of multipolarity or multilateralism as a key aspect of world politics, and finally Xi Jinping (2012–2022), who is gradually establishing a bipolar order through the Chinese flagship Belt and Road Initiative.

Saperstein (1991) work 'the long peace' did some model test and comparison between the two systems. "The Long Peace" is a phrase coined by John Gaddis (1986) to describe the Cold War's virtual absence of war between major powers, which became the longest period in history without war between major powers at the time. The work tries to answer the question of whether a tripolar world is less stable than a bipolar one (Saperstein, 1991). The work concludes that a bipolar world is more stable than any other system because "in a bipolar world uncertainty lessens and calculations are easier to make" (1991), so it helps powerful states to deal with situations quicker than in a multipolar one. The piece views it as a transition of cold war to hot war that may threaten global peace at a broader scale.

Waltz (1964) also supports the idea that a bipolar system is a reliable formula for international politics. Waltz thinks there is always a chance for change within the system because, during the Cold War, Richard Rosecrans spoke of the emergence of a "tripolar" world, and Walter Lippmann discussed the emergence of France and Communist China in his columns during the 1960s, which go against the bipolar system in some ways (Waltz, 1964). However, it didn't work out and bipolarity continued for further two to three decades. Bipolar system keeps an effective balance in the system, though commenting on contemporary unipolar system, Waltz find it undesirable. Waltz understands that unipolarity is a temporary transition in world order, where the US is largely unrestrained and 'it is faced with unbalanced power'.

He further advocates that the changes within system occurs all the time, therefore changes within unit is different that the changes in occur at structural level. Waltz thinks unipolarity is inappropriate in an anarchic world because it allows one hegemon to dominate and enlarge its power. Resultantly, dominant uni-polar hegemon expanded its influence, to what Paul Kennedy called "imperial overstretch". Furthermore, Waltz views the present as a fleeting period of time when other powers will emerge to rebalance the scales of power. "International equilibrium is broken; theory leads one to expect its restoration," according to Waltz, is the basis for his conviction (Waltz, 2002). No political system can ensure stability on both a national and international level. However, keeping the experience of the early Cold War decades in the mind, it helps us to assume that 'bipolar is a highly stable' system (Waltz, 1969); because, super powers are not dependent on their allies, they are free to design strategies according to their best interests, which creates a balance and does not let either side accumulate more power.

Waltz uses the 'stationing of the army' in Europe, the establishment of bases in Japan and elsewhere, the waging of war in Korea and Vietnam, and the 'quarantine' of Cuba' as the best efforts that show the US off-shore balancing against the Soviets. Waltz avoids these efforts, considering the threat posed by the Soviets in a bipolar setting (Waltz, 1969). The 1962 Cuban missile crisis is a vivid example of tangible Soviet arrangements in place to deter any potential US threat to Soviet interests in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In contrast, Simon Serfaty, writes, "bipolarity is potentially more dangerous because any regional conflict can escalate into an unwanted global confrontation. To that extent, bipolarity too can only be a short-lived moment of geopolitical transition during which one of the two preponderant powers surpasses the other on grounds of capabilities, will, values, and legitimacy unless they first reach an arrangement, or condominium, that creates two parallel empires poised for a more or less peaceful coexistence until final convergence or confrontation" (Serfaty, 2008). The core critique of a bipolar world could be that it did not reduce the motivations for expansion or increase of capabilities over others, which ultimately cause threat to a large extent; and, the inherent security dilemma of anarchical structure and misperception of state actors are core features of the international system (Jervis, 1976).

Morton Kaplan suggested that the Cold War period was marked by a number of harsh realities, it nourished more instability; and, bipolar system became more 'loose bipolar system', due to supranational arrangements of the UN, NATO and other similar kinds of settings (Kaplan, 1969). Though Kaplan agrees that multipolar settings have had many shortcomings since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, bipolarity has succeeded in reducing the intensity of conflict, but the emergence of new actors has further diluted the strain (Kaplan, 1990). Some scholars believe that the current loose bipolar situation is primarily a means of transitioning to multipolar settings. The equilibrium of power gradually changed from two powers to numerous other actors. Fliess (1968) considers them as 'neutralists a third force' in bipolar international relations. According to Deutsch and Singer, this means there are more opportunities for interaction and transactions between the societies. Therefore, a rise

in the 'number of independent actors is an increase in the number of possible pairs or dyads in the total system' (Deutsch & Singer, 1969). They further stress communication and increase the level of interaction between societies, which will bring more integrity, an appropriate distribution of power, and improved intersocietal understanding.

Numerous ifs and buts have been raised in our minds as a result of the expansion of various players on the global stage as a result of more interactions, most notably that 'the specter of multipolarity is whether usher in a period of great power peace and cooperation, or a perilous one with great power conflict and confrontation' (Kegley, Jr & Raymond, 1994). As a statecraft man, Kissinger reflected on the multipolar European concert system of 1815, he came to the conclusion that multipolarity was difficult to manage. That proves that multipolarity will lead to more power struggles and schisms among various powers, and that one player's error as a defector or cheat will have a disastrous impact on the history of the modern world havoc on modern world history. It is still too early to predict that the world will become more stable in multipolar settings, when time of unipolarity is yet to be over. According to this study, unipolarity effectively tried to contribute to global prosperity and the provision of public goods but not with an ease. Serfaty writes that 'multipolarity, which is the most likely outcome of the unipolar moment, is defined by power but also by the inability of one to surpass or even equal the many' (Serfaty, 2008).

Is Rising Chinese Influence a departure point for unipolarity?

The increasing Chinese oil demand makes China much more nervous about the oil supply security as the US power; particularly the American navy, is globally present and poses potential threat to China's maritime oil transportation. Based on this rationale, the Chinese are speeding up their military strategy transformation, i.e., from the land to the sea. According to Jon Alterman and John Garver, Sino-American conflict in the Middle East could cut China off from access to energy, since the US controls the sea lanes on which oil to China travels (Alterman & Garver, 2008).

Chinese media, general public and decision-makers in recent years seem to embrace Mahan's sea power theory warmly (Holmes & Yoshihara, 2007). They call out a transformation of China's military strategy, from land to sea. If we look at several indicators, we will find that China's oil increasing demand is unprecedented. First, China is the largest in oil-importing nations, probably become the first in next one or two decades. Oil fuel the rapid economic growth. Once the engine of Chinese economy started, it is difficult to stop or slower it in recent years. Second, as the Chinese are getting richer. The sizeable Middle Class will naturally come into being. Most of them are well educated and to some extent influenced by Western values and lifestyle. They are eager to buy nice cars with larger consumption. This is also rooted in Chinese culture, the culture of face. Owning a new car make them not lose face. It is reported that China will rank the top by motor vehicle production in future. Third, China is said to be the second largest manufacturing country in terms of Nominal and

the first in terms of PPP. These indicators all suggest that China's economy is fueled and sustained largely by energy, particularly the oil. If there is any emergency of oil security, China will suffer greatly, let alone war with other major powers.

To find alternative method, China is not only investing on its navy, naval bases but seeking alternate energy corridors to mitigate US dependence. China has a long history of putting too much focus on the lands. The perfect example is the Great Wall. Ancient emperors made great effort to build the long giant walls to surround Chinese territory, preventing Northern barbarians' attack. However, the Chinese gradually fell behind the Westerners in navy power after the Ming Dynasty (approximately 15th century). In the 1800s, the Westerners opened China's door from the Eastern Chinese Sea. The Great War seems to be left behind since then. Today, the psychology of victimhood among Chinese, to some extent, provokes the nationalism among general-public. The public are pushing the communist government to put more money on navy development. At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party is very willing to see the public support for military development as it can thus gain more legitimacy and control over the authoritarian regime.

Traditionally, China adopts the strategy of "watching the tigers fight", which comes from an old Chinese saying. This strategy fairly characterizes China's approach to US policy in the Middle East. Partly this is because the Chinese tend to believe that the grandiose ambitions of the United States to control the Middle East and its oil will not succeed in any case (Alterman & Garver, 2008). In other words, China is not willing to join the tigers fight in this region, instead China prefers to free riding on the US. If the US efforts to stabilizing the Middle East fail, China shall weigh an alternate model to secure its interest in the region. Besides, since Deng Xiaoping; China has always kept in mind that economic development is the top priority of national task, but later years especially the time of President Xi Jinping shows a complete different outlook of Chinese posture towards world politics. The Chinese seems to be good at learning lessons from the ancient wisdom, to emphasize further the traditional Chinese thoughts like the "Gao Zhu Qiang, Guang Ji Niang, Huan Cheng Wang.", which means "build tall walls, store grains, and claim the throne later." Therefore, the land-defensive has dominated China's military strategy over the past several decades. Until when the China started to build its naval fleet and engaged more aggressively in South China Sea.

The Chinese will make effort to build strategic partnership relations with the Middle East. In the process, Iran will be a tricky issue. China needs Iran's oil. Iran needs China's political, economic and military support. Thus, China will keep certain engagement with Iran. Fortunately, for China, Russia is always in the front of conflicts with the Western countries. Since Russia is eager to veto UN resolutions, China just abstains and does not hurt America. China and the Middle East will get closer, but their relations will not surpass the alliance relation between the US and some Arab states. America is getting more and more cautious of China-Middle Eastern relation. Redressing Bush Doctrine and remedying the relation with the Middle East and alliance is the urgent task for America, no matter through hard power or soft power.

The Middle Eastern States are very concerned about the Ups and Downs of Sino-US relation. For most states, they do not expect the worsening Sino-US relation. They wish that the US and China will continue to have a sound and stable strategic partnership, thus they can benefit from it. However, for few states, like Iran, Syria and Iraq, Libya, they hope China and the US have conflicts so they can gain more support from China. In this way, the Middle East is always a battlefield of games.

The increased oil demand causes fear in China as Americans control the maritime lane and chokepoints. The Chinese are trying to transform military strategy, from land to sea, in case the US cuts off oil supply in future. There is much room for the improvement in the two countries' mutual trust. The increasing Chinese naval power and confidence together with radical nationalists may probably lead to more conflicts in the sea with other countries. China has opened door over thirty years. However, still a large population is poorly educated and less informed. They are the force of nationalism. To divert domestic anger and criticism, the Communist Party can make use of those people. At the same, China has rapidly shifted with a serious thought processing through nuclear deterrence intertwined with economic ties and various exchanges between the two people. These are the three major remaining stabilizers of Sino-US relation. Compared to the impending conflicts, the three stabilizers are more decisive in shaping the shadow of future that may potential link with their future trade expectations (Copeland, 2015). The world order is always evolving, despite often very slow. It is shaped by major powers and in the meantime, it also reflects the interest of great powers.

Conclusion

The demise of former Soviet Union caused the collapse of the bipolar world, and contemporary unipolar setting dominated the new world order. As Fukuyama (1989) writes, that it is 'the end of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of government'. The US has emerged as a world 'leader' and 'indispensable nation' power of new order after the Cold War phase (Wohlforth, 1999). William Wohlforth sees the unipolarity is a stable time-period with more peace and prosperity across the world. One needs to admit the effective contribution of US in transforming the world system on equal basis focusing more on democratic norms and advocating societal equity and freedom of rights. Therefore, it is hard to think about bipolarity or multipolar settings as a sound recipe for world order.

During first decade of post-Cold war, no one tried to struggle for balancing with unipolarity. Rather, by and large, state and non-state actors acknowledged unipolarity as a more peaceful system with more hope and prosperity during cold war phase. Conversely, it is observed that some previous maneuverings, such as the "European Troika" between France, Germany, and Russia; the "special relationship" between Germany and Russia; the "strategic triangle" between Russia, China, and India; and the "strategic partnership" between Russia and China, which attempted to aggregate their capabilities vis-à-vis some current struggles of individual rise of few

states in order to match American power (Wohlforth, 2002). However, today China is transcending its spatial boundaries and growing its global influence.

The US is geographically isolated during the unipolar era, and it deployed strategic weapons for defence; however, others may have felt threatened by this. So that others might take it offensive and try to enhance their capabilities, to 'balance against threat'. Additionally, Walt (2002) points out that the US's commitment to multilateral institutions hinders its ability to pose a threat to or desert its major allies. Through various scholarships made predictions about restructuring of World order based on balancing is not yet possible. Despite, many political developments, 'world did not see a complete return of a multipolar balance of power system'; rather on can see a substantial and overwhelmingly growth in major powers military, political, economic and cultural power' (Ikenberry, 2002 The Western order, which is primarily based on institutional design, transparent diplomacy, and polities that hold all states together, is led by the US. One of the reasons why American power is now institutionalized is that it is based on democratic politics and a complex web of intergovernmental institutions. This 'institutionalized hegemonic strategy' serves US power, interests and policies to legitimize, expansive and durable' and other potential powers to learn from such change models. It shows US power is relative in competition by rise of digital order on one hand, and also the rising Chinese power over economic, political and military domains.

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