



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) and with the passage of time it gets upgraded 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 question about 'good' and 'fittest' brings the contention between order and disorder to the forefront which leads to an anarchic situation or in other words hegemonic competitions to challenge the existing order. Waltz (1964; 1969) believes, changes with system occur all the time; however a change in a part of the structure or the whole system takes some time. A study of the changes of the earlier decades of each century reveal that during international order revisions the transitory phases initially framed unipolar settings of world politics which seemingly reached a departure stage with the re-emergence 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.

Background

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 superpowers, 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 and Pakistan. 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

In the beginning of paper, we referred to the process of transition in world politics. Simon Serfaty(2008) vividly highlights the transformation phases of bipolar to unipolar and probably unipolar into multipolar in future. He aptly expounds on the idea that the contemporary unipolarity is a result of bipolar politics and it is hard to replace unipolarity again with bipolarity. Though some authors believe that in the near future the emergence of European Union (EU) may create a balance to US and in long terms China, whereby bringing in a re-emergence of the old phenomena of bipolarity in practice. It is interesting to carefully review the Chinese foreign policy

orientations, particularly the rule of Jiang Zemin (1992-2002) who maintained a policy of domestic peace and development, Hu Jintao (2002-2012) who started to promote the notion of multipolarity or multilateralism as a core feature of world politics, and finally the current presidency of Xi Jinping (2012-2022) who is gradually establishing a bipolar order, through the Chinese flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which is managed bilaterally.

Saperstein (1991) work 'the long peace' did some model test and comparison between the two systems. The Long Peace' is a phrase basically coined by John Gaddis (1986) elaborating the virtual absence of war among major powers during Cold war, which become the longest period in history without war between major powers of 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 work considers it as a transition of cold war to hot war that may threaten global peace at a broader scale.

Waltz (1964) also endorses the notion that a bipolar system is a sound recipe for world politics. Waltz believes there is always a possibility of change within the system as during Cold War Richard Rosecrans referred to the emergence of "tripolar" world and Walter Lippmann talked in his columns about emerging role of France and Communist China during 1960s which in a way go contrary to bipolar system (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. In a world of anarchic nature, Waltz believes unipolarity is inappropriate, because it provides a single hegemon to override and expand its power, as Paul Kennedy call it 'imperial overstretch'. Moreover, Waltz find contemporary settings as a brief moment in history, in which other rising powers will create a new balance. The reason Waltz believe is 'international equilibrium is broken; theory leads one to expect its restoration' (Waltz, 2002). No political structure can guarantee the stability both at domestic vis-à-vis at international level. However, keeping the experience of early Cold War decades, it helps us to assume that 'bipolar is highly stable' system (Waltz, 1969); because, super powers are not being dependent on their allies, rather they are free to design strategies according to the best interests and it creates a balance and did not let either side to accumulate more power.

Waltz uses the 'stationing of arm' in Europe, the establishment of bases in Japan and elsewhere, the waging of war in Korea and Vietnam and the 'quarantine'

of Cuba' are best efforts which shows the US off-shore balancing against Soviets, Waltz avoids them considering as a threat posed by Soviets in a bipolar setting (Waltz, 1969). Cuban missile crisis of 1962 is a vivid instance that helps see tangible arrangement emplace by Soviets, to deter any possible US threat to Soviet interest in 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 bipolar world could be that it did not reduce the motivations for expansion or increase of capabilities over others, which ultimately cause threat for a large extent; and, the inherent feature of security dilemma of anarchical structure and misperception of state actors are core features of international system (Jervis, 1976).

Morton Kaplan suggested that the Cold War period had number of hard realities, it nourished more instability; and, bipolar system become more 'loose bipolar system', due to supranational arrangements of UN, NATO and other similar kind of settings (Kaplan, 1969). Though, Kaplan agrees that the multipolar settings since Congress of Vienna 1815 had many shortcomings, and in contrast the bipolarity succeeded to mitigate the intensity of conflict; but emergence of new actors further diluted the strain (Kaplan, 1990). Some scholarships believe this loose bipolar situation primarily a way or transition towards multipolar settings. The equilibrium of power gradually moved from two powers to many other actors. Fliess(1968) considers them as 'neutralists a third force' in bipolar international relations. Deutsch and Singer account it as increased number of interactive opportunities. 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 on communication and increase level of interaction between societies that will bring more integrity, appropriate division of power and better understanding between societies. The growth of many players at international level due to increase number of interaction also raised number of if's and but's in our minds, primarily '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). Kissinger did a study on European concert system of 1815, which was a multipolar setting; whereas he concluded that multipolarity was hard to handle. That shows multipolarity will breed more rifts and power struggle among many powers; and a mistake of one player as defect or cheat will cause havoc in modern world history. It is still so early to guess that world become multipolar while living in a time of unipolar settings. This research argues that unipolarity is contributing effectively in the prosperity and provision of public goods to entire world. Dr. 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) & (Muzaffar, et. al, 2017).

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).

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.

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.

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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. However, we may see some past maneuverings were initiated like, 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 tried to aggregating their capabilities vis-à-vis some present struggle of individual rise of few states in order to match with American power (Wohlforth, 2002). However, today China is transcending its spatial boundaries and growing its global influence.

During the unipolar settings, the US was located on a geographically isolated land, and it deploys strategic weapons for defense purpose; but, that might create a sense of threat for others. So that others might take it offensive and try to enhance their capabilities, which will cause 'balance against threat'. In addition, Walt (2002) identifies US commitment at multilateral level with institutions that helps to reduce US ability either as a threat or abandon 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 one can see a substantial and overwhelmingly growth in major powers military, political, economic and cultural power' (Ikenberry, 2002). The US is the holder of Western order, which primarily based on the structure of institutions, open diplomacy and politics that keeps all states together. It is one of the reasons, American power is also institutionalized now; because, American order is organized around 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 a rising Chinese power over economic, political and military domains.

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