

**TRANSITIONING WORLD ORDER: THE SHIFT TOWARDS  
MULTIPOLARITY AND THE CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL  
DYNAMICS**



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## **DEDICATION**

*Dedicated to my lovely parents, amazing friends and helping teachers.*

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## ABSTRACT

The central argument of the study will be based on identifying the power configuration which currently characterises the international system. The study will be directed at displaying how the World Order of today is undergoing a transition from Unipolarity towards Multipolarity. However, neither have Unipolar elements ceased to be nor Multipolarity has been entirely established. The contemporary World Order is thus a combination of both the Unipolar and Multipolar systems.

Identifying the type of polarity that constitutes the world has become the new focus for the scholars of international relations. While one school of thought claims Unipolar system to still mark the systemic realm; others propagate the view that the present international system is Multipolar in nature. The major argument of this study is that the World Order of today is in a transition from a Unipolar to a Multipolar system. The study thus views how the contemporary system is different from the one which preceded it. Moreover, the study also provides an analysis regarding the prospects of peace and stability and those of war and instability that may characterize the future Multipolar world order. Recognizing the nature of power configuration the international system carries may aid in a better understanding of the actions states are pursuing and the developments that are undergoing in the current times, as well as will help us examine a pattern for improved analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

In international relations, the degree of power diffusion among states forms the basis for most of the inter-state interactions, patterns and the developments that occur in the world align with the nature of that power diffusion. Resting upon the diffusion, are the foundations of international configuration that constructs the very framework of the global system. In Unipolar configurations, where the tightest of power diffusion is experienced, the predominant state exercises its supremacy over the global structure. If the state attains a hegemonic status, her rule is further strengthened. In Bipolar structures, the diffusion is looser but not adequate enough to dispense power to many states. However, the carefully managed Balance of Power between the two strongest entities becomes a move away from the highly imbalanced power distribution experienced under Unipolarity. In a Multipolar world, the diffusion of power is the most 'loose', depending upon the number of states that attain the centre-stage position. The post Cold-War era was marked by the case of Unipolarity, where United States, though not a global hegemon, had preponderance in the economic, geostrategic, military and financial realms as well as immense soft power influence. However, the distribution of power was soon partly altered by developments that emphasized the vitality of various new influential players in the global structure. Many states primarily adopted internal balancing as a tactic to secure position in the world system. Foremost, it was Russia and China which became the rising powers and adopted assertive postures to accommodate themselves into the power hierarchy of the system. These states became successful in somewhat challenging U.S.

dominance, especially in the geostrategic arena. Today, the world order has seized to remain the same it was a few years ago. Unipolarity has been adequately challenged by the rising powers of the two states. Advancement in the economical, military and geostrategic domains vis-à-vis U.S. has led to a considerable widening of their spheres of influence. Moreover, the inability to obtain the desired outcomes from policies abroad has hastened the pace of U.S. relative decline. Even though the state faces immense competition today, U.S. still holds the predominant position due to her economic magnanimity and unmatched military muscle. Nevertheless, material primacy needs to be supplemented by influential superiority in order to establish affective rule in international politics. Without exercising influence over world affairs and state actions, U.S. will invite further decline. The study focuses on the argument that the rising states, especially China and Russia, have proved triumphant in altering the power distribution of the world and have successfully established themselves as the major powers in the World Order. The theses will therefore focus on how the current World Order can be classified and what changes and alterations have the states brought to the previously prevailing Unipolar system. The premise of the theses is that the contemporary World Order is in a transitional phase towards Multipolarity and incorporates the characteristics of both the Unipolar and Multipolar configurations. The subsequent chapters will therefore be based on explaining the concept of polarity and the nuances that each polarity type encapsulates. Further study will be based on identifying the Multipolar trends at the systemic as well as regional levels and the elements of commonality from the



Unipolar system will be discussed. Moreover, the second theme of the study will focus on the nature of the world that will characterize the future Multipolar Order that is currently under construction.

### **Problem Statement**

Much of the contemporary international literature focuses immensely on the changing nature of the World Order and on the rise of challengers against the Unipolar arrangement. However, a precise answer regarding the kind of power configuration marks the world of today is seldom provided. It becomes vital to examine the nature of power distribution the contemporary international system carries in order to understand the current developments as well as what course will the international system take in the future.

### **Research Questions**

Q1. What type of power configuration is prevalent in the contemporary international order?

Q2. How stable is the future Multipolar order likely to be?

### **Hypothesis**

The contemporary international order is undergoing a transition from Unipolarity towards Multipolarity and currently displays evidences of both the configurations. Moreover, the future Multipolar Order is likely to entail higher chances of conflicts and may be highly susceptible to instability. However, peace may prevail if great powers continue to adopt Defensive Realist policies along with multilateralism.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study will examine the type of world order that presently prevails in the international realm and will provide a detailed view of all the factors that characterize the contemporary power distribution. It will also provide adequate background information on the concept of polarity as well as will give a historic background of the world orders that have been witnessed post Second World War. A correlation between the Multipolar trends and the geostrategic developments will be made to explain the transitioning world order. Lastly, the study will also help forecast the complexities that may be expected to mark the future Multipolar Order.

### **Methodology**

This study has been conducted using a qualitative research methodology. It is a descriptive research that is focused on describing, and explaining the phenomenon under inspection. Case studies have been used to supplement the study and historical comparative approach has been utilized to explain the current international system. For the research, secondary sources such as books, research papers, journal articles and online articles have been consulted.

### **Structure of the Study**

To obtain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon under study, the thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter will focus on the theoretical explanation of polarity and will assess the different types of polarity focused in international relations literature. Also, a historical brief regarding the world order that have existed post Second World War is also provided along with a precise

mention of the Multipolar transition that we are taking as our central point of discussion. In the second chapter, a comprehensive account regarding the contemporary world order is given. To support the findings, U.S. relative decline along with the return of Multipolar elements are discussed. Moreover, the argument of the current world order being a combination of Unipolar and Multipolar systems is clarified. The third chapter contains the case studies of two major geostrategic arenas, the South China Sea and Syria. The motive of including the case studies is to display what Multipolar factors are characterizing the regions today and how they are accelerating the transition process towards a Multipolar system.

Lastly, the fourth chapter provides the argument regarding the stability or instability of the future Multipolar system and explores the likelihood of war and peace in such an order.

## CHAPTER ONE

### POLARITY AND ITS ACCOMPANYING DIMENSIONS

The chapter focuses on the concept and relevance of ‘polarity’ in international system and provides an insight to its three major types – Unipolarity, Bipolarity and Multipolarity. Accompanying the general discussion will be the ‘historical context’ for each polarity-type that has prevailed in the post World War II global arena, with a comprehensive debate on various aspects of each kind of polarity. In addition, a section of the chapter will be occupied by a brief overview of the undergoing transition of the world order towards Multipolarity along with presenting a paradigm-centered discourse on polarity and on the Multipolar transition.

#### **1.1 Elaborating the Concept of Polarity**

The extent of inequality among states reflects itself in global system in the form of poles – distinct centers of power and influence that dictate and dominate the world affairs. Polarity thus refers to the arrangement of power-distribution among states, at a given point of time, and the degree of supremacy that they carry. Polarity, though an abstract concept, radiates immense material impacts on the functioning of international politics. It is the nature of polarity that then defines the World Order and sets the guidelines for the working of the globe. The entire set of rules, norms, governance and interactions become a byproduct of the existing character of polarity and power distribution. Polarity constructs the relations of power among states and has an extended effect on alliance-formation,

the prospects of war and peace as well as the on the overall international stability.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat set patterns are therefore introduced into the otherwise anarchic system where upholding the polarity-based status quo becomes important for the survival of weaker states and for a continued power projection by the much stronger poles.

The significance and relevance of the idea of polarity for state system cannot be under-emphasized. It is this very notion of polarity on which sets the entire construct of the global apparatus and it is in turn affected by the actions that the state actors carry out. Identification of the nature of polarity becomes essential, as without it one can simply not analyse and comprehend the overall universal developments. Polarity creates trends that then define the military, economic, institutional, diplomatic and political attitudes and actions that majority of the states adopt. Structural Realism promotes the idea that it is the distribution of power that creates the structure and patterns of international system.<sup>2</sup> The distinct polarity at the system-level gets directly inter-related with the state-level nuances and scenarios, where both continuously affect each other.

### **Interpreting Polarity**

The idea of polarity has been differently conceptualized by the adherents of various paradigms related to international relations. Each model centers its argument regarding polarity on a distinct framework, thereby proving it difficult

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<sup>1</sup> R. Harrison Wagner, "What was Bipolarity," *International Organization*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1993): 77-82.

<sup>2</sup> Steven E. Lobell, "Structural Realism/Offensive and Defensive Realism," Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Dec 2017, <<https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/abstract/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-304>> [Date Of Retrieval (DOR: March, 28th, 2019)]

to choose which paradigm projects perfectly the causes, nature and aims of polarity. The only visible similarity that the polarity-based arguments of the paradigms carry is the fact that 'none consider power to be equally apportioned throughout the system'<sup>3</sup> and therefore this inequality leads to the production of specific powerful entities. However, what leads to the creation of poles is dealt with very differently by each model. For Realism, polarity is the result of the competition that exists between states and due to the relative Balance of Power that ensues. Realists extend the view that uneven power sharing tends to be the norm of international politics, where states that possess power, influence, self-sufficiency and resources, rule. Realism however has been criticized for being unable to provide a satisfactory rationale for the failure of BOP aspect post Cold War and the coming of the Unipolar Order.

Liberalism, on the other hand, views polarity as a means to enhance institutional dependence of states on international organizations in order to provide public goods to every individual. The focus of liberalism on intuitionism and individualism causes it to interpret the existence of strong centers of power; which as in realism are considered to be an intrinsic occurrence; as a medium to ensure that ideals are upheld and that different alliances are made for the pure reason of dispensing benefits to all.<sup>4</sup> As far as 'Marxism' is concerned, the paradigm criticizes intensely the concept of polarity, as it recognizes polarity as a structure

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Horness, "Understanding Paradigms and Polarity in International Relations," *Atomi University*: 18-19, <[https://atomi.repo.nii.ac.jp/?action=repository\\_action\\_common\\_download&item\\_id=1135&item\\_no=1&attribute\\_id=21&file\\_no=1](https://atomi.repo.nii.ac.jp/?action=repository_action_common_download&item_id=1135&item_no=1&attribute_id=21&file_no=1)> (DOR: April, 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> Jack Snyder, "Realist-Liberal Divide? Power and Progress in a World in Transition," *E-International Relations*, May, 21, 2012, <<https://www.e-ir.info/2012/05/21/realist-liberal-divide-power-progress-in-a-world-in-transition/>> (DOR: April, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

that promotes disparity among nations and is a tool in the hands of powerful capitalistic states.<sup>5</sup> Marxists emphasize that the polarity-based international system is intentionally framed in a certain manner so as to keep specific states at the top rung of the hierarchy and to restrict others to a position where they are reduced to mere pawns of the dominant entities. Moreover, the major point made by Marxists is that polarity, in a given period, is the consequence of economic determinism,<sup>6</sup> and that it is economy alone that shapes the world order and influences power relations and interactions in the global arena.

Constructivism analyses polarity as being simply a construct of perceptions and subjective interpretations of states and its leadership. The advocates of this paradigm insist that it is the personalized viewpoints and narratives of states that build up the concept of polarity –each state will interpret the existent nature of international system according to their own perceived conceptions and thus will create their own realities based on those viewpoints. It is thus ‘perceptions, knowledge and interactions that socially-construct the reality’<sup>7</sup>, which we know as polarity. It highly depends on the major powers’ interpretation of the threat they are faced with that drives their actions in the global system. Similarly, the narratives about oneself, the perceptions about others, the notions about perceived threats, the narratives about cooperation and biases possessed by states, all affect

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<sup>5</sup>Robin Varghese, “Marxist World: What did you expect from Capitalism?” *Foreign Affairs*, Aug 2018. <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/marxist-world>> (DOR: May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019)

<sup>6</sup> Karl Polanyi, “On Belief in Economic Determinism,” *Sociological Review*, vol. 37, no. 1(1947): 96-104.

<sup>7</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Socially of Knowledge* (New York: Penguin, 1967), 13-28.

how each actor in the international realm conceives and reacts to the idea of polarity.

### **Classifying Polarity**

Owing to the various specifications and attributes that the international system carries, one can categorize polarity type as being one of the following: Unipolarity, Bipolarity and Multipolarity. Each type identifies with a particular nature of concentration of influence and strength across state system and is characterized by differing properties. The Unipolar order is marked with the presence of one superpower that may or may not be a hegemon. U.S. marking the termination of Cold War emerged as the sole dominator of the international structure and secured the title of a hegemon against which, no state's independent policies stood robust. Its hegemonic status strengthened considerably post the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>8</sup> The U.S. positioning was, however altered, due to relative increase in the power status of other states and the successful self-standing ventures by some countries like Russia in the early 2000's, coupled with the debilitating foreign policy choices by U.S. led to a scenario, where Unipolarity existed but without hegemony.<sup>9</sup> The policy of strategic hedging came to play a huge role in helping other states increase their powers while not challenging the status of U.S. directly.<sup>10</sup> Many Realists, such as Kenneth Waltz and Hadley Bull, stand against the argument of Unipolar world order, reiterating the vitality of the

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<sup>8</sup> Karen A. Mingst and Ivan M. Arrenguín-Toft, "The International System," in *Essentials of International Relations*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed (New York: W.W Norton and Company, 2010), 17-21.

<sup>9</sup>David Wilkison, "Unipolarity without Hegemony," *International Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1999): 141-172.

<sup>10</sup> Mohammad Salman and Gustaaf Geeraerts, "Strategic Hedging and Balancing Model Under the Unipolarity," ResearchGate, April, 2015.

<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275654677\\_Strategic\\_Hedging\\_and\\_Balancing\\_Model\\_under\\_the\\_Unipolarity..](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275654677_Strategic_Hedging_and_Balancing_Model_under_the_Unipolarity..)> (DOR: May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019)



doctrine of BOP, where states automatically balance against an emerging dominator, so as to keep the world in equilibrium. For them, Unipolarity, even if realized cannot sustain much longer and eventually the order will pave its way towards Multipolarity. The world order based on the former structure is conceived by a broad spectrum of scholars to be relatively peaceful, considering the being all-powerful; the superpower does not get confronted with any challenging opposition. Paul Kennedy and many other hegemonic stability theorists presented the case for utmost peace and stability during the rule of a Unipolar hegemon'.<sup>11</sup> Majority of the nations comply with the policies and agendas set forth by the Unipole and not having enough strength to form an affective counter-alliance, the states tend to accommodate themselves in the Unipolar apparatus. On the other hand, the social constructivist scholars such as Hadley Bull advocate against the Unipolar order rendering it as an impediment for the actualization of what he termed as the International Society. Bull argued that for the optimal functioning of the world institutions and for peace-maintenance, power sharing is essential among states in order to obstruct the creation of a world hegemon. Bull, thus, makes it a point to highlight then and again that equilibrium has to be artificially created among major powers and that the concept of an inherently occurring BOP by realists is indeed defective.<sup>12</sup>

Bipolarity, as evident by the term, is an arrangement where two states lead the power equation and establish an authoritative stature at the global theatre. Although the distribution of power is not as 'tight' as in Unipolarity, the factor of

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<sup>11</sup> Mingst and Arrenguin-Toft, "The International System," 19-21.

<sup>12</sup> James Plunkett, "The Unipolar Society: The Value of an International Society Approach to Preponderance," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2011): 787-804.

sharing the top status renders utmost relevancy, say and influence to the two states and aids them in dominating various regions in order to sustain their supremacy besides aiming towards an increased preponderance. A Balance of Power is maintained between both the poles, which constantly build up their capacities in the every domain to ensure that the other state is unable to surpass its growth and muscle- be it diplomatic, political, strategic, economic or military. What is interesting in the idea of Bipolarity is the fact that a relation of duality persists between the two superpower – that of both antagonism and cooperation.<sup>13</sup> Alliances in Bipolarity are said to be the strongest and most reliable – this owes mostly to the fact that with only two poles, the world gets clearly divided into two zones, each with strikingly different aims, ideologies, attitudes, commitments and policies. States that join one of the two alliances are stern supporters of the ideology and stances of the particular state. Due to such intense bonding of postures and actions, states thus find it almost impossible to shun their previously taken course of action and therefore remain sincere to the alliance.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, due to the two poles being somewhat equally powerful, members of each alliance reaps as much benefit as it would in the other coalition and thus, they are not tempted by the idea of an alliance shift.

Scholars; most prominent of whom is Johan Galtung; have been since long accentuating the phenomenon of Multipolarity and advocate that the American Unipolar Moment has ended and that the world has to now experience the rule of many power centers. Multipolarity, hence is a structure where dominant position

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<sup>13</sup> Wagner, "What was Bipolarity," 83-95.

<sup>14</sup> Louis Rene Beres, "Bipolarity, Multipolarity and the Reliability of Alliance Commitments," *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 4 (1972): 702-710.

is adopted by more than two states and it is taken to be a direct consequence of globalization.<sup>15</sup> These states have a share in the capabilities and capacities to influence the world affairs and assert their postures and policies over other countries. The doctrine of BOP characterizes the scenario where the great powers are involved in a continuous competition for more capabilities and try to expand their sphere of influence, while keeping a close check on each other's advancements. Multipolarity presents a realm where alliance-making and alliance-shifting hugely alter the ongoing developments and has an effect on the overall universal stability. Due to the focus on interests as well as the lack of trust between nations, one that increases intensely under Multipolarity, states often adopt hedging policies to maximise gains when in a relatively weaker position.<sup>16</sup> Wars, as history exhibits, become a common incidence in a Multipolar configuration and many conflicts are caused by the one of the unstable state(s) of the alliances and a drive to somewhat obtain absolute benefits.<sup>17</sup> The distribution of power is comparatively 'loose' and the aspect of hegemony is absent.

## **1.2 Post-Second World War Global Orders**

### The Cold War Rivalry

The Multipolar Order that existed during the WWII was brought at the brink of collapse near the War's end. With a humiliated Germany, shattered Japan and weakened United Kingdom, the global landscape was characterized by two major

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<sup>15</sup> "How Will the Multipolar World Affect the US?" Geopolitica, last modified 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan, 2019, <<https://www.geopolitica.ru/en/article/how-will-multipolar-world-affect-us>> (DOR: May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

<sup>16</sup> Kendall W. Stiles, "Trust and Hedging In International Relations," ResearchGate, last modified March, 2018, <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323614140\\_Trust\\_and\\_Hedging\\_in\\_International\\_Relations](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323614140_Trust_and_Hedging_in_International_Relations)> (DOR: 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2019)

<sup>17</sup> Wagner, "What was Bipolarity," 83-98.

powers – U.S. and Union of Soviet Socialist Republic. From this very scenario emerged the onset of Cold War, underlying which was the bipolar nature of power distribution. The World then got divided into what came to be termed as the Eastern and Western blocs, each with its distinctive policies, ideologies, narratives, actions, advantages and weaknesses.<sup>18</sup> It was then, that these two superpowers; surpassing every other state in economic, military and political strengths; dominated the chessboard of world affairs and dictated as well as forced their schemes on countries for the attainment of legitimacy, compliance and supremacy.

The USSR and U.S. were entangled in a continuous effort to balance each other's capabilities, if not to outdo them. Europe, East Asia and Middle East became the centers of the bipolar tussle and every development from then on was seen from the perspectives of the superpowers and the lines of actions, mostly catastrophic, were taken on their instructions. This was especially true for Eastern Europe, whose states became mere satellites of the Soviet Union and were used for the purpose of effective buffer-zones against the Western threat. While the Western allies, though under American patronage and dependence were all legitimate democracies, the states of Eastern Europe were installed with Communist regimes and had mostly no say in the affairs of their foreign policy. Each bloc thus extended its strength via its alliances, the military expression of which was introduced in the form of NATO and WARSAW.

Kenneth Waltz strongly argued against the relevance and importance of alliances in Bipolarity, focusing on the fact that the two great powers in a Bipolar system

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

are so mighty that they are least influenced by the actions of other states or alliances. Conversely, Fred Halliday and Harrison Wagner presented an argument against this conception of Waltz regarding the stature of alliances in Bipolarity. They both presented the case of the interference of two poles and their alliances. Fred Halliday promoted that the happenings in the Third World impacted greatly the policies of U.S. and USSR.<sup>19</sup> What mostly emerged as independent revolutionary trends in Cuba, Korea and others, were then given a systemic dimension by the superpowers. Their involvement in those local scenarios then molded the course that these happenings followed. These locally situated instabilities eventually acquired a personality based upon the Bipolar Cold War dimensions and were made to be converted into conflicts that only centered upon great power competition. It was through this discourse that the very inter-state specific matter of Cold War was transformed into the Global Cold War. Harrison Wagner illustrates how U.S. military and strategic schemes were shaped by the occurrences in its ally states and that to guard states like South Vietnam or South Korea; as well as to balance the Soviet incursions into their domestic fabric; U.S. got involved in major wars.<sup>20</sup>

While presenting an argument on the vitality of alliances that marked the Bipolar Cold War, it is also important to take into notice the case for their reliability. When compared to Multipolar orders, the alliances that constitute Bipolarity are taken to be more stable and reliable. This is because the power is so tightly concentrated between two centers that the allegiances is based on inflexible

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Saull, "Social Conflict and the Global Cold War," *International Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 5 (2011): 1123-1140.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

commitments and robust ideologies and fixed doctrines. Deflection therefore, becomes difficult and inconvenient for states and the option of alliance shifting is discarded. The uncertainty regarding the actions and obedience of the alliance-states thus gets extremely minimized in a bipolar order; hugely owing to the fact that all states are dependent on the two entities; and the overall stability of the World Order is sustained.<sup>21</sup> It is owing to this durability of alliances that the chances of a total war between two powers in bipolarity are eliminated – the poles, being aware of the interests, actions and strategic outreach of their rival and its allies, act rather rationally and the careful cost and benefit analysis that becomes possible, leads them to avoid major power wars.

Referring to the subject of war during Bipolarity, while relative peace prevailed between U.S. and USSR and no direct armed confrontation arose between the two, the conflict between them was translated in the shape of violent proxy wars and sub-national conflicts among weaker states. Neither the Afghan War nor the Korean War involved one-on-one military engagement of U.S. and USSR. The wars remained concentrated in specific regions, expanding but never reaching as close to the superpowers, as to threaten their internal security. The client-patron relationship that grew between U.S. and its allies and USSR and its satellites gave the weaker states the status of mere surrogates, which carried the burden of each blocs domination for the greater powers. The adoption of a proxy war- based military strategy therefore lead both poles to solidify their international footing and accelerate their military might, without actually directly confronting one

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<sup>21</sup> Wagner, "What was Bipolarity," 98-105.

another. During the Cold War the incidences of sub-national conflicts aggravated as they got backed by U.S. and USSR – be it the Cuban Revolution in the Western Hemisphere, the Afghan and Vietnam War in Asia, the Angolan Civil War in Africa or the Libyan and Syrian conflicts in the Middle East. They only ended when USSR could no longer fund these conflicts and the Unipolar status quo emerged.<sup>22</sup>

A major factor that changed the nature of warfare from conventional to non-conventional was the introduction of nuclear weapons. Arthur Burns was of the opinion that it was due to nuclear weapons and might that the bipolar order came into existence, as no other power was able enough to match the two pole's nuclear capacity. But Waltz contradicted this argument by Burns and though recognizing the importance of nuclear weapons in aiding the development of Bipolarity didn't agree with the point of nuclear weapons leading to Bipolarity. Instead, he propagated that Bipolar World Order would even have existed in the absence of nuclear weapons and that it was in reality a whole combination of military, diplomatic, strategic and economic strengths that led the two states to dominate the international system.<sup>23</sup> What becomes a matter of equal importance in studying Cold War bipolarity is the structure of hegemony that existed at that period. The aim of both the poles was always centered upon expanding their sphere of influence and hegemonizing the international realm.<sup>24</sup> But none of the pole acquired the stature of a hegemon in the purest sense and that was actually

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<sup>22</sup> Mark O. Yeisley, "Bipolarity, Proxy Wars and the Rise of China," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2011): 75-91.

<sup>23</sup> Wagner, "What was Bipolarity," 98-102.

<sup>24</sup> Louis Rene Beres, "Bipolarity, Multipolarity and the Reliability of Alliance Commitments," *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 4, (1972): 702-710.

why the bipolar order sustained. Scholars, however, are supportive of the idea of near-hegemon, but do contest over which pole was the most dominant one and why. For some, it was the USSR; due to its hold on Eastern Europe; which had the ability to dominate the world affairs. The strategic maneuvering capacity and resulting strategic advantage that Eastern Europe provided the Soviet Union guarded the claim of USSR being the near-hegemon.<sup>25</sup> Contrary to this was the view of U.S. being the near-hegemon due to its economic strength, soft power influence and domination of numerous major international institutions.

#### The Unipolar Moment

The Balance of Power during the Cold War that sustained Bipolarity, shifted as a result of the USSR's economic collapse, the change of leadership, the consequence, the consequent independence movements in Eastern Europe and the dire domestic state of the Union. The subsequent disintegration of the USSR led to the initiation of a world configuration which realists thought could never be a reality – that of Unipolarity. With USSR collapsed and no state able enough the dominance of U.S., the BOP became a notion of the bygone era. Charles Krauthammer, who famously advocated the concept of 'Unipolar Moment' also believed Unipolarity to be a temporary phenomenon, leading eventually towards a Multipolar Order, where Germany, Japan, Russia, China and U.S. played an equally important role.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Wagner, "What was Bipolarity," 96-102.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," The Washington Post, last modified 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1990, <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/07/20/the-unipolar-moment/62867add-2fe9-493f-a0c9-4bfba1ec23bd/?utm\\_term=.2f443256bce3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/07/20/the-unipolar-moment/62867add-2fe9-493f-a0c9-4bfba1ec23bd/?utm_term=.2f443256bce3)>



Despite of such claims, Unipolarity only grew stronger and U.S. became a regional hegemon, with the power to dictate, change and affect the course of actions that many states took. U.S.-led initiative of War on Terror amassed worldwide support, Afghan War was aided by many countries, the Iraqi Invasion; though criticized; wasn't resisted, the change of regimes in Iraq and Libya proved victorious and U.S. dominated economic institutions of International Monetary Fund and World Bank like no other state. U.S. then dominated the major geostrategic hubs such as that of South Asia, Middle East and East Asia. The nature of war as well as the alliance set-up was strikingly different from that of the Bipolar era. Majority of the states cooperated with U.S. while she too embarked on a mission to support democracy and freedom around the globe. Therefore, no challenging nations or alliances emerged to threaten U.S. position. States adopted a strategy to stabilize the dominator, let alone to destabilize it. It was the continuation of the status quo of U.S. supremacy which the states found to be the best suited to their interests and development.

The presence of one superpower led to an era that was identified with no counter alliances and thus; due to the tightest power concentration; the issue of alliance shifts was no more relevant, ensuring the stability of the World Order. Major contestations over power-politics immensely declined and the Unipolar Order that was thereby maintained ushered an era that was relatively peaceful than that of Bipolarity. While Bipolar Cold War experienced the onset of sixty-one sub-

national conflicts from 1946-1992, the Unipolar-driven system saw only five.<sup>27</sup>

Intra-state conflicts became a rare sighting and inter-state conflicts rarer.

The argument of U.S. hegemony has long drawn attention - While the matter of Unipolar Order was not rejected by scholars, the case for U.S. sole dominance to the extent of hegemony, however, was. A hegemon, is described as not only the most capable and powerful state, but also that which is the most influential. The presence of power without influence doesn't make a case for hegemony. David Wilkinson in his article 'Unipolarity without hegemony' makes the argument that U.S. post 1999 was becoming a power without influence and therefore a unipole without hegemony. He rests his arguments on the facts that U.S. was unable to stop India and Pakistan from developing the nuclear weapons and could not carry out a successful regime change in Iran.<sup>28</sup> But though his arguments seem solid, it was after years of his writing the article that U.S. toppled the regimes of Saddam Hussain in 2003 and then that of Muammer Gaddafi in 2011. The Iraqi nuclear program was successfully rolled back and Iran was substantially deterred from developing its nuclear arsenal.

### **1.3 The Emerging Trend of Multipolarity**

#### The Waning Unipolarity

The sustenance of a Unipolar world post Cold War was not an idea that many welcomed and Unipolarity was mostly merely reduced as a bridge towards Multipolarity. But scholars such as Joseph S. Nye contradicted the debates regarding the advent of Multipolarity and claimed that it was not only the

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<sup>27</sup> Yeisley. "Bipolarity, Proxy Wars and the Rise of China," 75-91.

<sup>28</sup>David Wilkison, "Unipolarity without Hegemony," *International Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1999): 141-172.

Unipolar Order but the U.S. hegemony too, that was here to stay. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been a combination of U.S. foreign policy high and lows but the numerous scenarios that injured her reputation has then and again provided us with the clue of a fully-realized Multipolar system in the future. As previously mentioned, the large-scale U.S. War on Terror, the intervention in Iraq and Libya as well as the killing of Osama Bin Laden displayed the influential status of the U.S. However, the ultimate success of foreign policy is not entirely based on the actions that a state carries out but rather on the ends that the state achieves. Even though U.S. gained its goals to some extent, the seemingly never-ending War on Terror, the catastrophe Iraqi invasion brought and the instability it produced for Middle East, the deterioration of Libya, the rise and spread of various non-state actors, the apparent defeat U.S. has faced in Afghanistan, the blooming Chinese might, Russian resurgence and the Crimean Annexation, the non-U.S. centric geostrategic and economic programs and entities like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) etc – all present the case that Unipolarity has been on the path to decline. The world is now entering a theatre that will possess multiple power hubs, each asserting its own posture and influence over the global affairs. The BOP doctrine is re-emerging as a major component of the world system as a Multipolar configuration is transpiring and gaining momentum. States are involved in both internal and external balancing schemes to accentuate their power statuses.<sup>29</sup> Multipolarity is greatly impacted by alliance-changes and as we can observe today, if any of the major states; be it China, Russia, U.S., United

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<sup>29</sup> Wagner, "What was Bipolarity," 83-105.

Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, India or even, for that case, states like, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran; change their nature of allegiance and tow their policies differently as before, a major change in the World system may be expected. A sole power cannot alone rule the international arena and it is due to the transforming power configuration that we are witnessing U.S. in relative decline, though still predominant.

### **Multipolarity from the lens of Paradigms**

It is important to note that the advent of Multipolarity will not be seen in the same contexts by all and that the analysis of Multipolarity will involve differing views based on the approach primarily focused on studying the Multipolar trends. As seen from the perspective of Realism, the emerging Multipolar Order may be examined compromising of the Balance of Power among major states. It may therefore be taken in the context that in order to increase their security, power-base, influence and authority, states are moving towards bringing a system that provides them a complete opportunity to claim their position in the political and strategic happenings around the globe. Multipolarity can then be seen as a process of creation of a system within which the great powers work to maximize their benefits while trying best to reduce those of their opponents. The alliance shifts, particular to Multipolarity, will result not from value-based scenarios but on the basis of pure national interests. A struggle for dominance and supremacy may also accompany such an arrangement, where countries, in the near future, could be occupied with the agenda of out-doing each other, surpassing other power centers in the domain of military, economic and strategic might and the resultant

security dilemma would prove to complicate the international structure even further. War and instability may appear as a direct consequence to such outlooks. From a liberal view, the unfolding Multipolarity will, via the BOP, ensure that power is distributed evenly around the globe so that majority of the world nations are able to benefit from such a system. Multilateralism, global governance, international cooperation and collective security may therefore be the dimensions expected by liberals. For liberals then, the prospects of instability and war in a Multipolar Order will be limited due to the creation of a milieu where positive-sum scenarios are sought and state action are based on aims of seeking mutual benefits.

For Marxists; whose views regarding polarity have already been mentioned in the first section of the chapter; the blossoming Multipolar system is a manifestation of the changes in the nature of economy that characterizes the world today. Marxists will thus view the multipolar transition from an approach of Historic Determinism and will posit that the transition is due to the shifting of the means of production and relations of production away from the Transatlantic states towards China, Russia, Brazil, India and the states of East Asia. They will consequently utilize the emergence of various economic initiatives to verify that it is solely economy that is driving the multipolar changeover and the system that will proceed will own the same exploitative-nature as before. Constructivists, however, will neither analyze the rising multipolarity as a result of re-emergence of 'Balance of Power' nor will they hold economy as a responsible agent. Constructivism will hold the perceptions and narratives of each state regarding one another and regarding the

entire world system responsible for a transition that we are naming as Multipolar.<sup>30</sup> Thus the world system is not undergoing inevitable changes creating a multipolar structure, rather it is the socially constructed relations based on history and our biases that are creating a Multipolar reality – a reality which will seize to be the day states perceive their relations differently

Concluding, the debate on polarity thus holds importance in analyzing the nature of the international system and the trends that envelop the order. It helps us determine how the power is distributed among world regions and which entities play the foremost part in controlling the military, institutional, political and economic structures of the world we live in. Paradigms contribute their own narratives regarding the system of polarity and on the various types of polarity that exist and provide a lens to view the contemporary international relations on the basis of the arguments they present, thus making polarity a subject open to vast interpretations.

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Horness, "Understanding Paradigms and Polarity," 21-26.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “WORLD ORDER UNDER TRANSFORMATION: A MULTIPOLAR TRANSITION”

The chapter will provide an analysis on the nature of the contemporary World Order. The content of the chapter will be based upon the premise that the world is in a transitional phase, moving from a Unipolar towards a Multipolar order and contains elements specific to both configurations. Hegemonic decline, great power competition, balance of power, and alliance-centrality will be focused as elements re-emerging as the prominent international characteristics.

#### **2.1 The Relative U.S. Decline**

Establishment of the Unipolar structure introduced a unique case to the international arena otherwise marked by constant power struggles. Structural Realism, which dominated as a theory for analyzing global developments and states' actions, stood firmly opposed to the concept of Unipolarity, claiming the arrangement to be the most unstable due to the lack of the balance of power among states. Nonetheless, the Unipolar World Order, characterized by the hegemonic rise of the U.S., was a move away from the realist norm. There was no country or alliance which balanced the power of U.S. and the entire complex of global system was shaped on the guidelines of the West. Rest of the world states, with extremely limited political and economic powers, found it best to work on strengthening their domestic structures while accommodating the pre-

eminence of U.S.A. The state, at its zenith, became the symbol of power, freedom, liberty, prosperity and gained a virtual leadership of the world. U.S. expanded its influential clout in Europe and Latin America, while also cementing relations with numerous Middle Eastern and Asian states and furthered her strategic interests utilizing these relational affinities. Even though scholars such as Mearshiemer and Paul Kennedy saw the continuance of Unipolar Order with skepticism, others advanced perspectives arguing the status quo to prevail for many more years to come. They anticipated no considerable balancing game to be embraced by any of the states, at least not in the near future. However, it is in the recent times that admittance of U.S. relative decline and the loss of its hegemonic stature have come from even the strongest of American supporters.<sup>31</sup> U.S., throughout the 1990's and early 2000's managed to skillfully sustain its Unipolar stature but some isolated but salient factors; strengthening of foreign economies, the Russian-Georgian War, Iraq War, 2008-9 economic recession etc; emerged as the potential indicators of a move towards a system of multiple prominent actors. A revamping of the power distribution was signaled where major states were set to promote somewhat independent policies and introduced certain elements of their own to the global complex.

The exponential rise of Chinese might and the resurgence of Russia as well as the nature of politics characterizing the geostrategic theatres have introduced change in the power configuration of the globe. Scholars such as Paul Kennedy claimed U.S. as a declining state since the early ages of the post-Cold War era but those

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<sup>31</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "American Hegemony or American Primacy," *Project Syndicate*, March 19, 2015.



claims were put to rest by the continued U.S. ascendancy. However, owing to the Chinese and Russian competition in the contemporary age, the debate of relative U.S. decline has resurfaced. The rise of China as an economic giant and its strategic endeavors in multiple regions has challenged the position of U.S. In addition, Russia has revived its stature as a vital international player. Penetrating deeper into the power politics, it has initiated efforts to alter a status quo where U.S. remained uncontested. If seen in material aspect, U.S. still stands at the top of the international hierarchy. With an unmatched military might, a self-sustained economic base, extensive alliances around the globe, U.S. primacy remains intact, though not unchallenged. Furthermore, the petrodollar economy and dollar as the world reserve currency ensure and revitalize the status of U.S. as the most powerful and stable state of all. However, analysing power in material terms alone proves to be a defective approach. Power, is the ability to influence, and what impact a state has on the actions of others remains a crucial aspect to be investigated in the power debate. It is when assessing U.S. influence in world affairs that one comes across the idea of her relative decline. The Russian success in the Russo-Georgian War appeared as one of the initial indicators of U.S. waning influence. The intervention in Iraq and the resulted strategic fiasco as well as the protracted Afghanistan conflict, bring to display the incompetency of U.S. to manage her strategic pursuits.<sup>32</sup> Today, Afghanistan similarly to Iraq seems as a lost cause. With Taliban growing stronger, it is now U.S. making efforts towards seeking a decent interval, reviving the memories of the Vietnam War. Where

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "The End of the American Era," *The National Interest*, no. 116 (2011): 6-13.

setbacks in the wars waged portrayed the decline of U.S. influence and power to attain the desired outcomes, it also hugely affected U.S. soft power.

Policies of interventionism and regime change crafted by the Bush Administration made many states wary of U.S. leadership. It is beyond doubt that the U.S. appeal has been further jeopardized by the isolationist policies undertaken by the Trump Administration.<sup>33</sup> The Crimean Annexation by Russia emerged as a manifestation of U.S. shifting to a path of decreased international influence. The Russian success thus revealed the failure of long-drawn deterrence implied by U.S. Joseph S. Nye provides a similar argument and believes that the biggest challenge U.S. has faced is its failure to achieve the desired outcomes from its policies abroad.<sup>34</sup> U.S. has also been overpowered by Russia and her allies in Syria and the Assad regime; against which U.S. stood strongly; has chiefly reclaimed Syria's entire control. The inability to contain and coerce North Korea and Iran proves yet again that U.S. even with the biggest of material power lacks a key component that ranks essential for maintaining supremacy in the international world – the essentiality of exercising successful influence over other states as well as achieving desired results from one's foreign policy agendas. Apart from influence, in the economic sector too, U.S. is undergoing relative decline with Chinese economy giving it a tough competition. Moreover, besides the lack of influence bearing capacity, U.S. now faces an ever looming debt crisis that may cause a threatening economic recession if adequate measures are not taken.

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "Donald Trump and the Decline of U.S. Soft Power," *The Strategist*, last modified Feb, 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018, <<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/donald-trump-decline-us-soft-power/>> (DOR: April, 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

<sup>34</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "The Future of American Power: Dominance and Decline in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 6 no. 89 (2010): 2-12.

## 2.2 Great Power Competition: Return of the Balance of Power

The relative rise of other competitive states vis-à-vis U.S., the transformation of the economic landscape, forging of new alliances along with numerous global changes have initiated a balancing trend in the global international structure. Where Russia and China are focused on balancing the power of U.S. at the systemic level, America too have adopted strategies to equalize, if not surpass the power of the states at regional realms. It therefore is important to mention here that the balancing occurring in the current times may be classified into two categories – artificial balancing and intrinsic balancing. The artificial balancing, that Hedley Bull talks about, has appeared due to a deliberate (not intrinsic) effort against the supremacy that America carries since post Cold War era.<sup>35</sup> Russia and China thus have created a situation suitable enough to balance the America power and to claim their share of power in the international theatre. The other category, as propagated by Kenneth Waltz, may be termed as ‘intrinsic balancing’ that has followed as a structural consequence of the rising statuses of China and Russia.<sup>36</sup> It is via this intrinsic balancing that U.S. today is keeping the ambitions of the two major powers under check and through the same intrinsic balancing both China and Russia are balancing one another in major regions.

The Balance of power theory by structural realists, as explained earlier, envisages the primary mechanisms of increasing state power, forming credible alliances and going at war when necessary. The two initial means are used to ensure power

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<sup>35</sup> Plunkett, “The Unipolar Society,” 787-804.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” in *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 40-49.

equilibrium among major states while war is an option that usually weighs in when the sustenance of the status quo is exceedingly challenged.<sup>37</sup> The prospect of war-probability among states as a consequence of or as a reaction to the trends of balancing is considered as a likely phenomenon but depends heavily on the policies that states adopt. The contemporary transitional phase towards Multipolarity depicts signs of BOP apparently shaped following a defensive realist approach – an approach that is not offensive in its mannerism but aims mostly at security-maximization rather than power-maximization and at avoiding war. Moreover, the hedging policies currently undertaken further endorses that offensive policies currently appear dormant. The undergoing transition towards a Multipolar configuration encapsulates relatively higher undertones of the defensive realist approach which, though realizing states' ambitions to pursue power gaining as a core policy diverges from the offensive realist notion of seeking hegemony and war-making.<sup>38</sup> The contemporary developments in the international system have showcased both the mechanisms of power-gaining and alliance-formation by the core countries but the utilization of war as a tool to obtain the balance of power has yet been an unlikely sighting. Though many would consider the Russo-Georgian War and the Crimean Annexation as a means of striking balance against U.S., it may be argued that many underlying factors; like Russian history and domestic politics; are also to be considered when analyzing the cases. Currently no over-the-top aggressive ventures to acquire ultimate power, hegemony or any pro-war policy-postures

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>38</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Reckless States and Realism," *International Relations*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2009): 242-244, <<https://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0048.pdf>> (DOR: June, 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019)

have been adopted by states. Bandwagoning scenarios are not yet observed and therefore in the transition which is taking place the great powers seem to give higher weight to balancing via attaining higher power and forging alliances instead of initiating wars.

Both China and Russia, as formerly stated, extended their efforts to build strong economies and focused on military modernization. The internal balancing initiated years ago continues and both states have displayed keen aspirations to bolster their economic and military might in order to improve their position at the global front. Chinese commercial reach has remarkably stretched all around the globe and her military power is on a constant rising trajectory. Russia too has emerged as a major international player with considerable ability to influence the international system. With Russia keen as ever to augment her already robust military capabilities, the state is equally attentive and now succeeding in reinforcing its economic strength, though it isn't yet potent enough to considerably challenge the Chinese or American economies.<sup>39</sup>

What is interesting to notice is that U.S. too is now working towards attaining higher economic status and is modernizing its conventional weapons system. With the most powerful defense capability in the entire state system, U.S. is recognizing the opportunities that an even stronger military and economy will bring to them. The world now has, at the top hierarchy, three major powers competing for power, resources and influence. They are shaping the patterns of state interactions and are driving the international system towards a world consistent with Multipolar norms.

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The transition towards a balance of power is supplemented by the fact that great powers are seeking alliance-formation strategies to advance their positions. The alliance between Russia, Syria and Iran in the Middle East has exhibited immense success to decrease the involvement of U.S. in Syria and has aided Russia to a position of near-dominance in the region. Renewed efforts by U.S. to solidify her alliance with the ASEAN states to counter Chinese designs in the South China Sea presents the illustration of how crucial alliances are where balancing between great powers in a Multipolar setting is concerned. Hans Morgenthau, writing extensively on the BOP in Multipolar system, states the formation of counter-alliances against potential dominators as ‘the most spectacular’ phenomenon the system generates.<sup>40</sup> The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative is a step forward to forge a network of alliances directed at widening trade opportunities and accessing new markets by China. The project is destined to provide China with vital strategic and political assurances besides economic advantages. Chinese eagerness to build ties with the South East Asian nations to maintain a prominent position in the South China Sea as well as her interests in seeking close ties with Central Asian nations signal the importance that alliances will carry in the future Multipolar system. Chinese aims to build closer ties with Japan and South Korea may in part be viewed as tactics to challenge U.S. alliance commitments and the recent visit of Chinese president to North Korea clearly display the extent of competition present between the great powers.

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<sup>40</sup>Randall L. Schweller, “The Balance of Power in World Politics,” Oxford Research Encyclopedias, last modified May, 2016, <<https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-119>>

Where the Multipolar trend of focus on alliance formation is being noticed, so is the component of alliance shifting. Though the concept of alliance shifting is likely to manifest in a higher degree in a pure Multipolar setting, today's transitional phase too, provides indication of the phenomenon. Turkey's tilt towards Russia regarding Syrian affairs and the latter's weakened relations with the U.S. may prove that the global order is on the path of embracing a new form of power configuration. Pakistan's troublesome relations with the once strong ally U.S. and her attempts to build warmer ties with Russia show a similar pattern. Moreover, Philippines inclination towards China and her reintegration into U.S. camp for matters regarding the South China Sea supports the claims that scholars make regarding the unreliability of alliances in a Multipolar order. This very unreliability of alliances along with the conflictual nature of great power politics is what makes Multipolar orders more susceptible to instability than the Unipolar structures.

#### Hedging: A Complementing Strategy to BOP

Where major powers are embracing balancing schemes to restrict the growth of their competitors, the nature of the international system due to interdependence has made it difficult for them to follow a unidirectional policy agenda. Therefore, coupled with balancing, major states are now extensively supporting strategic hedging to contain the greater power but with careful considerations of not meddling into a direct confrontation. Strategic hedging, involves both balancing and engagement mechanisms, which are jointly ensued to ensure power-gaining and security-maximization without

inviting war with the power with higher relative strength.<sup>41</sup> Today we experience, hedging; like balancing; being pursued at both systemic and regional domains, especially by the second-tier states. China's economic hedging against U.S.,<sup>42</sup> China's regional hedging against Russia in the Middle East, Turkey's regional hedging against Russia in Syria, Russia's regional hedging against China in the South China Sea - all point towards the relevancy that hedging approach has gained in the transitional phase. Adherence to a hedging policy thus provides the great powers to gain more power, expand mutually-beneficial cooperative agendas as well as keeping equalizing the state that possesses an upper hand.

These factors make hedging an extremely viable policy for a cooperative Multipolar world, where diluted power and interdependence increase the incentives for maintaining peace and avoiding war. However, the world today is in transition and establishing that similar importance will be given to hedging in the future, may be an impulsive analysis. If and when U.S., Russia and China become states with more or less equivalent strengths, hedging is most likely to be replaced by pure balancing acts alone.

### **2.3 The Current Power Configuration**

The international order prevalent today may be best regarded as composition of both the Unipolar and Multipolar configurations. The contemporary global

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<sup>41</sup> Mohammad Salman and Gustaaf Geeraerts, "Strategic Hedging and Balancing Model under the Unipolarity," ResearchGate, last modified April, 2015, <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275654677\\_Strategic\\_Hedging\\_and\\_Balancing\\_Model\\_under\\_the\\_Unipolarity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275654677_Strategic_Hedging_and_Balancing_Model_under_the_Unipolarity)> (DOR: April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

<sup>42</sup> Alicia Garcia Herrero, "Trade War: Is the U.S. Panicking due To China's Big Hedge?" Forbes, last modified May, 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/aliciagarciaherrero/2019/05/09/is-the-u-s-panicking-at-chinas-big-hedge/#807d0c7ccb6f>> (April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019)



structure carries many elements typical to a Multipolar arrangement – Balance of Power, great power competition, alliance centrality and alliance shifting probabilities. But in addition, the dynamics and systems that were the creation of the U.S.-dominated Unipolar era continue to add into this system a distinct nature of their own. The liberal-capitalist order is functioning and its legacies are predicted to sustain their relevance in the future too. Though the Chinese and Russian governmental setups are more or less authoritarian in nature and state capitalism forms the basis of their respective economies, there have been no overt signs that the rising states want to challenge the Western Liberal Order to the extent of completely nullifying the systems that operate today. However, it might be strongly argued that with the possession of higher power and influence both the states may find it in their best interest to set the global rules according to their standards. Moreover, another Unipolar legacy that remains is the continued primacy of U.S. The current international configuration is neither entirely Unipolar nor completely Multipolar. It may be called what Samuel Huntington reckoned the post Cold War world to be - a ‘Uni-Multipolar Order’. It is therefore an order where U.S.-created systems and her material primacy coexist with the Multipolar essentialities of the balancing of power and great power competition. It may not be termed Unipolar because of the poor influencing capabilities of U.S. and the failure of its deterrence and coercion policies, for the most part. But it may also not be termed as an entirely Multipolar system as the material power gap between U.S. and the two rising states, especially in terms of military might remains

huge. In addition, due to the interdependence marking the state-system, the present power configuration incorporates both the liberal and neo-realist particularities. Major powers; instead of focusing entirely on relative gains for themselves and their allies; are moving towards adopting multilateralism as a dominant approach. Multilateralism is comprehended as a theory focused on a positive-sum game and in seeking mutual benefits via cooperation. On the contrary, Multipolarity is largely understood as an approach that pivots around a zero-sum scenario and focuses dominantly on power struggles.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Multipolar arenas are not supposed to carry the tenant of multilateralism, but the current transitional phase is identified by inter-state relations that seem to be based heavily on interdependence and multilateral cooperation, a scenario which formed the basis of the Unipolar order. Today, numerous institutions NAFTA, BRICS, SCO etc are based on multilateralism. China's Belt and Road Initiative too, is directed at establishing an entire global network for economic cooperation. The inclusion of numerous states and the quest for more members indicates the multilateral design of the project. However, where on one hand the BRI is perceived as a multilateral scheme, on the other it has been criticized as a scheme of establishing Chinese dominance.<sup>44</sup> This ambiguity about the future thus makes it difficult to claim if rising powers would support a beneficial-for-all

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<sup>43</sup> Stanley Crossick, "Multipolarity vs Multilateralism," BlogActiv, last modified May, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, <<https://crossick.blogactiv.eu/2010/05/22/multipolarity-vs-multilateralism/>> (DOR: May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019)

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Chatzky and James McBride, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified May, 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019, <<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>> (DOR: May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

multilateral approach in a multipolar setting which positions them at dominating statuses. U.S. lately, has resorted to highly unilateral postures. Her withdrawal from UNESCO, UNHCR, Iranian Nuclear Deal, Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Peace Treaty may be rightfully regarded; at a certain extent; as moves taken to downplay the essentiality of multilateral cooperation. It may thus be claimed that a realization of the Unipolar configuration diminishing, has guided U.S. into the next best scenario – aiming for primacy, but in a Multipolar order.<sup>45</sup> Being at a position of dominance, U.S. is therefore partly sidelining multilateralism as to curtail the benefits that the approach could provide her rivals. That being said, U.S. policy orientation cannot be generalized as being unilateral. There seems to be a confusion regarding the right policy choices to make or simply the U.S. is simultaneously drawing towards a multi-dimensional policy approach, not letting set patterns gauge its next big step.

Concluding, the contemporary international system is marked with the once hegemonic U.S. facing a relative decline scenario due to the rising statuses of China and Russia in world affairs. With still upholding the premier position in material-based power calculus, the state suffers today from the dilemma of having power without the requisite influence. The lack of capacity to deter or coerce other states has aggravated the balancing designs of China and Russia against U.S. It is due to these developments that great power competition has returned to challenge the status quo once completely controlled by U.S. Today, balancing is being pursued by all three states against each other,

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<sup>45</sup> Crossick, "Multipolarity vs Multilateralism."

although at different levels and extents. Moreover, major states are not adopting an entirely linear approach as a means to balance the power of the contenders. Along with balancing, strategic hedging has been resorted to by great powers to balance the potential adversary with a toned down approach as well as to engage together for mutual benefits. This cooperation and multilateral outlook coupled with the conflicting postures of states may be claimed as a combination of the Liberal and Neo-Realist policies and the current system may be regarded as being neither completely Unipolar nor completely Multipolar. The current world order is thus undergoing a transformation, transitioning from a Unipolar to a Multipolar realm, while not being either in the purest of sense.

#### **2.4 Regional Multipolarity: A Transpiring Global Norm**

The current power configuration, as summed up in the previous section, incorporates characteristics of Uniplarity along with Multipolarity but another consistent theme is that U.S. remains the dominant power even today. However, while U.S. still maintains at a preponderant position at the systemic level, it is at the regional level that her primacy is seriously being contested. The next chapter will therefore focus on the Multipolar trends that identify two of the most crucial regions of today, Syria and the South China Sea, and will depict how the nature of power distribution has completely transformed in these two arenas. It is the regional politics among the great powers that is impacting largely the change in the power distribution at the systemic level. Without analysing the great power competition developing and escalating at

the regional stage, studying the emergence of the greater Multipolar World Order will prove challenging. The assertive posturing of China and Russia has greatly challenged U.S. ascendancy in many of the world regions. A greater tussle for increased influence is underway, alliances are becoming momentous and in some cases, alliance-shifts are also being observed. Nevertheless, due to increased interdependence and adoption of somewhat defensive realist attitudes, hedging policies are being pursued along with the balancing ones.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “MULTIPOLAR TRENDS AND THE GEOSTRATEGIC ARENAS: ANALYSING SYRIA AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA”

The following chapter takes the South China Sea and Syria as case studies and analyses the Multipolar trends marking both the geopolitically and geo-strategically crucial realms. The elements of Balance of Power, Alliance Shifting and Great Power Competition are specifically taken as core to the discussion and the current developments within the two regions is further evaluated.

#### 3.1 The Case of the South China Sea

Asia Pacific today appears to be the epicenter for Multipolar developments and envelopes the distinct trends that signal the emergence of a Multipolar Order in the region. The East and South China Sea have become arenas of immense importance as U.S. and China, along with other prominent states position their interests in the region's strategic power-bases and resource hubs. The South China Sea, most importantly, has remained a highly contested region since the 1960's, when the exploration of huge oil and natural gas reserves intensified states' claims regarding territorial rights over specific regions in the sea.<sup>46</sup> The Sea, since then, had been situated in a Multipolar setting but it may be argued that it is only lately that great power competition has begun to develop in an otherwise peaceful realm. The major source of this competition has been

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<sup>46</sup> Mercy A. Kuo, "The Geopolitics of Oil and Gas in the South China Sea," *The Diplomat*, Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018, <<https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/the-geopolitics-of-oil-and-gas-in-the-south-china-sea/>> (DOR: June, 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

the Chinese endeavors focused on territorial expansion and defense-buildup within the South China Sea. Consequently, these moves have instilled insecurity among the claimant states regarding Chinese ambitions and have also invited non-claimant states, such as U.S., Japan, and India; to name a few; to play their distinctive roles in the dynamics of the Multipolar competition. Responding to Chinese endeavors, numerous states have upped the operational and strategic ante and have resorted to enhancing their naval and defense bases in the region to effectively counter any regional-hegemonic ventures that China may potentially carry.

Although China reiterates she has no hegemonic schemes for the region, claims of having the right to ownership of majority of the territories marking the South China Sea makes her neighbors fearful of Chinese ambitions and direct them towards adopting more cautious policy choices to balance her. Thus, the balancing posture adopted by the states vis-à-vis China in the South China Sea affirms the structural realist view of how the international system works in a Multipolar phase and how the aspirations to change the present distribution of power are reacted to. The balance of power strategy embraced by U.S. and her East and Southeast Asian allies appears as an inherent occurrence against the rising power status of China and as an orientation; driven by a defensive realist approach; aimed towards security-maximization. Both the modes of power-gaining and alliance-making are being utilized by the states to counter the increasing Chinese entrenchment and a

countervailing alliance has been created to keep under check, the actions of China.

It may be critical here to analyze the factors that have lead China to adopt an assertive standpoint in the South China Sea and as to why her actions regarding securing, what she claims as her rightful territorial claims, have resonated so strongly in the past few years. The most suitable of all explanations is her new-found status as a major world power in the international configuration and the change in the nature of polarity that is underway. It is her economic positioning, incremented military and technological might coupled with the perception of decreased U.S. influence that has cemented her confidence to reiterate her potential as a power capable of disrupting the status quo and tilting the balance of power in her favor. But this narrative is deemed to prove faulty, at least until U.S. maintains balancing China in the South China Sea as one of her primary national interests. However, it is crucial to mention that the initial efforts to strengthen Chinese standing in the region came partly as a result of the insecurity that developed due to U.S. adopting the 'Pivot to Asia' policy. Robust relations between U.S. and East Asian countries meant increased hurdles for China to project influence in the region. This therefore drove China to heavily invest in securitization and militarization of the islands.

The securitization strategy that followed a defensive realist route has steered China in a preeminent position. Many levy the burden of Chinese success in fulfilling her aims of cementing control over much of the sea upon the delayed



response and poor deterrence of U.S. and its allies.<sup>47</sup> U.S., as mentioned in the previous chapter has earned a poor reputation in successfully guarding its geostrategic operations elsewhere. In addition, the increasing isolationist policies adopted by the Trump Administration regarding multilateral treaties and the withdrawal of U.S. from various international forums lead China into wrongfully assuming that a pronounced security and power-gaining scheme will go if not un-noticed, un-counteracted by U.S. But, a declinist view that most of the U.S. competitors carry today is definitely one that under-estimates the power that U.S. still carries. As discussed before, U.S. possesses supremacy in military domain and has a larger political and diplomatic presence around the world. U.S. is not a lost power in the Multipolar arrangement and is adopting policy orientations that safeguard her relevancy as well as that of her allies – a case that is well represented by the happenings in the South China Sea. Assessing U.S. policy towards Asia-Pacific does signal a restructuring of agenda towards the South China Sea Dispute and demonstrates. The recent developments – The Joint Freedom of Navigation Exercises by India, Japan, U.S. and Philippines in 2019, the hike in arms sale to Taiwan by U.S. and the U.S. efforts to reintroduce the South China and East China Sea Sanctions Act,<sup>48</sup> all demonstrate the gravity with which U.S. is now striving to curb Chinese aims in the region. The BOP scenario in the region is strikingly different from that at the systemic level. In the South

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<sup>47</sup> Salvador Santino, "Beyond Paradigms: Understanding the South China Sea Dispute using Analytical Eclecticism," *International Studies*, vol. 55, issue no. 3 (2018):213-237, <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0020881718794527>> ( DOR: Jun, 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

<sup>48</sup> Nirmal Ghosh, "Renewed Bid to Stop Beijing's South China Sea Plans," *The Straits Times*, last modified May, 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, < <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/renewed-us-bid-to-stop-beijings-south-china-sea-plans>> (June, 18<sup>th</sup>.2019)

China Sea it is U.S. which, with the aid of her allies, is balancing Chinese influence and her augmenting military and naval presence. However, if we interpret the dynamics of the Balance of Power at the broader global level, it is China and Russia that seem to be involved in a security and power-maximizing upsurge to come at par with the prestige U.S. holds in the Global Order.

The state of affairs in the South China Sea has emphasized a basic pillar of balance of power tradition, alliance-building, that remains crucial to counter the growing aspirations of a state or coalition focused on attaining the larger edge. U.S. seems to have attained a stable position opposite China as far as alliance-support is concerned. Robert Kaplan has for long advocated the concept of 'military Multipolarity' characterizing the South China Sea, insisting that no state involved has power ample enough to dominate the region. But it is due to the happenings that have been unfolding in the recent times that have made Kaplan believe that if not acted responsibly, the balance of power may very soon shift in China's favor completely. Recognizing the success of China's gradual encroachment, Kaplan thus suggests U.S. not to respond aggressively against the rival but instead to tactically balance Chinese influence via alliance-strengthening.<sup>49</sup> It is in a Multipolar arena that inter-state cooperation and strong alignments result in monumental strategic and political gains and the side able to gain the assistance of concerned states benefits in the overall balancing equation. Chinese actions did definitely tilt the status quo in her favor but that lasted only a

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<sup>49</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "How President Trump is Helping Win in the South China Sea," The Washington Post, last modified Oct, 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018, < [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/10/09/how-president-trump-is-helping-beijing-win-in-the-south-china-sea/?utm\\_term=.c6c99907e27b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/10/09/how-president-trump-is-helping-beijing-win-in-the-south-china-sea/?utm_term=.c6c99907e27b).> (June, 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019)

short while as a balancing strategy ensued from the opposite front. Today, naming the dominating side in the South China Sea power-equation might be a premature analysis of the contemporary developments and the best way to examine the regional nuances is by using a balance of power approach, where Chinese power-seeking aspirations are successfully being restricted by the East Asian states with an active backing from the U.S. Dissecting the current hegemonic structure prevailing in the South China Sea may provide us with an indication that the two core ideas incasing hegemony – greater power base and the exercise of leadership,<sup>50</sup> are differently concentrated between the states of U.S. and China. China holds control of a vast majority of the South China Sea region and has expanded its territorial presence via the creation of multiple artificial islands, each in turn secured by a network of coordinated military and naval presence. U.S., however, has control of the leadership strings in the arena. The coalition that appeared to have been negatively affected by the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership is cooperating again. Nevertheless, alliance reliability remains crucial for the future of the power balance in the region. The impact an alliance-shifting scenario may levy on the distribution of power within the South China Sea became explicit when Philippines, under President Rodorigo Duterte, sided with China, breaking the long-term alliance she had with U.S. The years characterizing the shift aggravated Chinese defense-strengthening operations and aided the country to promote its dominance even further. The cleavage in an alliance thus matters significantly in a region marking Multipolarity and may

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<sup>50</sup> Brian Schmidt, "Hegemony: A Conceptual and Theoretical Analyses," DOC Research Institute, last modified Aug, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018, < <https://doc-research.org/2018/08/hegemony-conceptual-theoretical-analysis/>> (April, 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

possess the capability to shift the balance of power, providing one entity the ability to dominate others. But eventually the breaking of the China-Philippines alliance over the issue of China endangering the latter's territorial sovereignty ensured a viable counter-China coalition that is focused on balancing, if not surpassing, Chinese power and influence in the South China Sea.<sup>51</sup> However, ruling out the possibility of another alliance shift in the near future may account as a limiting viewpoint. The inclusion of ASEAN states into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) framework may be interpreted as one of the very initial steps China may use to safeguard her position and posture in the region. The alliance, if strengthened, may aid China in translating an economic project into one of strategic nature. Once the ASEAN states commit themselves to the alliance, it will become taxing for them to choose sides between U.S. and China regarding the contestation within the South China Sea. But if needed, the states would pick a side not on ideological basis but on the basis of guarding their national interests, as Philippines did, portraying the fluidity of alliance commitment in a Multipolar setting.

Russian involvement in the South China Sea presents a typical case of regional hedging. Though, the major power lacks material power in the region, her influence is reckoned to prove substantial in affecting the balance of power. Russia, interestingly, is adopting a combination of mechanisms in the South China Sea - On one hand, she is balancing U.S. influence by aligning with China but on the other she is carefully adopting a policy of hedging as its regional

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<sup>51</sup> Mark Manantan, "It's Time for A New Philippines Strategy towards China," *The Diplomat*, last modified April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019, < <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/its-time-for-a-new-philippine-strategy-toward-china/> > (DOR: June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019)

agenda vis-à-vis China. While engaging with China Russia simultaneously balances her by striking equilibrium between China and Vietnam, the rivals in the dispute.<sup>52</sup> Russia's policy of aligning with China in balancing American influence at the systemic level while keeping a balance between Vietnam and China at the regional level proves how the balance of power works in an international arena where interdependence remains crucial. When considering Russia, a future change in the hedging policy which it currently peruses regionally, may prove as a strong force to favor substantially one party over the other (Russia over the East Asian nation(s) or vice versa). Russia's policy tilt will come probably as a result of the balance of power drastically shifting in favor of any one of the entities.

### 3.2 The Case of Syria

Syria presents another relevant case of great power competition and has emerged as a prominent Multipolar theatre, where numerous states are contesting for greater influence. In Syria, the great power contestation developed mainly between U.S. and Russia and their respective allies, each bloc seeking security-maximization and power-incrementing schemes. Enclosing a Multipolar nature, the region witnessed profound balancing of power and the milieu that thereby followed was identified with a constant struggle for greater dominance. Unlike the South China Sea; where no rival side(s) has yet developed explicit dominance; the current underpinnings of the Syrian case amply suggest that Russia and its allies

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<sup>52</sup> Alexander Korolev, "Russia in the South China Sea: Balancing and Hedging," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 15, issue no. 2 (April, 2019): 263-282, <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323201523\\_Russia\\_in\\_the\\_South\\_China\\_Sea\\_Balancing\\_and\\_Hedging1](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323201523_Russia_in_the_South_China_Sea_Balancing_and_Hedging1)> (DOR: June, 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

have outplayed the rebels and their supporters. The hegemonic structure characterizing the nature of polarity in Syria in the current times, may therefore suggest Russia; with the aid of her allies; to have created; what may be regarded as; near-hegemony. The balance of power that remained intact for much of the Syrian War was one where the two opposing alliances (Russia, Iran and Assad regime v/s U.S., Turkey and the rebel forces) retained a somewhat equal footing in the regional dynamics. The balancing strategy implemented by both camps insured that no power rose above the other. But a combination of the structural underpinnings and regional scenarios caused disruption in the distribution of power within Syria. The shift lent the Russian-led bloc enhanced power status and a greater authority to shape the regional politics. The relative decline of U.S. has been predominantly depicted with how the realities in the Syrian conflict have unfolded. In addition, with rebels defeated and now actually looking for opportunities to come under the ambit of the state led by Assad's regime, U.S. and Turkey find it even harder to continue exerting their control and thus a new approach to deal with greater strength of rival powers requires to be formulated.<sup>53</sup> The primacy gained by Russia and her counterparts does not in any manner seize the prospects of a renewed power balancing within Syria. Though many believe that the announcement of U.S. withdrawal from Syria is a manifestation and confirmation of her defeat,<sup>54</sup> the U.S. role in the state and beyond has not yet diminished. U.S. leadership has unequivocally stated that they will maintain some

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Hassan Hassan, "Syria: Assad has decisively Won his Brutal Battle," The Guardian, last modified Dec, 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/30/syria-year-cemented-assad-victory-trump-us-troops>> (DOR: June, 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

forces in Syria even after the withdrawal in order to keep the Iranian ambitions under check. This decision by U.S. may also be interpreted as one targeted at continuing balancing Russia's power and re-creating a status quo with an amplified U.S. influence. Such a policy directive would not be counted as a new occurrence for the regional and international arrangement. In the current Multipolar Syrian realm; even though the relative influences of states vary; U.S. cannot afford the development of a Russian regional hegemony. Also, with China now focused in the reconstruction of the Syrian state, U.S. insecurity has aggravated as the state considers a non-Western domination of the region a major national security challenge.<sup>55</sup>

Although in a weaker position, Turkey still maintains the capacity to alter the Syria's balance of power. The state possesses the potential to play a decisive role in determining the success of the peace settlement in Syria. If Turkey continues to fund some factions of the rebel forces as well as sustains its offensive against the Kurds and YPG, instability in Syria is destined to only aggravate. The recent Russia-Turkey rapprochement may suitably be analysed as a tactic of balancing that Turkey is perusing via adopting a hedging policy. By engaging but simultaneously balancing Russia, Turkey will be able to ensure that its influence in the region sustains. Russia being the greater power with geostrategic goals in the region wants peace to return to Syria and is thus seeking an alliance with Turkey in order to ensure stability. Along with presenting a case for hedging, the newfound cooperation between Turkey and Russia signals the manifestation of a

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<sup>55</sup> Rajesh Kumar, "Will Great-Power Conflict Return?" Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, last modified April, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018, < <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/great-power-conflict-rkumar-060418>.> (May, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

critical aspect intrinsic to Multipolar arenas – the aspect of alliance-sifting. The nature of the power configuration was also significantly amended due to the souring of relations between Turkey and U.S. in the recent times. The declining U.S. influence in the region, Turkey’s S-400 Missile Deal with Russia and the matter of U.S. providing support to the Kurdish militants became the basic factors of divergence between the once tight-knit allies. Where the resultant alliance shift today seems to benefit Turkey, it also further strengthens Russian posture as a dominating entity. But the prospects of Russian hegemony in the region are overshadowed by the inclusion of various other power centers, mainly China and India, who are equally interested to play their part in the reconstruction of the war-torn country as well as to cement relations with the state. Most prominent; for the future dynamics of Syria and the region; of the two states is China which, regardless of being a new player, is a candidate potent enough to render huge impacts on how the regional balance is fashioned. China’s assistance in reconstruction of Syria is assumed to prove as a win-win situation for the state. Firstly, China will be able expand her trade and transportation activities; especially those under the BRI project; in addition to fulfilling her long-sought goal of developing easier connections with the Eastern and Western European nations.<sup>56</sup> Secondly, China will be capable of maintaining a balance of power in the region, especially restricting the Russian preponderance. If taken in context, the hedging scenario may be analyzed as the central approach adopted by China,

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<sup>56</sup> Chloe Cornish and Archie Zhang, “Lebanese Port Eyes China it sells itself as the Hub for Syria,” *Financial Times*, last modified Jan, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019, <<https://www.ft.com/content/386b3fd2-01db-11e9-99df-6183d3002ee1>> (DOR: June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019)



making her policy similar to that of Turkey. China, by cooperating with Russia in Syria will develop a feasible engagement with the state, but will concurrently take up the role of a balancer in the region.

Concluding, the relations of power examined in both the regions of South China Sea and Syria indicate the presence of a Multipolar-natured configuration where numerous centers of power are ensuing agendas and policies based on the doctrine of the BOP. Alliances remain vital for upholding the current status quo and the slightest of changes in the foreign policy alignment by a state(s) is set to depict considerable impacts on the overall Multipolar power distribution. The element of major power competition is apparent in both the cases and China, Russia and U.S. resonate as common forces in these Multipolar arenas. As mentioned in the previous chapter, no distinct bandwagoning scheme is evident and the balance of power strategy is revolving basically around the balancing rather than bandwagoning agenda. Hedging is another dominant policy orientation that states are perusing to strike a balance at the regional level while still maintaining cooperation and a multilateral approach. Russia, especially, is abiding by the norms of regional hedging against China in both Syria and the South China Sea. While a coherent balancing strategy is being adopted by China and Russia at the systemic level to dilute U.S. power concentration, U.S. too is engaging in balancing tactics against both the states in regions they have developed or are close to developing dominancy. The prevalent contestation though concerning has not yet entered into a domain that may prove catastrophic for either one or for all the concerned major powers. However, Multipolar theatres often remain open

to rivalries and instability. How the future of these geostrategic realms is shaped will depend on how far states flex their muscles to achieve security and power. The currently defensive postures may shift and states may adopt offensive realist agendas, risking the stability of the current system.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “MULTIPOLAR SHIFT: ANALYSING THE FUTURE PROSPECTS”

The chapter will be focused on the premise of assessing the future developments that may characterize the Multipolar order. The probability of war will be discussed along with the probability of peace sustenance. In addition, the stability-instability debate will follow.

#### **4.1 The Prospects of War and Peace**

The structural changes in the international system generate deep impacts on the functioning of international relations. The change in the distribution of power therefore has vast consequences for the relations among states. To an extent, it plays a significant role in determining if cooperation would curb the aspirations of conflict or whether conflict would overwhelm cooperative notions. In a world that is shifting towards Multipolar arrangement, it sparks much interest to analyze which discourse will dominantly identify the politics of the future order. Taking a historical comparative approach it becomes clear that most Multipolar structures have not been able to maintain peace or avoid conflicts. Both the World Wars occurred while a Multipolar order identified the systemic arena and it is the same order that has characterized large-scale direct wars between many other major powers in the past. Scholars of international relations view Multipolarity's impact on the prospects of war and peace differently. Few scholars such as Hedley Bull, claimed Multipolarity as a peace-promoting order. They base their claim on the perspective that increased power sharing and higher diffusion of power lead to

stronger cooperation incentives among nations. Furthermore, for them the absence of a hegemon; unlike that in a Unipolar setting; assures that no imbalance of power persists and that peace is ensured. This narrative, though desired, stands in opposition to the *realpolitik* norms. Neorealists, like Paul Kennedy note Unipolarity to be the most peaceful, due to the stabilizing role played by the hegemon and the states that help the hegemon to sustain its predominance. Other Neorealists, such as Kenneth Waltz, side with Bipolar systems as best one's at avoiding conflicts.<sup>57</sup> They deem Multipolar orders as weak at organizing world peace due to a constant state of competition among major powers. Thus, conflicts and wars in the future Multipolar order would not come as a surprise. An arrangement where major states are preoccupied with gaining power to balance the rival state, wars come as an inevitable consequence.

Today, numerous regions like Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific etc are considered theatres of upcoming wars between the great powers. With uncertainty developing over the extent to which China and Russia will extend their efforts to gain power, the possibility of war initiation by the entities to secure their interests may be predictable. With alliance centrality on rise and alliance shifts sighted, one can estimate the incentives for war to be higher than those for peace. But a one-dimensional approach to the prospects will be unfair to the developments that have marked the international system for many decades. The presence of nuclear weapons and the extent of interconnectedness present in the state system have compelled thinkers to revise their viewpoints. If states are seen

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<sup>57</sup> Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, "Is the World Ready for Cooperative Multipolarity," *Rising Powers Quarterly*, vol. 2, Issue. 2 (2017): 15-29.

as responsible actors focused on avoiding nuclear devastation, then cooperation may be taken at the centre of relations. The multilateral trade connections and the interdependence will further guide major powers to adopt restrained policy postures as to not threaten the system to the limit of risking a war. Where the nuclear element will mitigate the scope of war, it will definitely not eliminate the possibility of conflicts altogether and some scholars even believe nuclear weapons in a multipolar system of future will prove destructive rather than restrict state actions. But following a largely prevalent viewpoint, the great power conflicts in a nuclear world may follow a similar path of the bipolar system - that of major states avoiding direct confrontation and instead using state and non-state actors as proxies.

The role played by America and the policies adopted by the state will prove decisive in mapping out the forecasts of whether the system will experience a peaceful milieu or will conflict dominate. How U.S. manages the rise of Russia and China will affect largely the way the international structure is shaped. It therefore is vital for America to not fall into the 'Thucydides Trap' and wage wars on the rival state(s) out of fear of loss of primacy.<sup>58</sup> A cautious and calculated response to the actions of the two rising states that will assist in maintaining peace in the global system. On the contrary, hasty and proactive ventures by America may lead to further tensions. Conflicts may be restricted in today's environment where America has still has material superiority. As mentioned earlier, the rising states are adopting what seem like balancing strategies and America too is

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<sup>58</sup> Leon Whyte, "The Real Thucydides' Trap," *The Diplomat*, last modified May, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <<https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/the-real-thucydides-trap/>> (DOR: May, 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

counterbalancing them in regions where they are growing stronger day by day. But in the future, if Russia and China are able to lessen the power gap that exists between them, they may adopt bandwagoning postures or certain aggressive policies to advance their interests. In such a situation, conflicts among states will become unstoppable, despite all the economic integration and interdependence. It thus depends on what decisions and tolls the major states apply to improve their positions in the multipolar arrangement and how they are responded to by others. Peace-making in the multipolar arrangement will thus be a mutual choice as well as a combined effort. U.S., will thus have to make what may be termed as ‘grand bargains’ to accommodate these powers and their allies into the power structure.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the rising states will also have to refrain from pursuing offensive realist strategies based entirely on power-maximization and instead adopt actions that may prove mutually beneficial.

#### **4.2 The Prospects of Stability and Instability**

Along with the discussion of war and peace, it is also important to analyse the extent of stability and instability the future Multipolar order will carry. Instability of the international system is detrimental to all those who reside in it and it therefore is vital to inquire if the transpiring system will move state system to heightened instability levels and what could be done to avoid such an occurrence. When examining stability of systems based on power configurations, the many different meanings that stability may entail make the analysis problematic. Stability can mean decreased number of major wars, higher chances regarding

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<sup>59</sup> Michael Mazarr and Hal Brands, “Navigating Great Power Rivalry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” War on the Rocks, last modified April, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017, <<https://warontherocks.com/2017/04/navigating-great-power-rivalry-in-the-21st-century/>> (DOR: Jun, 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

sustenance of peace, the presence of strong allies or the ability to uphold a sustainable order and status quo.<sup>60</sup> If seen in the context of upholding a balance of power, then the future Multipolar world may be considered as being relatively stable. Kenneth Waltz deems Unipolar world as highly unstable for the mere reason that the imbalance of power at a certain point is destined to give rise to states acting to develop balance between their strengths and the strengths of the Unipole.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the Unipolar world is not sustainable and balancing is the end result. However, Multipolar structures due to the diffusion of powers is considered more stable and attempts directed to disrupt the Multipolar status quo are met with profound resistance by all the major stakeholders. Furthermore, the prospects of instability in the future Multipolar order are somewhat lessened by the fact that the rising Chinese and Russian powers; as previously mentioned; are not challenging the many essentialities that the Western Order carries. Instability is highly aggravated in those systems where rising powers are determined to replace the previously prevalent institutions and structures with that of their own. If seen in the context of strong alliances, the future Multipolar world may be analysed as not carrying much stability as the reliability of allies in a Multipolar arrangement tends to be far weaker than in other arrangements. Directed by their interest more than any other aspect, states thus may shift their allegiance more easily towards another major power, giving rise to uncertainty. ASEAN's inclusion in the BRI project with China may signal a similar happening. It

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<sup>60</sup> Jeff Goodson, "The line between Conflict and Stability in Great Power Competition," Stratfor, last modified April, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019, <<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/line-between-conflict-and-stability-great-power-competition>> (DOR: Jun, 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

<sup>61</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, "Imitations of Multipolarity," in *The New World Order: Contrasting Theories*, ed. Birthe Hansen and Bertel Heurlin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 1-17.

therefore becomes crucial for the major powers to provide immense incentives to the allied states in order to keep their commitments loyal in a Multipolar configuration.

The stability of Multipolar order of the future will rely highly on how the major actors design their grand strategies and to what limits do they flex their muscle to obtain their national interests and goals. The adoption of offensive policies will surely result in wars; of what nature is a different debate altogether; and distort peace. Continued competition and tensions will prevail in the major geopolitical arenas. This scenario will not let peace be realized but they will also not be wars - they will however be measures short of war. But the basic instability will arise when augmented competition between U.S., China and Russia will turn into wars no contending power will be willing to lose.

The analysis of prospects that the Multipolar Order characterized by U.S., China and Russia as the great powers will contain is an assessment based on the discussions of scholars and on the previous power configurations that have identified the international realm. Predicting patterns and state actions in international relations may many a times prove premature as the state system is constantly undergoing new developments. However, when taken in the context of war and peace, the future Multipolar order may provide partly a bleak picture. Multipolar systems have historically been more war-prone and very few instances of sustained peace have been witnessed. Nevertheless, the presence of nuclear weapons and the high level of interdependence present among states today may lead to the avoidance of brutal wars in the long run. Also, stability of the structure



is differently conceived owing to what measure of stability one is interested in. if it is the protection of the status quo, Multipolar orders are seen as stable. While if the subject matter under observation is peace and alliance reliability, instability often is the case. But nonetheless, the nature of the Multipolar world and the nuances that it carries will be structured on the state actions, perceptions, interests and the then international environment. 7

## CONCLUSION

The study has focused upon the nature of power distribution that exists in the international structure today and the world order that is currently existent. The world order of today appears as an amalgamation of the post Cold-War Unipolar structure as well as has elements particular to a Multipolar world order. Where U.S. supremacy and U.S.-led systems prevail as they did in the Unipolar order, we today are also witnessing Multipolar trends of Balance of Power, Great Power Competition, Alliance-Centrality and Alliance-Shifting scenarios. Russia and China are balancing U.S. dominantly at the system level while U.S. is containing their influence in various crucial world regions. Alliances have become important in the great power confrontation that is underway, like it is in any Mutipolar order. Alliance reliability is being challenged by the rival great powers and some alliance shifting occurrences have already been witnessed. All the three major states are adopting internal and external balancing tactics to secure their positions in the world order. Power-gaining and alliance-making have been adopted as key components in the balancing of power at both regional and systemic levels. It is at the regional level that the policy of hedging is widely being pursued by major powers, primarily due to the interconnected nature the contemporary world possess. Therefore, along with the Neo-Realism driven actions, the liberal approach of multilateralism is being supported by states, especially by China and Russia.

The current underpinnings are indicating the culmination of a future Multipolar order, where the power gap between U.S. and the two great powers may be

lessened. Such a Multipolar system will be characterized with higher prospects of war as interest-driven policies, balancing actions, alliance-unreliability or the mere protection of one ally from the rival may involve the great powers into a conflict. In Multipolar orders, where great powers have more or less equal strength, competition may transform into conflict with the slightest of disturbances. Therefore, the sustenance of peace in future will be highly dependent on the policies that major states adopt and how they keep their alliances intact. The future Multipolar order, which may be predicted to be stable in the sense of preserving a Balance of Power between the system balancers, is deemed to have instability as a major characteristic in terms of wars, alliance shifts and the constant power struggle and competition among the great powers. The responsibility of ensuring stability, in terms of avoiding turbulence, will therefore rest on the shoulders of the nations competing for higher positions in the international hierarchy. An approach based on interdependence, liberal internationalism and multilateralism may well assist to tame down any offensive aims the major states may carry in the future.

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