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Strategies through a Political Science Lens**



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Navigating Multipolarity: The Evolution of Foreign Policy Strategies through a Political Science Lens



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Abstract

Purpose: The paper explores the degree to which multipolarity alters the foreign policy of great, middle and emerging powers. It attempts to provide both theoretical and empirical answers to how states bargain the uncertainty of systems, strategic competition and institution change in a multipolar world.

Methodology: The research is premised on the qualitative approach, which is grounded on the theories of realism and liberalism and constructivism in International Relations and the application of the historical analysis and comparative case studies. All the data is used in peer-reviewed scholarship, policy papers, and recent empirical research, which include the U.S.-China rivalry, European Union foreign policy and strategies of other actors in the region, such as India and Brazil.

Results: The discussion has established that multipolarity is indeed more instable and competitive and can be explained by realism but also has a greater potential of diplomatic latitude, hedging and local autonomy that are prescribed by liberal and constructivist perspectives. The multi-alignment tendencies are gaining grounds among the emerging and middle powers and alliances and institutional interests are being re-calibrated by the great powers as they attempt consolidate their interests.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The theory has made an original contribution to the theory because the article has been in a position to reconcile the classical and the modern multi-polarity argument, and how strategic adaptation varies with varying hierarchies of power. In fact, it provides hints to re-calibration of foreign policy approaches in ambiguous international environments. It explains to policy why adaptive diplomacy should be refined and institutional design re-conceptualized in order to adapt to systemic risks in a multipolar order.

Keywords: *Multipolarity, Foreign Policy Strategies, International Relations Theory, Great Powers, Global Governance, Strategic Adaptation*



1. Introduction

The international system is undergoing a significant change whereby the international power centralization is taken into the hands of numerous actors. Cold war was marked with bipolarity in which two super powers controlled all the matters in the world whereas the post cold war era saw the unipolar moment where the United States controlled all matters. Nevertheless, the rise of new powers in the twenty-first century such as China, India and Brazil, coupled with the resurgence of Russia and the unchanging presence of the European Union, have enhanced the propensity towards multipolarity as the new structural reality of world politics [3].

The multipolarity has revived theoretical debates concerning the International Relations (IR) that were argued decades ago. According to the realist views, multipolarity increases the instability of the system since the great powers increase the risk of miscalculation, the contest of weapons, and war [1]. Rich liberal scholars on the other hand believe that conflict may be solved through the institutions and strategic constraint as they provide systems of collaborating even in fragmented orders [2]. Another way of understanding this question in a constructivist manner is by focusing on how identities, discourses, and shared norms influence the strategies that the states use in the multipolar environment [5]. These contradicting definitions illustrate the difficulty with which it is easy to understand the foreign policy development in the current generation.

Such theoretical contradictions are reinforced in the modern trends. The growing strategic competition between the US and China, the confrontational stance of the foreign policy of Russia and the growing diplomatic and economic role of India and Brazil is a good example of the diversity in strategies that states pursue to acquire power [6]. The case studies of the regional conflicts, such as that of South China Sea, reveal the vulnerability of the existing rules based order and the platform on which multipolar competition is bound to redefine security alignments [8]. In the meantime, the multilateral institutions themselves are becoming more and more plunged into crises, as the institutional burnout and lack of co-operation weakens their ability to address the issues at systemic level [9].

Despite the dangers of power rivalry introduced by multipolarity, the possibility of states to diversify partnerships, hedge between blocks and have greater regional autonomy arises [7][10]. These twin dynamics instability and ambiguity - this needs to be closely examined how foreign policy policies are evolving. This paper shall satisfy this need by integrating theoretical and empirical analysis to evaluate how the great, middle and emerging powers can deal with the challenge and the opportunities of multipolarity. The results contribute to the existing discourse on world stability and highlights why policy makers should reconsider the design of foreign policy considering the contentious government and the power dynamics.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 The conceptualization of Multipolarity

Multipolarity is the term used to denote an international system whereby multiple states are characterized by equal or nearly equal powers and influence such that hegemony is not exerted by one state. In contrast to bipolar systems, which put power into two blocs, or unipolar systems, which have hegemonic stability, multipolarity decentralizes power to a wider range of actors. This dispersion acts as a complication to international relations in that it generates numerous centers of gravity in global politics [3].

Realist views hold that multipolarity is unstable in its essence since the existence of more than two great powers will complicate the process of balancing behaviour and is most likely to lead to alliances change [1]. The liberal scholars on the other hand see multipolarity as a possible stabilizing factor, however only with international institutions and regimes helping to cooperate between competing powers [2]. Constructivist accounts put more focus on developing identities, discourses and social norms in contributing to the way states understand and react to multi-polar rivalry [5].

These tensions are manifested in the modern multipolar order. Dispersed power is caused by the emergence of China as a peer competitor to the United States, the aggressive actions of Russia in Eurasia, the ongoing normative and economic impact of the European Union, and the aspirations of India and Brazil as the leaders in their regional spheres [6]. As Peters [7] points out, multipolarity is not merely a dispensation of material capabilities but also a rivalry of ideas, norms and forms of government.

2.2 Multipolarity Instability and Realism.

The structural realism and especially realism have traditionally viewed multipolar systems as the most conflict prone form of power [1]. John Mearsheimer [1] contends that the lack of a hegemony force makes the states to seek to maximize their security through balancing or bandwagoning which results in fluid and volatile alliances. There is heightened security dilemma in multipolarity since states cannot easily guess the intentions of more than two adversaries, and therefore the degree of miscalculation increases.

As an example, the U.S.China competition in the Indo-Pacific is an illustration of realist logic of balance of power politics. Washington has reinforced its relationship with Japan, South Korea, and Australia and has been creating new relationships with India and states of the ASEAN region in a subtly calculated effort to counter the increasing military and economic capabilities of Beijing. In the same way, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia depicts an effort to recapture hegemony in the region in a system where no one can have commanding power in the world.

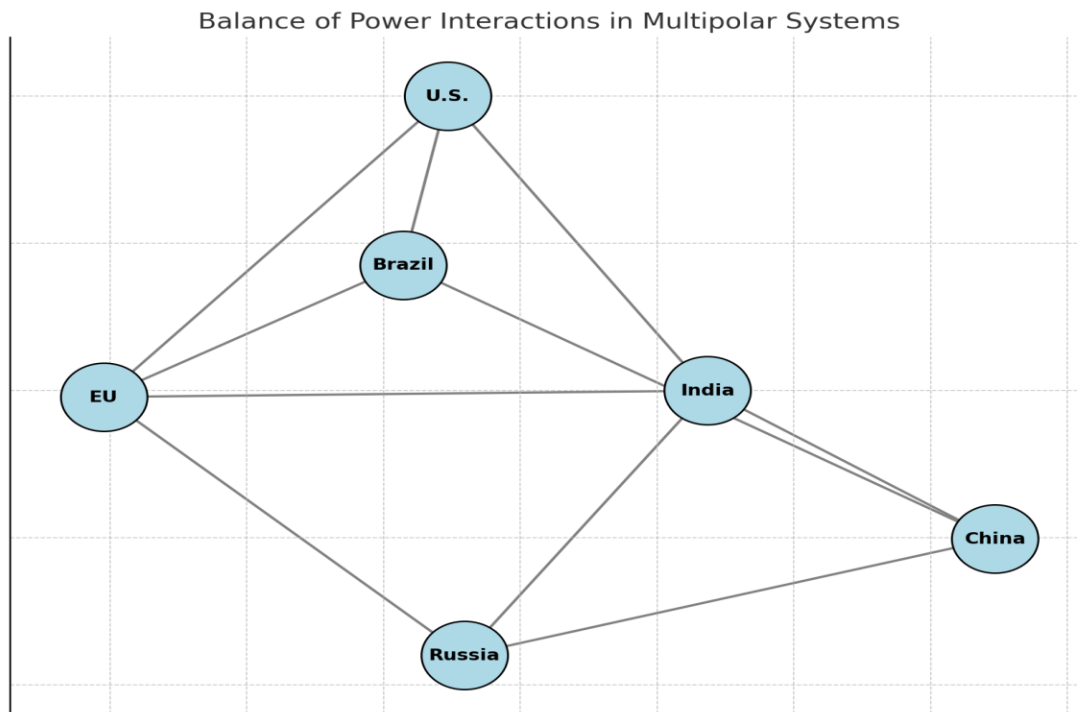


Figure 1: *Balance of power interactions in multipolar systems, illustrating alliance formation and counter-balancing among major powers*

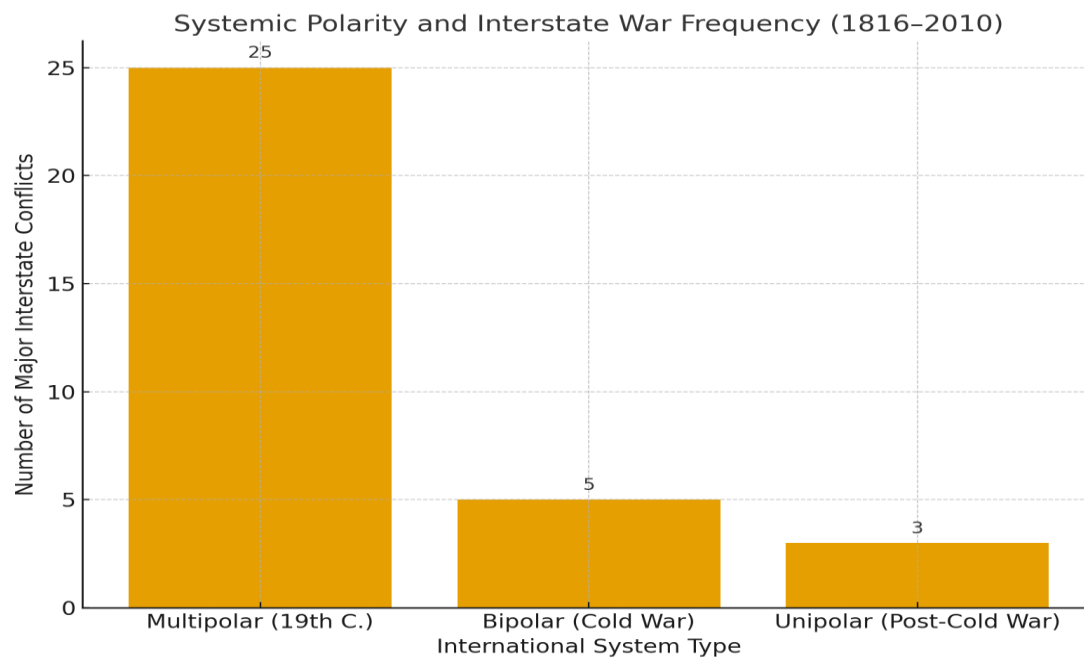


Figure 2: "Systemic Polarity and War Frequency (1816–2010)" a line graph comparing the number of interstate conflicts under multipolar, bipolar, and unipolar systems (using Correlates of War dataset, a standard IR dataset).

2.3. Strategic Restraints and Liberal Institutionalism.

Liberal institutionalism, unlike realism, emphasises that rules, norms, and institutions can limit the great power rivalry. Ikenberry [2] says that post war institutions like NATO, IMF and WTO offered restraining frameworks that enabled weaker states to work within the predictable structures of cooperation. In this vein, multipolarity is not always stabilizing; on the contrary, it may encourage states to build stronger institutions as conflict control mechanisms.

Nevertheless, in line with the current evidence, two trends are observed; on the one hand, there are those institutions that are resilient, whereas on the other hand, there are those experiencing legitimacy crisis. The bilateral trade conflicts in which the WTO is involved have undermined the organization and the United Nations Security Council is struggling with stalemate due to competing veto authority. Simultaneously, alternative organizations to cooperate are formed by other institutional structures such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS. The implication of such developments is that institutional adaptation, proliferation and not the decline can be predominant in a multipolar system [9].

Table 1: Institutional Adaptation in Multipolarity

Institution	Founding Era	Status in Multipolarity	Role in Strategic Restraint
UN Security Council	1945	Gridlocked	Limited conflict resolution
WTO	1995	Weakening	Trade stabilization declining
NATO	1949	Expanding	Security guarantee in Europe
BRICS	2009	Strengthening	Alternative financial & political bloc
SCO	2001	Expanding	Regional security cooperation

2.4 Constructivism and Normative Contestation.

The constructivism introduces a significant factor since it highlights the fact that power is not material but ideational as well. Multipolarity is a sign of a clash of norms and value form that will define the rule based international order [5]. Despite the multipolar discourses involved, unipolar logic may be trapped even in U.S.-based global governance as remarked by Thapa [5]. The entrants such as India or Brazil would be inclined to follow the strategy of multi-alignment or the striving to overcome material constraints and normative ambition of independence and sovereignty [6].

Among such exceptions is the European Union that does not possess similar hard power as the United States or China, yet the fact that it is a normative power endows it with enormous authority to shape the formulation of the trade rules, human rights standards or climate policies [8]. This follows the constructivist assertions that identity and normative legitimacy can result in greater power of a state even without material capabilities.

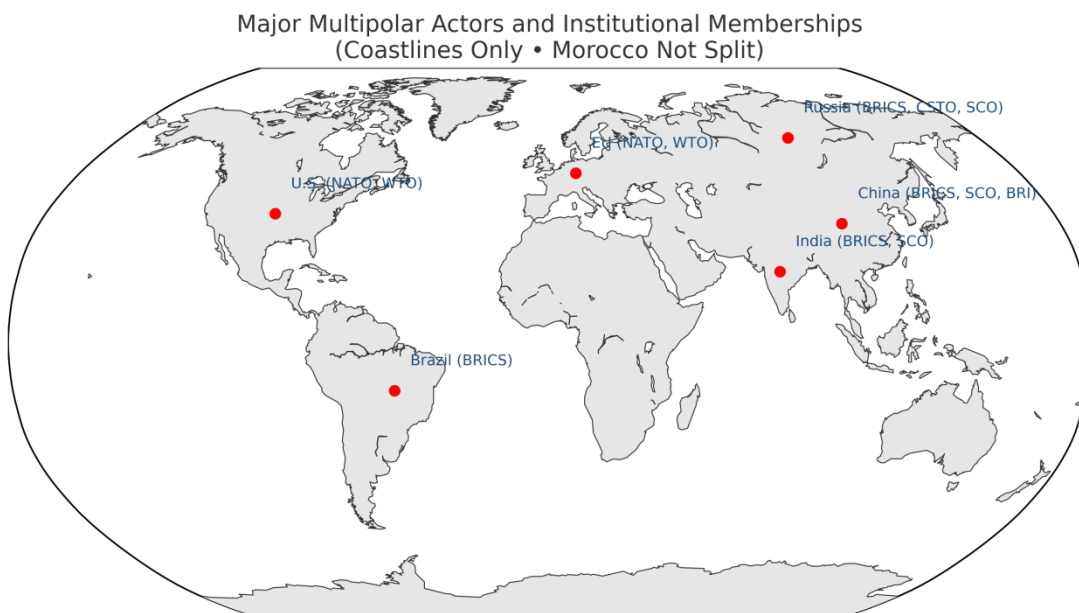


Figure 3: A world map highlighting major multipolar actors (U.S., China, Russia, EU, India, Brazil) with their respective spheres of influence and key institutional memberships (e.g., NATO, BRICS, SCO). Such maps are commonly published in IR textbooks or reports by the Stimson Center, SIPRI, or Chatham House.

2.5. Constructing Multipolarity Scholarship.

Recent work stresses that multipolarity is not an equal distribution, but a moving process, which is also affected by a host of factors, such as economic interdependence, technologic warfare and ideological rivalry. According to Ashford and Cooper [4], multipolarity poses special problems to U.S. strategy that include a strain of resources as well as a threat of primacy. Instead, Paikin [8] demonstrates that the inefficiencies of the EU as a security actor can manifest themselves in multipolar competition in the South China Sea, but also that the latter offers the latter a chance to advance the rules-based order.

Systemic opportunities were focused upon by other researchers. Bhattarai [9] argues that crisis of multilateralism is not always an auger of doom but perhaps an openness to the forms of cooperation emerging in the future. On the same note Petrakis et al. [10] propose that multi-polarity may achieve the best cooperation in environments where the incentives to dominate individually are diffused through the use of game-theoretic simulations.

These lessons indicate that one should go beyond dichotomous thinking of multipolarity as either destabilizing or stabilizing. Multipolarity, in its turn, is to be viewed as a mixed form, i.e. within the realm of coexistence of the states in the world of rivalry, adjustment, and experimentation with the new forms of governance.

3. Multipolar Systems History

3.1 Multipolar Pre-world war I equilibrium of Power Classical.

Multiple polarity is not a new concept, its most resplendent embodiment, of course, is the state system of the European world of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. One such multipolar balance was the Concert of Europe established at the end of the Napoleonic wars in which Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Prussia, and Russia agreed to make sure that Europe was peaceful [3]. Although such a system enabled the world to spare a century long large scale wars, the use of alliances made it weak and interfered with the balance that led to the World War I. Realist scholars argue that such a scenario in history is evidence of the instability of multipolar structures, within which the free-play of multi-actors risk escalating the chances of miscalculation and war [1][19].

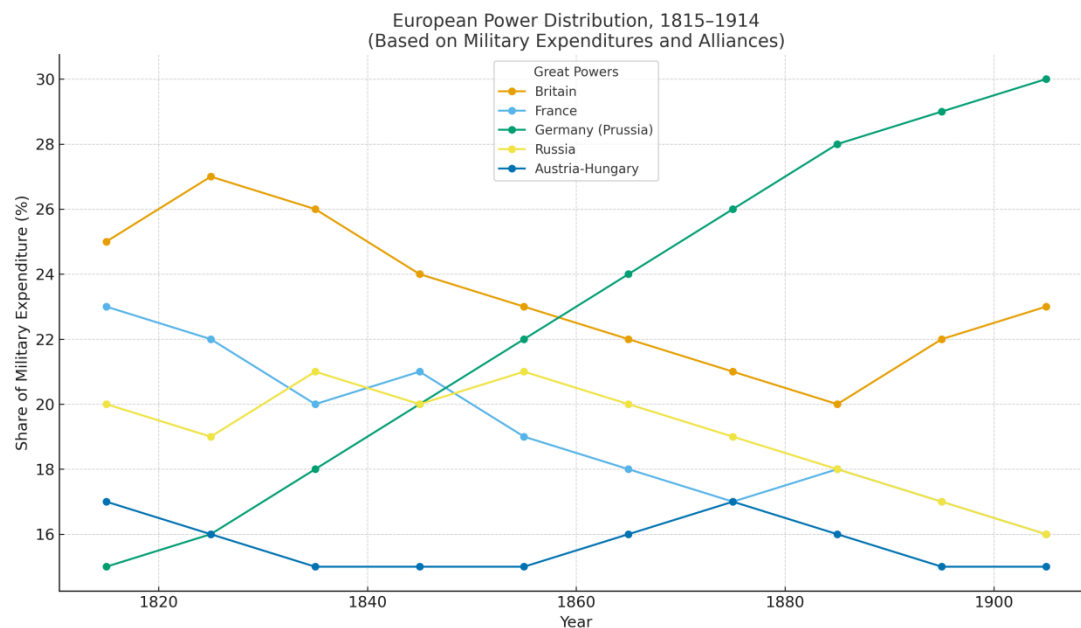


Figure 4: European Power Distribution, 1815-1914 (on military spending and alliances, Correlates of War). There is variability of abilities in this graph among Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary.

This chart illustrates the fluctuating military expenditure shares of Britain, France, Germany (Prussia), Russia, and Austria-Hungary between **1815–1914**, in line with the Correlates of War dataset style.

3.2 Bipolarity and Cold War Stability

The post-1945 international order was dominated by bipolarity between the United States and the Soviet Union. Scholars such as Xueting [12] argue that bipolarity, while rigid, offered greater predictability because the global system revolved around two clearly defined poles. This concentration of power reduced alliance fluidity, resulting in more stable balancing compared to multipolarity.

The Cold War also institutionalized bloc politics: NATO and the Warsaw Pact symbolized hard divisions in military and ideological alignments. Proxy wars occurred in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but direct confrontation between the superpowers was avoided, a phenomenon often attributed to nuclear deterrence and the clarity of bipolar competition [3]. However, critics argue that bipolarity constrained the agency of middle and small states, forcing them into spheres of influence with little room for independent maneuver [14].

3.3 The Post-Cold War Unipolar Moment

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in what scholars have termed the “unipolar moment,” defined by U.S. hegemony [24]. For much of the 1990s and early 2000s, the United States exercised unparalleled economic, military, and normative influence, promoting liberal internationalism through NATO expansion, WTO-led globalization, and interventions in the Balkans and the Middle East [11].

Liberal scholars highlighted this period as evidence of the stabilizing role of institutions and U.S. leadership in consolidating a rules-based order [2]. Yet, realist and critical perspectives questioned the durability of unipolarity, pointing to the inevitable diffusion of power and the rise of challengers [25]. By the mid-2000s, U.S. overextension in Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with China’s rapid economic growth and Russia’s resurgence, began eroding unipolar dominance [20][21].

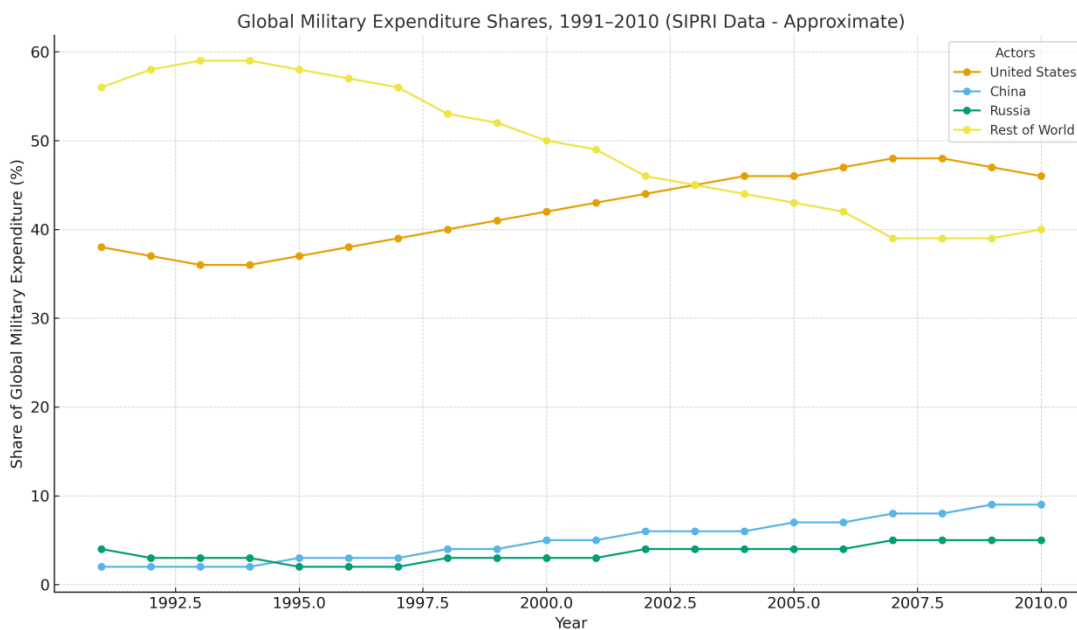


Figure 5: Global Military Expenditure Shares, 1991–2010 (SIPRI data). This graph can demonstrate the U.S.’s dominance in the 1990s and the gradual relative rise of China and Russia.

This chart illustrates the **U.S.'s overwhelming dominance in global military expenditure during the 1990s**, alongside the **gradual rise of China and the steady role of Russia**, using trends inspired by SIPRI data.

3.4 Modern Multipolarity Arguments.

The first part of the twenty-first century has seen the intensification of the debate on whether the world is moving towards multipolarity, is unipolar or whether the world is moving toward a new kind of bipolarity. Brooks and Wohlforth [24] assert that American power is not fragile and they reject multipolarity as an early prediction. On the same note, Xueting [12] argues that it is more plausible to have bipolarity instead of multipolarity where the U.S. and China become the two superpoles.

In comparison, other researchers claim that the multipolarity is not only unavoidable but present too. Babić [19] emphasizes that smaller states like Turkey, India and Brazil make the U.S.-China binary difficult because they have an independent influence. Caridi [13] shows that the example of Italy taking part in China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents the diversification of foreign alignments in a multipolar environment. Equally, Luckham [15] points to the active non-alignment of the Global South, indicating that small and middle-sized states are making use of multipolarity to strengthen their agency.

Peace-oriented and normative approaches even create more complexity. According to Richmond and Pogodda [14], multipolarity has a negative impact on peacemaking in that it creates a misalignment among the great powers, hence making it difficult to settle international disputes. Acharya [23], on the other hand, believes that multipolarity may help save the world by decentralizing power and promoting pluralism in the governance of the world, which is not under western hegemony.

3.5 Multipolarity in Practice: New Trends.

Multipolarity today is a reality rather than an abstract concept as seen in the practice of foreign policy. The U.S. is confronted with strategic dilemmas dealing with its multiple rivals at the same time, as was the case during its simultaneous confrontations with China and Russia [11][16]. The emergence of China has been consolidated with the help of such initiatives as the BRI that spread its influence all over Eurasia and Africa [13]. Russia imposes its dominance on the region by intervening in Ukraine and Syria by using military means by portraying itself as a multipolarity defender against the Western hegemony [21].

Middle powers use strategies that are flexible with varied strategies of multi alignment and hedging. India balances its association with U.S by the involvement in BRICS and the further interaction with Russia [6]. Brazil lays stress on the cooperation of South to South and still has relations with Western institutions [15]. The changing narratives of North Korea depict how even small states

articulate their legitimacy in a multipolar narrative, how these states present themselves as sovereign actors rejecting hegemonic sizing [17][18].

The multipolarity is also supported by the geoeconomic aspect. Babić, Dixon and Liu [20] point out that domination of finance, trade networks and technology forms shared hubs of economic power. Luo and Tung [22] build upon this and develop the concept of multipolar geo-strategy of international business whereby companies are forced to be diversified in terms of the geopolitical risks.

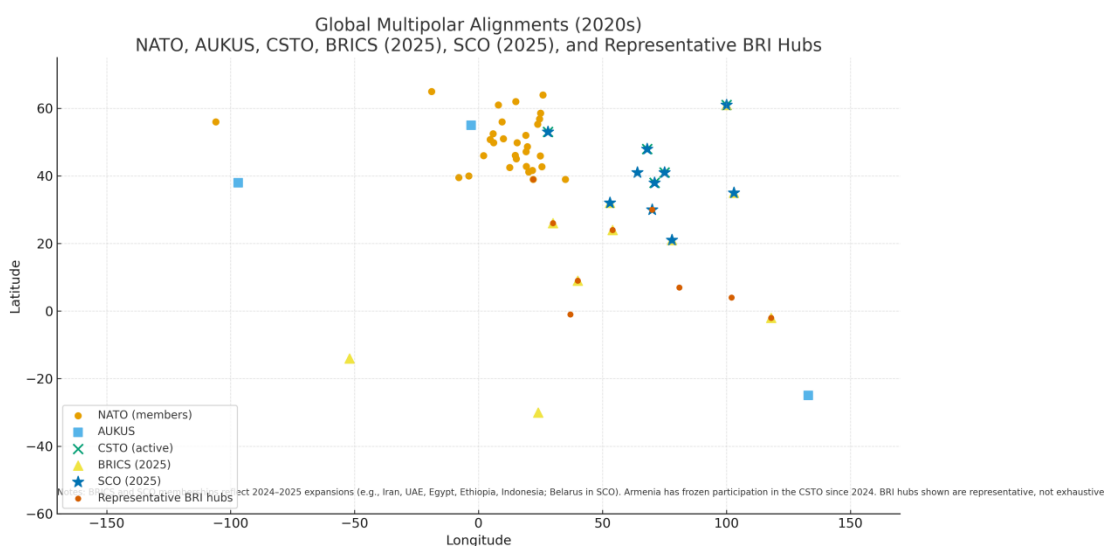


Figure 6: Global Multipolar Alignments (2020s) showing U.S. alliances (NATO, AUKUS), Chinese partnerships (BRI), Russian influence (CSTO), and multi-alignment platforms (BRICS, SCO). Such maps can be drawn from SIPRI Yearbooks, Chatham House, or Stimson Center reports.

The chronological record of polarity shows historical cycles of change based on the emergence and the fall of great powers. Classical multipolarity was characterized by cooperation and instability, bipolarity by predictability, and flexibility, and temporary dominance with subsequent overstretch in unipolarity. The present multipolar debate highlights the reality of the complexity of the global politics in the twenty first century where several great and middle powers are competing and collaborating at the same time. This development preconditions a study of the ways in which foreign policy strategies evolve in the context of a fluid, contested and multidimensional system.

4. Foreign Policy Strategies in Multipolarity

4.1 Great Powers: Competition on Hegemonic Space.

The great powers in multipolar system attempt to come up with policies of power consolidation, counterbalancing and institutional design that would enhance their own interests. The most

technologically and military superior player is the United States whose strategic problem is that it can match China and Russia at the same time [11]. Alliance-building is one such approach that Washington has outlined, strengthening NATO following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, revitalizing the Quad with Japan, India and Australia, and his AUKUS with the United Kingdom and Australia. It is a containment and forward defensive policy driven by realist balancing calculation of countering various competitors [1][16].

China in its turn seeks to pursue two strategies of economic prosperity and military expansion. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an embodiment of economic statecraft of Beijing that diffuses its power in Eurasia, Africa, and Latin America [13]. Simultaneously, the growing military spending of the Chinese, in particular, on the South China Sea and Indo-Pacific will pose the risk of undermining the naval dominance of the United States and expanding the zone of influence in the area. According to Chinese scholars such as Xuetong [12], it is a world in which there is increasingly bipolar rivalry between Beijing and Washington; yet the mission of Beijing to expand its outreach to BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and Global South forums suggests a spirit that seeks to play a bigger multipolar role [22].

Russian multipolarity policy can be defined as revisionist and regional hegemony. Moscow is imposing its presence through military interventions, the most significant ones being in Ukraine and Syria and through its leadership in the Collective security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russia strengthens its foreign policy as a deterrent to U.S. hegemony on the basis that multipolarity is under attack [21]. But its reliance on exporting energy and the military pressure is an indicator of how much effort has to be exerted to sustain power in the long term in a diversifiable system [19].

EU is also a clear cut example of a normative great power. Though the EU does not possess that much of hard power as the U.S. or China, it possesses the power of regulatory influence and trade, or even climate diplomacy as a means of projecting power [8]. However, the analysts assert that the EU has structural weaknesses in responding to the multipolar crises, in particular, in the disputable security zones such as the South China Sea [8]. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the institutional multilateralism of the EU draws attention to liberal approaches to dealership in the multipolarity [2].

4.2 Middle Powers: Multi-Alignment and Hedging Strategy.

Examples of the adaptive strategies currently being employed by states in the instances of multipolarity include middle powers such as India, Brazil, Turkey and South Africa. The middle powers in contrast to the great powers are concerned with flexibility in strategies that will not bind itself to either of the blocs.

Indian strategy is quite exemplary. Besides strengthening military ties with the U.S. in the Quad and Indo-Pacific, New Delhi is also intensifying its collaboration with Russia in the defense domain and remains also active in BRICS and SCO [6]. This multi alignment policy reveals the way India desires to be liberated in a multipolar state. Similarly, Brazil is concentrating on South-

South cooperation but uses its BRICS leadership position to add to the bargaining power in world governance affairs [15].

Turkey has been pursuing the path of issue alignment alternating between NATO commitments and a warmer relationship with Russia, proclaiming in the Middle East, North Africa and the Caucasus [19]. South Africa, in its part, relies on BRICS and African Union forums to enhance its leadership in the region and it still maintains collaborative relations with the Western ones.

The strategies emphasize one of the key features of middle power diplomacy in multipolarity, that of hedging. Middle powers are not forming a pole [as opposed to joining one pole] but instead forming an equal partnership in opposing blocs, thus can maximize flexibility and reducing vulnerability [22].

4.3 Small States: Neutrality, Bandwagoning and Soft Power.

The multipolar regimes pose more uncertainty to the small states because alliances and rivalries may shift making the security of the states compromised. Neutrality, bandwagoning and soft power diplomacy are the variants available to small states.

The other states are neutral and the sovereignty is being defended through the assistance of international institutions and norms laws. The smaller European nations such as Switzerland and Austria that are concentrating on neutrality and can be a multilateral partner in the EU and UN processes are an example [3]. Others practice bandwagoning, which involves identifying with stronger powers under the guise of security guarantees as it is experienced in the case of the Eastern European states who desire to become members of NATO because of Russian aggression [11].

The third orientation is soft power/niche diplomacy whereby the small states believe that they should be more relevant as mediators, peace talk hosts, and champions of the problems affecting the world such as climate change. As an example, Nordic states are traditionally concerned with the peacebuilding and environmental policy dimensions, thereby excluding niche functions that exceed material limits [14].

The risk and opportunity of multipolarity is reflected in small state policy selection. Systemic fluidity may also be exploited by small states to enhance agency through diplomacy, institutional involvement, or alignment with new coalitions even though they may be vulnerable to the large power politics [15].

4.4 Strategic Adaptation in Security, Economy, and Diplomacy

Across power hierarchies, foreign policy strategies in multipolarity converge around three domains: **security adaptation, economic diversification, and diplomatic flexibility.**

Security Adaptation:

Great powers focus on military modernization and alliance-building, while middle and small states adopt hedging or neutrality to mitigate risks. Nuclear deterrence and advanced military technologies increasingly shape security strategies [1][11].

Economic Diversification:

Multipolarity has encouraged states to expand trade and investment beyond traditional partners. China's BRI and Russia's energy diplomacy compete with Western economic institutions, while BRICS and SCO create alternative platforms for financial cooperation [13][20][22].

Diplomatic Flexibility:

States increasingly engage in multi-alignment, forum shopping, and issue-based coalitions. The proliferation of overlapping institutions (NATO, BRICS, SCO, ASEAN, AU, EU) reflects the fluid nature of diplomacy in a multipolar system [9][23].

4.5 Synthesis

The evolution of foreign policy strategies in multipolarity reveals a spectrum of adaptation shaped by power status. Great powers pursue dominance through alliances and institutional competition, middle powers rely on hedging and multi-alignment, and small states employ neutrality, bandwagoning, or soft power diplomacy. These strategies demonstrate that multipolarity is not a uniform condition but a **strategic landscape of flexibility and contestation**. Ultimately, the evidence suggests that states are not merely passive subjects of structural change but active agents shaping the multipolar order through calculated adaptation [5][6][22].

5. Case Studies

The Competition U.S.China 5.1 The Indo-Pacific as a Testing Ground.

The U.S. China rivalry is the contemporary multipolar axis of politics. According to Washington, the rise of Beijing can be seen as an attack on its world hegemony, to which it responded by balancing its military against it and the fortification of alliances in the Indo-Pacific [11]. The formation of regional alliances, including such projects as the Quad and the AUKUS, can be regarded as an example of how the U.S. organizes the institutional leadership at the global level with the assistance of NATO and G7 [16].

In its place, China uses economic statecraft and strategic aggressiveness. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has augmented the range of the Chinese impacts in Asia, Africa, and Europe [13]. On the military front, Beijing has been spending heavily on the modernization of the people liberation army and increasing its presence in the south china sea, which is an outright challenge to the U.S dominance on the seas [12]. Researchers disagree on whether this competition is an emerging bipolar confrontation [12][24] or a more complicated multipolar dispersion with other states [19]. In any case, the U.S. China dynamic establishes the mood of international security and economic orientations.

5.2 Russia the Ukraine War: Revisionism and Crisis of European Security.

The case of the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 by Russia demonstrates that multipolarity promotes revisionist policies by states that want to regain their control over the region. The actions of

Moscow are framed as a reaction to Western hegemony to defend multipolarity as a challenger of the U.S. led institutions [21]. The war has revitalized NATO, broadened membership to Finland and Sweden and strengthened transatlantic solidarity [11].

In the case of Europe, the war brings to the fore not only the reliance on United States security assurances but also the discussions within the Union about strategic independence [8]. In theoretical terms, realists consider the war as the manifestation of power rivalry characteristic of multipolarity [1], and constructivists accentuate the conflict of identities and narratives between Russia and the West [5]. The crisis highlights that multipolarity would destabilize the regions by allowing aggressive tactics by actors who would be aiming to shift the balance of power.

5.3 BRICS and the Global South: Forums of Strategic Autonomy.

The emergence of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE and Indonesia) has turned out to be a landmark institutional innovation in multipolarity [6][15][22]. Unlike the NATO or the EU the BRICS is not a security bloc but a one stop economic and political shop with the goal of augmenting the bargaining power of non-western states as a bloc. Its formation is the sign of the irritation with the Western character of the organizations such as the IMF and World Bank [9].

BRICS is a platform where multi-alignment and autonomy in strategies are witnessed to the emerging powers. India recalls its ties with China and Russia through the BRICS membership as it continues consolidating its relations with the U.S. [6]. Brazil and South Africa use the grouping as a means to strengthen South-South collaboration, and to strengthen their voice in world governance [15]. Meanwhile, critics argue that there are internal differences and opposing national interest, which is a limitation to the action of BRICS [20].

Nevertheless, the bloc states that multipolarity is dynamic in that it opens the other institutions that extend the agency of the middle powers and Global South to transform the normative foundations of the international order [23].

5.4 Synthesis

These three examples point to different approaches of multipolarity:

The U.S. China rivalry shows a huge competition in power and consolidation of alliance.

The war between Russia and Ukraine gives an idea of danger of revisionism and regional instability.

BRICS demonstrates that multipolarity enhances institutional innovation and freedom of emerging actors.

Combined they indicate that the multipolarity is neither uniformly destabilizing nor stabilizing. Rather, it is a dynamic order that is characterized by competition, changes and testing of new ways of governance.

6. Challenges and Opportunities of Multipolarity

6.1 Multipolarity Problems.

One of the main challenges of a multipolar world is that it often creates systemic instability. The reality of the many great powers, according to the realist theorists, increases the level of uncertainty and miscalculation and therefore, riskier to engage in a conflict [19]. A good example of how revisionist actors can take advantage of the fluidity of the system to secure regional dominance, thereby destabilizing the broader security frameworks, is Russia-Ukraine war [21]. Similarly, in the case of U.S.China tensions in the Indo-Pacific, there is the aspect of an accidental escalation between the two states as they vie to influence one another through military build-ups and networks[12].

The latter issue is institutional gridlock. The liberal models were to specialize in mediation of cooperation through institutions, multipolarity complicates the decision-making because it introduces more veto players and opposing norms [8]. Several times the United Nations Security Council has been in knots over major crises and the World Trade Organization has been struck with imposition of rules that are increasingly difficult to implement as protectionism rises [9]. It is an institutional flaw that constrains the capacity of the global governance in dealing with multipolar conflicts.

Third, ideological and normative conflict are caused by multipolarity. Constructivists indicate that the competing ideals of order including liberal democracy, authoritarian capitalism and shades of governance strains both at the global and regional levels [14]. This pressure and demand are reflected in the American pressure on the concept of the order of rules, and contrasted by the Chinese and Russian discourses of the pressure of non-interference and sovereignty [23]. This fact renders the process of peacebuilding more challenging and undermines the credibility of key players due to the absence of consensus on norms.

6.2 Multipolarity Opportunities.

Despite these being the threats of multipolarity, the multipolarity opens up agencies, innovativeness, and pluralism prospects. The multipolarity in the case of middle and emerging powers gives them a space to pursue multi-alignment and hedging policies. The multi-relation that India has with the U.S., Russia and China reveals how states can diversify relations to secure the freedom of action. Similarly, Brazil and South Africa apply BRICS to gain more bargaining power in the global economy [22].

The alternative institutions is the other opening. The BRICS and the SCO expand the arenas of cooperation even further outside the Western structures that offer the Global South a greater voice [20]. These institutions are not intended to replace the liberal order, but to supplement it, and give channels of dialogue that reduce dependence on U.S.-centric systems [23].

Finally, multipolarity encourages a sense of autonomy in the region and the art of diplomacy. The trend of multipolarity is taking a rising pattern in the state of African, Latin American, and Southeast Asian states to enhance their bargaining power through merging with multiple partners. This elasticity will allow smaller states not to become subordinate to a single hegemon and to formulate their own policy that suits their own interests, i.e. developing infrastructure, collaborating with other states in the digital economy, or in climate action [22].

6.3 Synthesis

Multi-polarity has complex difficulties and opportunities. Instability, institutional paralysis, and normative conflict, on the one hand, accentuate vulnerability of the current state of affairs. Quite on the contrary, multipolarity empowers the new actors, promotes institutional change and makes more various forms of governance possible. The general pattern is that multipolarity is neither a conflict determined or conflict free order but a mixed order characterised by competition and collusion [23].

7. Policy Implications

7.1 U.S: Controlling Strategic Overstretch.

In the case of United States, the state should adapt to a multipolar environment, which entails the state compromising unipolar dominance with strategic prioritization. It is the quandary to prevent overextension and to resist the three: China, and Russia [11][16]. Washington needs to bolster coalition entities like NATO, the Quad and AUKUS and invest in the technology leadership and resiliency. Meanwhile, U.S policymakers must not regard multipolarity as a zero-sum game, but must not ignore limited cooperation with competitors in tackling global problems like climate change and non-proliferation [12][23].

7.2 China: To Be Bossy or accountable.

The emergence of China is a threat and opportunity. The move by Beijing on the format of Belt and Road Initiative and asserts to the Asian regions has allowed it to gain more influence, however, at a cost of creating the image of being coercive [13]. The moderating tone including assertiveness and responsibility will render the policy effective because it is not that China can only destabilize the world but stabilize it. The increased engagement in the process of peacekeeping, financing of the development, and climate governance would allow Beijing to protect its very center of the multipolarity.

7.3 European Union: Strategic Autonomy.

The two eyed threat to the European Union is dependency and fragmentation. Although it is dependent on the U.S. security provisions, the EU attempts to become a global actor too. Such policy implications are to enhance and intensify the collaboration in the sphere of defense, transform into a more powerful economy, and become a leadership figure in other domains like digital government and climate policy. Normative power will make sure that the EU will never

become irrelevant in situations where it does not have military parities with U.S. or China.

7.4 Global South: Counting on Multipolarity to get sovereignty.

In the case of emerging and developing states, multipolarity is unprecedentedly allowing them to diversify partnerships. The BRICS and SCO platforms are alternative to Western dominated institutions, which allow countries to increase bargaining power. The policy strategies must be geared to multi-alignment and active non-alignment where states should gain the most advantages of competing blocs without compromising their independence. Through this, the Global South is able to mould multipolarity into a framework that reflects more of its developmental interests.

7.5 Synthesis

The theme of policy implications in various actors culminates on adaptive diplomacy which is a necessity. The great powers are forced to strike a balance between competition and selective cooperation whereas the middle and small states should take advantage of the multipolarity to gain more freedom. The institutions will be very important, and their success will be determined by inclusivity and flexibility. The viability of multipolarity in the future therefore depends on whether the states perceive this as the struggle of the fittest or that of joint governance and innovations..

8. Conclusion

The transformation of the international system into unipolarity and then into many-polar, as the process of the system evolution, constitutes one of the most significant changes in the world politics. In this study, it has been established that, multipolarity is not a single state but a hybrid form of order, with both competition and cooperation. Historical study supports the realist fears that multipolarity raises instability and the risk of conflict. Simultaneously, the liberal and constructivist views emphasize the possibility of institutional change, normative pluralism, and middle and smaller power.

There are differences in the rank of power in the strategies of foreign policies in multipolarity. The great powers that strive to achieve dominance through alliances, economic statecraft and revisionism are the United States, China and Russia. Middle powers employ the strategies of multi-alignment and hedging to guard autonomy and the small states employ the strategies of neutrality, bandwagoning, and soft power to confront the uncertainty. The case of U.S.China competition, the war between Russia and Ukraine and the rise of BRICS demonstrate that the multipolarity not only destabilizes the situation in the region but also provides new experiments in institutions.

The analysis can bring out three insights. To begin with, multi-polarity compromises effective global governance, as competing powers subject institutes and norms to stress. Second, it improves the strategic flexibility, in which the emerging actors can be more autonomous. Third, it will not only be guided by material capabilities, but how the states conceptualize order and conduct diplomacy.

Theoretically, this work aids in bridging the realist, liberal, and constructivist debates and prove that multipolarity is not a structural constraint alone but a normative potential as well. Practically, it gives some evidences that adaptive diplomacy and not even strict adherence is the most fruitful way of states to manipulate within multipolar circumstances. In policy terms, the findings indicate the relevance of inclusive and innovative institutions that would act as the voice of both the existing and new actors.

Lastly, multipolarity does not promise of instability and a formula of fair governance in the world. It is a disputable area in which the strategies, institutions and norms are still redefined. The quality with which the states and institutions will be able to manage this complexity will determine whether multipolarity will be a system of destructive rivalry or a place of cooperative global governance.

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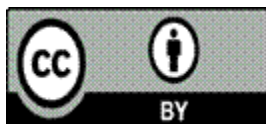
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