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Multipolarity Myths and Unipolar Fantasies: New Realities in Crisis

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Abstract

The conflict between the persistent dreams of unipolar supremacy and the myths of multipolarity is becoming a more prominent feature of the global order particularly after the meteoric rise of China and the relative decline of the United State. The article explains the contrast between these two paradigms, along with how both viewpoints mask the reality of a fractured and crisis-prone international society. Although multipolarity is sometimes welcomed as a return to normalcy and balance in great power politics and international system, it is hampered by unequal power dynamics, discontinued diplomatic coordination, and instability in certain regions. On the other hand, the continued existence of unipolar fantasies—especially in the stories of waning hegemony United states—does not take into consideration how single power is eroding in a complex and disputed global order. This study makes the case that neither multipolarity nor unipolarity effectively portrays the complexity of the modern world by looking at current challenges, which range from economic rivalry and geopolitical wars to technology upheavals and climate change. The study suggests conclusive evidences that United states still is in a good position to shape it constructed world and tackle the challenges coming its way.

Keywords: US, China, Polarity, Unipolarity, Bipolarity, Multipolarity, International system, Great power politics.



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Introduction

During the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century, the unquestionable worldwide dominance of the United States was evident. Regardless of the specific criteria used to measure power, it is evident that the United States consistently has a significant advantage. No nation has achieved such a significant lead in military, economic, and technical domains concurrently since the establishment of the modern state structure in the mid-seventeenth century. In conjunction with the United States, the bulk of the world's wealthiest nations formed an alliance, interconnected via a series of international organizations that were mostly established under the leadership of Washington. The United States has a much higher degree of autonomy in shaping its foreign policy compared to other prominent states throughout modern history.

Contended dissatisfied powers:

China, Russia, and other emerging countries expressed discontent with their position within the existing international order, however acknowledged their inability to effectuate any substantial changes to it. This statement refers to a past event or situation. Currently, the influence of the United States seems to have significantly declined. Over the last twenty years, the United States has experienced significant challenges, including unsuccessful military deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq, a severe economic crisis, escalating political divisions, and a four-year presidential term under Donald Trump characterized by isolationist tendencies. Throughout this period, China consistently had a notable economic rise and shown an increased level of assertiveness. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia has been seen by many as a significant event that marked the decline of U.S. dominance. It signaled the United States' diminishing ability to counteract revisionist forces and uphold the established international order it had constructed. The prevailing consensus among observers is that the era of unipolarity has reached a conclusive conclusion. Many commentators have proclaimed the globe to be bipolar, citing the size of China's economy as evidence (Nelson, 2009).

However, many proponents assert that the global community is approaching or has already reached a state of multipolarity. China, Iran, and Russia together support this perspective, whereby they, as prominent anti-American revisionists, possess the authority to influence the system according to their preferences. India and many other nations in the developing world have collectively arrived to a similar standpoint, asserting that after an extended period of superpower influence, they have now gained the autonomy to choose their own trajectory. The prevailing perception among a significant portion of the American population is that the current global order is characterized by multipolarity, a phenomenon that is often overlooked or not fully appreciated (Inderjeet Parmar, 2022). Multiple reports from the U.S. National Intelligence Council have consistently asserted this allegation, which is also supported by individuals across the political spectrum who advocate for a less assertive approach to U.S. foreign policy. The prevailing consensus in contemporary discourse is that the globe is no longer characterized by a unipolar power structure. However, this perspective is incorrect.

The new structure of international system:

The global political landscape does not conform to a bipolar or multipolar structure, and there is no imminent shift towards either configuration. Indeed, there has been a discernible decline in the dominance of the United States over the course of the last two decades. However, it is important to note that the United States still maintains its position at the apex of the global power structure, securely surpassing China and far outpacing all other nations. The selection of appropriate metrics is crucial in order to accurately perceive this phenomenon, since it is no longer viable to rely on

arbitrary measures. The prevalence of unipolarity becomes further apparent when one takes into account the absence of a significant factor that influenced the dynamics of international relations throughout periods of multipolarity and bipolarity, spanning from the inception of the modern state system to the Cold War era: the concept of balance (Zhu, 2005). The ability of other nations to rival the United States in terms of power via means such as forming alliances or strengthening their military capabilities is inherently limited. The influence of the United States continues to have a significant global presence, but somewhat diminished compared to previous periods. However, it is important to consider this development within a broader context. The focal point of discussion pertains only to the essence of unipolarity, not its mere presence.

Under developed third world:

During the historical period known as the Cold War, the global landscape exhibited a clear bipolarity, primarily characterized by the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the global power dynamics underwent a significant transformation, resulting in a unipolar structure whereby the United States emerged as the predominant nation, occupying a position of unparalleled prominence (Kimmage & Fix, 2023). There is a prevalent belief among proponents of multipolarity that power may be understood as influence, denoting the capacity to persuade others to act in accordance with one's desires. The assertion posits that due to the United States' inability to establish peace in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as its limited success in addressing many other global challenges, it is imperative for the world to adopt a multipolar approach (Bolt, 2014). However, the concept of polarity revolves on an alternative interpretation of power, which may be quantified via several means such as military might and economic influence. In contemporary discourse, the prevailing notion behind discussions on multipolarity is rooted in the original conception put out by academic pioneers. This notion posits that the dynamics of international politics are contingent upon the distribution of resources among the largest powers. In order for the system to exhibit a multipolar structure, it is important that its dynamics be mostly influenced by a group of three or more states that possess relatively similar levels of power and influence (Zaidi & Saud, 2020).

Rise of peer competitors:

The United States and China are widely acknowledged as the foremost global powers; but, the presence of at least one more nation of comparable stature is necessary to establish a state of multipolarity. This is the point at which assertions on multipolarity lose credibility. None of the countries that are potential candidates for the third slot, namely France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, and the United Kingdom, can be seen as true counterparts to the United States or China. This statement holds true regardless of the measure used. The measurement of polarity often relies on metrics that were popular throughout the mid-twentieth century, primarily focusing on military expenditures and economic productivity. Even when considering these rudimentary indicators, it is evident that the system does not exhibit a multipolar nature. Furthermore, it is quite likely that this state of affairs will persist for many decades (Kagan, 2023).

A straightforward analysis reveals that unless there is a complete breakdown of either the United States or China, the disparity between these nations and other contenders will persist for the foreseeable future. With the exception of India, the other countries possess populations that are very tiny, rendering them unlikely to achieve comparable status. Conversely, India's economic limitations hinder its ability to gain such a position until a later period within the current century. The significant disparities between the current material circumstances and a rational comprehension of multipolarity highlight a further issue with any discussion of its resurgence: the

equally significant disparity between today's global politics and the functioning of multipolar systems in previous centuries. Prior to the year 1945, the prevailing state of international relations was characterized by multipolarity. In the realm of international politics, a prominent characteristic was the frequent occurrence of dynamic coalitions among the major countries, who often found themselves in a state of relative parity (Mathews, 2023).

Building new alliances:

The alliance game primarily included the major countries, rather than including interactions between these powers and smaller governments. The strategic calculations of coalitions played a crucial role in the field of statecraft. The dynamics of alliances had the potential to disrupt the equilibrium of power within a short period of time. This was due to the significant impact that the addition or removal of a major power from an alliance had, which much outweighed any internal efforts of a single state to enhance its own might in the immediate future. In the year 1801, the Russian emperor Paul I entertained the idea of forming an alliance with Napoleon rather than opposing him. This caused significant concerns in the United Kingdom regarding the potential establishment of French dominance in Europe. Some historians argue that these apprehensions prompted the British to potentially play a part in the assassination of Paul I during that very year. Currently, the majority of global alliances, particularly those involving security assurances, mostly align smaller nations with the United States. The primary trend seen in this context is the continuous growth and enlargement of this alliance framework. Given the United States' significant material might and extensive network of alliances, the outcome of great-power politics is not contingent upon any nation's selection of partners, unless the United States were to completely dissolve its ties. During multipolar times, the equitable allocation of capabilities resulted in frequent power shifts among nations, leading to prolonged transitional phases characterized by competing claims of supremacy (Kotkin, 2023).

Consequently, determining the rightful holder of the top position became a contentious and ambiguous matter. Prior to the outbreak of World War I, the United Kingdom held a prominent position due to its extensive naval power and vast colonial territories. However, it is worth noting that its economy and military forces were comparatively smaller than those of Germany, which in turn had a smaller army than Russia. Furthermore, all three nations' economies were overshadowed by the economic might of the United States. The inherent reliability of technology facilitated the rapid narrowing of the gap between a dominant state and a superior adversary, since the former could effectively emulate the latter's advantageous capabilities. Therefore, throughout the initial decades of the twentieth century, when German authorities endeavored to diminish the stature of the United Kingdom, they had minimal difficulties in swiftly constructing a naval force that possessed comparable technical capabilities to the Royal Navy.

The current scenario exhibits notable disparities. Firstly, it is evident that there exists a distinct leader and a prominent aspirant. Furthermore, the characteristics of military technology and the configuration of the global economy contribute to the gradual pace at which a contender surpasses the dominant power. Currently, the most potent armaments exhibit a formidable level of intricacy, with the United States and its allied nations possessing a significant degree of control over the requisite technology for their production. The multipolar world was characterized by a lack of aesthetic appeal. Frequent occurrences of great-power conflicts were seen during the period spanning from 1500 to 1945, with such battles erupting on many occasions within a decade.

With alarming frequency, a recurring pattern emerged whereby the most powerful governments engaged in intense and all-encompassing battles. These included notable examples such as the

Thirty Years' War, the Wars of Louis XIV, the Seven Years' War, the Napoleonic Wars, World War I, World War II and Cold War. The disputes were influenced by the complex and significant alliance politics associated with multipolarity, which resulted in a state of uncertainty. The system's frequent power shifts and the transient nature of leading states' control over their status were significant factors. Despite the potential challenges in the present global landscape as compared to the relatively peaceful era of the 1990s, the current international environment lacks the underlying factors that often lead to conflicts, therefore making it significantly different from the era of multipolarity.

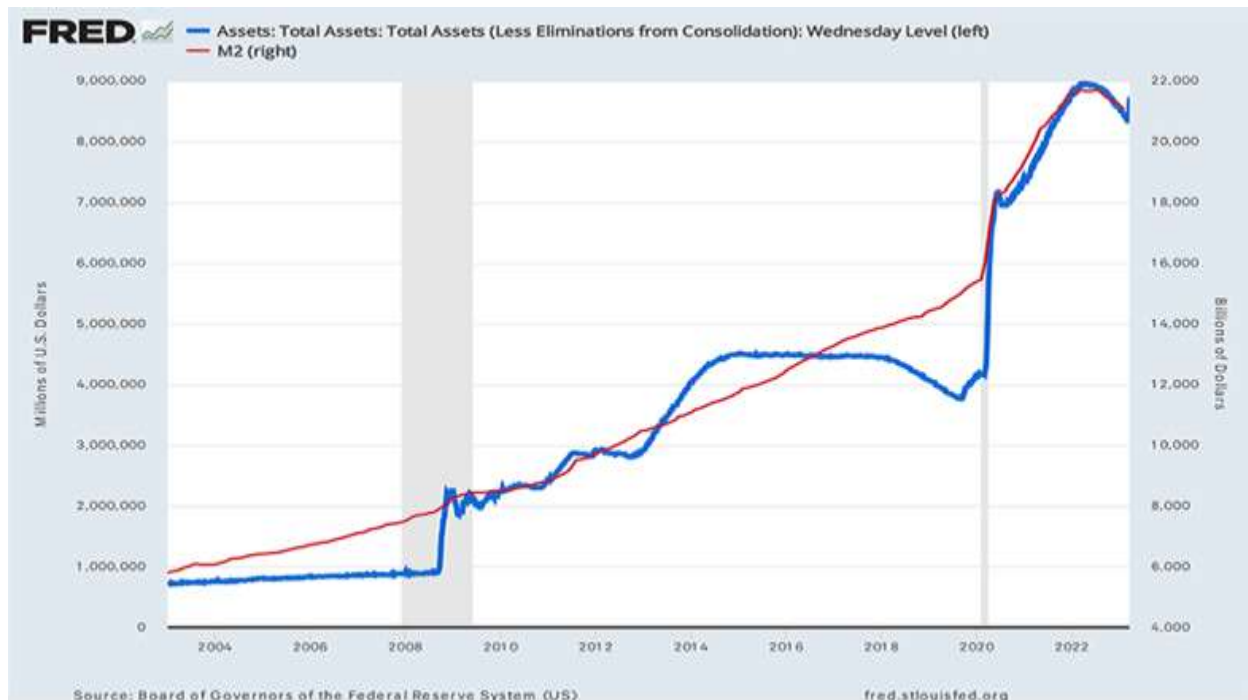
Don't bit on Bipolarity: Using GDP and Military Expenditure as Matrix;

Based on the use of GDP and military expenditure as key indicators, several analysts might provide a compelling argument in support of the emergence of a bipolar global power structure. However, this argument becomes invalid when used metrics that accurately include the significant changes in the origins of state power caused by various technological revolutions. According to more precise assessments, it is evident that the United States and China are inherently distinct entities and are expected to maintain their respective positions for an extended duration, particularly in the domains of military and technology. The indicator that is commonly used by proponents of a change in polarity is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Pradt, 2016). However, both domestic and international observers have consistently raised doubts over the accuracy and reliability of China's official economic data. Based on an analysis of satellite-derived data on nocturnal luminosity, which serves as a proxy for energy consumption and is indicative of economic activity, economist Luis Martinez has made an estimate suggesting that the growth of China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in recent decades has been around 33% lower than the figures officially stated by the authorities. Based on confidential U.S. diplomatic cables that were made public, it was revealed that Li Keqiang, a provincial official at the time who later assumed the position of China's premier, expressed skepticism on the accuracy of his nation's artificially manipulated GDP statistics during a conversation with the U.S. ambassador to China in 2007.

However, he used proxies, such as the measurement of power consumption. Since Xi assumed leadership, there has been a noticeable decline in the availability of accurate data pertaining to the Chinese economy. This may be attributed to the Chinese government's decision to discontinue the publication of certain economic figures, which were previously used to approximate China's actual GDP. However, it is important to note that some signs are not susceptible to manipulation or deception. In order to assess China's economic prowess, it is necessary to examine the extent to which enterprises from the nation contribute to the global earnings within a certain sector. Drawing upon the scholarly contributions of political economist Sean Stars, our study, conducted by one of the authors (Brooks), reveals that among the top 2,000 organizations worldwide, American enterprises claim the first position in terms of global profit shares across 74 percent of sectors (Tsang & Honghua, 2015).

In contrast, Chinese firms secure the leading position in just 11 percent of sectors. The data pertaining to high-tech sectors reveals a noteworthy trend: American businesses now own a majority share of 53 percent in these pivotal industries, while other countries with substantial high-tech sectors exhibit profit shares in the single digits. Japan ranks second with a share of seven percent, followed by China in third place with six percent, and Taiwan in fourth place with five percent. One effective approach to assessing technical aptitude is via the examination of payments made for the use of intellectual property, which denotes technology of significant worth that prompts financial investments from external parties. The presented data demonstrates that China's substantial expenditures in research and development (R&D) throughout the previous decade are

yielding positive outcomes. Specifically, Chinese patent royalties have seen a notable increase, surging from under \$1 billion in 2014 to almost \$12 billion in 2021 (Brown, CEO, CHINA The Rise of Xi Jinping, 2016).



Source: <https://www.cathaybank.com/about-us/insights-by-cathay/us-china-2023-annual-economic-report>

However, it is important to note that China's annual revenue remains far lower than that of the United States, amounting to less than one-tenth of the latter's total (\$125 billion). Furthermore, China's revenue also falls well behind that of Germany (\$59 billion) and Japan (\$47 billion). From a military standpoint, it is widely acknowledged by observers that China is still somewhat far from attaining global parity with the United States, despite the rapid modernization of its armed forces. To what extent does the advantage held by the United States possess significance and durability? The United States has capabilities that provide it what political scientist Barry Posen has referred to as "command of the commons." This refers to the ability to exercise control over the domains of air, open sea, and space.

US critical role of Military force:

The United States' ability to exercise control over shared resources is a key factor in establishing its status as a prominent global military force. As long as China is unable to challenge the prevailing supremacy of the United States in this particular sphere, its status as a military power will be limited to the regional level. A total of 13 system categories have been identified as the foundation for this capability, encompassing a range of technologies such as nuclear submarines, satellites, aircraft carriers, and heavy transport planes. In terms of these capabilities, China falls below 20 percent of the United States' level in all but five categories. Moreover, China surpasses the United States' capability in only two specific areas, namely cruisers and destroyers, as well as military satellites, where China's capacity exceeds one-third of that of the United States. The United States has maintained a significant lead due to its substantial allocation of resources towards the development of these technologies over an extended period. Consequently, bridging these gaps would need a similarly protracted endeavor. The discrepancy is further amplified when

one considers not just the quantity but also the quality of the data. The United States has a fleet of 68 nuclear submarines, which exhibit a level of acoustic stealth that makes them difficult for China to detect. Conversely, China's fleet of 12 nuclear submarines still emit sufficient noise to enable the modern antisubmarine warfare sensors of the U.S. Navy to track them effectively, even in deep ocean environments (Brown, CHINA'S WORLD; What Does China Want? 2017).

Drawing a parallel with the Soviet Union proves to be illuminating. During the Cold War, the Red Army emerged as a formidable counterpart to the U.S. military, although the Chinese military did not attain a comparable status. China does not possess the three advantages that were enjoyed by the Soviets. One significant factor contributing to the Soviet Union's military advantage during World War II was its advantageous geographical position. By successfully conquering Eastern Europe, the Soviets were able to establish a substantial military presence in the central part of the European continent, which included a significant portion of the global economic production. Another significant aspect was the substantial prioritization of military expenditure above civilian welfare in a centrally planned economy focused on bolstering military capabilities. Moscow consistently allocated a considerable proportion of its GDP to defense, maintaining double-digit figures throughout the duration of the Cold War. This allocation was unparalleled among contemporary major powers during times of peace (Jaques, 2016).

One aspect that contributed to the Soviet Union's capacity to compete with the United States during the Cold War was the relatively straightforward nature of military technology. Throughout most of this period, the Soviets were able to use their comparably weaker economy to rapidly develop nuclear and missile capabilities, potentially surpassing the United States in this regard (Thu, 2023). Additionally, they could argue that their conventional forces were also superior to those of the United States. It was during the last decade of the Cold War that the Soviet Union encountered a similar challenge to the one now faced by China. This challenge pertains to the production of sophisticated weaponry that can effectively compete with the technologically advanced armaments being developed by the United States, which has a substantial annual military research and development budget of \$140 billion. The phenomenon of bipolarity emerged as a result of atypical conditions. The conclusion of World War II resulted in the Soviet Union gaining significant influence throughout Eurasia, while the other major countries, with the exception of the United States, were severely affected by the war. Consequently, the United States emerged as the only state capable of forming a coalition to counterbalance Moscow's dominance.

Therefore, the Cold War was characterized by a profound rivalry, which manifested in many ways such as the armaments race, continuous struggle in the Third World, and frequent crises between the superpowers around the world, ranging from Berlin to Cuba. In contrast to a multipolar system, the system under consideration is characterized by a higher degree of simplicity, since it consists of a single pair of states occupying the top position, hence limiting the possible power transition concerns to just one (Wohlforth, 2023). Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the transition from a bipolar to a unipolar world order, the international system underwent a significant transformation, transitioning from one historically unprecedented state to another. Currently, there exists a single prevailing power and alliance structure, as opposed to the previous existence of two. In contrast to the Soviet Union, China has not yet achieved territorial conquests that have significant importance in maintaining global equilibrium (Gries, 2014). Furthermore, Xi has not shown a same level of willingness as Soviet leaders in terms of engaging in the exchange of resources, such as butter for weapons. It is worth noting that China has consistently allocated around two percent of its GDP towards military expenditures. Furthermore, it is implausible for

him to swiftly align his economy with the military might of the United States within a short span of time, considering the intricate nature of contemporary armaments.

Partial unipolarity:

To contend that the current system is neither multipolar nor bipolar does not imply a denial of the shifting dynamics of power relations. China has had a significant increase, particularly in the economic domain, and there has been a resurgence of great-power rivalry after a period of relative calm after the Cold War. The era of unmistakable United States' across-the-board superiority has come to an end. However, the significant disparity in power distribution on a global scale will need a considerable amount of time to rectify, and it is important to note that not all aspects of this disparity will diminish at an equal pace. China has made significant efforts to reduce the economic disparity; yet, its progress in military capabilities, particularly in the field of technology, has been comparatively limited. Consequently, the current distribution of power exhibits a greater proximity to uni-polarity rather than bipolarity or multipolarity (Scott, 2013).

Due to the unprecedented nature of the contemporary era characterized by unipolarity, there is a lack of established vocabulary to accurately depict the transformations occurring in such a global order. Consequently, it is seen that some individuals have erroneously adopted the notion of multipolarity to express their perception of a diminished American dominance. Despite its limited scope, the aforementioned lead remains significant, therefore characterizing the current distribution of power as a kind of "partial unipolarity" in contrast to the "total unipolarity" that prevailed in the post-Cold War era. The transition from a state of absolute unipolarity has led to an increased willingness by Beijing, Moscow, and other dis-satisfied nations to take action in response to their grievances, even if it means taking some risks such as potentially provoking the targeted opposition of the United States. However, the endeavors made by these actors demonstrate that the global order still maintains a significant degree of unipolarity. Consequently, the challenge of achieving a balance of power against the United States poses a far more formidable limitation for its adversaries than it does for the United States itself. Ukraine serves as an illustrative example (Mărgineanu, 2022).

By engaging in military conflict, Russia demonstrated a readiness to assess its capacity for revising established norms or principles. However, the indication of weakness is evident in the decision of Russian President Vladimir Putin to engage in an invasion. During the 1990s, had one informed Boris Yeltsin, the predecessor of the current leader, about the prospect of Russia engaging in a military conflict in 2023 to maintain its grip over Ukraine, a nation that Russian authorities at the time anticipated would become a dependable friend, it is unlikely that he would have readily accepted the notion of Moscow descending to such depths. It is noteworthy that in the current discourse around the decline of unipolarity, Russia finds itself grappling with the pursuit of a status it previously believed it had attained at the apex of U.S. hegemony. If one were to inform Yeltsin that Russia would not emerge victorious in the battle against a nation with an economy just one-tenth the magnitude of Russia's, his level of disbelief would have been further heightened. The events in Ukraine have had a significant negative impact on Russia's future economic outlook, primarily due to the extensive sanctions imposed by Western countries.

However, in the hypothetical scenario if Russia successfully seized control of Kyiv and established a government aligned with Russian interests, as anticipated by Putin, it is important to note that this development would have had no impact on the overall global power dynamics. The significance of the conflict in Ukraine cannot be overlooked, as it has considerable implications for the future sovereignty of the country and the effectiveness of the international rule against

forcible territorial acquisitions. However, within the context of global material power, Ukraine's relatively modest economy, comparable in size to that of Kansas, renders its alignment with NATO, Russia, or neither side of little significance. Moreover, it should be noted that Ukraine does not possess the status of a formal ally of the United States. It is quite improbable that Russia would have the audacity to launch an assault on any of those entities.



Source: <https://www.ibon.org/us-military-spending-largest-in-the-world/>

China is far from America Military competitor.

Considering the historical response of the United States to instances when Russia has engaged in aggression against a nation that lacks a formal alliance with the U.S., such as the provision of weaponry, assistance, and information to Ukraine, as well as the imposition of substantial economic penalties, it is reasonable to assume that the Russian government is aware that the United States would undertake more extensive measures to safeguard a nation that had a formal alliance with them. China's revisionist actions are supported by a far greater total capacity. However, similar to Russia, the achievements of China's revisionism remain remarkably limited when seen within the context of historical developments. To date, China has modified the established territorial arrangement only inside the South China Sea region, via the construction of artificial islands. However, it is important to note that the U.S. military has the capability to make these tiny and vulnerable holdings inoperative during times of conflict. Even in the event that China were able to successfully assert control over all disputed areas in the South China Sea, it is important to

note that the economic importance of the resources in these regions, mostly fish, is very insignificant. The majority of the oil and gas reserves in the South China Sea are located in undisputed regions that are in proximity to the coastlines of many nations. China's revisionist aspirations are now limited to the first island chain, which encompasses a series of Pacific archipelagoes including Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan, until the U.S. Navy decides to withdraw from the Asian region.

The prospect of China acquiring the necessary capabilities to challenge the United States military's control over the commons is unlikely to occur in the near future. Such a development would need a significant amount of time, spanning many decades rather than just a few years. Moreover, it is plausible that China may not see it necessary to actively pursue such a capability. Despite the potential frustration experienced by Chinese officials about the actions of their counterparts, it is unlikely that U.S. foreign policy would generate a comparable degree of apprehension that previously spurred the extensive establishment of Washington's global force projection capacity during the Cold War era. Currently, there exists a singular location where China has the potential to pursue its revisionist aspirations, namely Taiwan. China's increasing interest in the island is evident, as President Xi announced in 2022 that it is imperative to accomplish the full reunion of the homeland. The potential occurrence of a Chinese military offensive against Taiwan is a significant departure from the era of complete unipolarity, whereby China's limited capabilities rendered concerns over such a scenario negligible.

However, it is crucial to consider that Beijing's aspirations towards Taiwan differ significantly from historical instances of revisionist challenges, such as those undertaken by Japan and Germany during the first half of the twentieth century, or the Soviet Union during the second half. It should be noted that these countries successfully conquered and occupied extensive territories over considerable distances. In the event that China successfully incorporates Taiwan into its sphere of influence, even those who strongly advocate for the strategic importance of the island do not see it as being of such immense value that its realignment would result in a significant shift in the allocation of power, akin to the perilous dynamics associated with multipolarity. What is the current status of the growing collaboration between China and Russia? The topic at hand has significant implications as it engenders challenges for Washington and its allies. However, it does not provide any potential for a fundamental restructuring of power dynamics inside the system.

In order to counterbalance a superpower that has entrenched leadership and vast ties inside the existing order, it is necessary for the opposing coalition to also possess comparable significance. In this regard, Chinese-Russian ties do not meet the criteria. There exists a rationale behind the decision of the two parties to refrain from labeling their collaboration as a formal alliance. In the first phase of the crisis in Ukraine, China's involvement was mostly limited to its oil purchases, with little contribution in other areas. An impactful partnership would need enduring collaboration across a diverse range of domains, rather than superficial cooperation primarily driven by convenience. Despite the potential improvement in China and Russia's bilateral ties, it is important to note that both nations remain primarily regional military powers. The combination of two powers with the ability to achieve regional equilibrium does not always result in global equilibrium. The attainment of such a goal requires military capacities that are now beyond the reach of both Russia and China, both individually and in combination, and are unlikely to be acquired in the foreseeable future.

Tough measures for Revisionism:

The prospect for a great-power war, which may escalate to a nuclear conflict, is a cause for concern despite the relatively restrained revisionist endeavors undertaken by China and Russia. Consequently, any reassurance derived from these restricted revisionist ambitions may be seen as insufficient. However, it is crucial to contextualize the stability of the system within a historical framework. During the period of the Cold War, both superpowers had concerns that a complete annexation of Germany by the other side would result in a significant and definitive change in the worldwide balance of power. And for valid reasons: in 1970, the economy of West Germany constituted about 25% of the United States' GDP and approximately 66% of the Soviet Union's economy. Due to the proximity of each superpower to a highly important economic asset and the equitable division of the prize, a consequential outcome emerged: a fierce struggle in security, characterized by the deployment of substantial military forces by both sides inside their respective territories in Germany.

The possibility of brinkmanship crises concerning the destiny of Germany was always present and sometimes became prominent, as shown by the 1961 crisis on the status of Berlin. Alternatively, one might draw a parallel between the current state of affairs with the geopolitical landscape of the 1930s, characterized by a multipolar world. During this period, Germany underwent a significant transformation over a relatively short span of time, transitioning from a nation with limited military capabilities and international constraints to a formidable force that almost achieved dominance over the Eurasian continent. However, Germany was able to do this due to two advantages that are no longer present in the current context. Initially, it was feasible for a dominant nation to rapidly amass significant military capabilities during that era, since the prevailing weaponry technologies were relatively straightforward. Furthermore, Germany has a geographically and economically advantageous opportunity to enhance its influence via the conquest of neighboring nations (Posen, 2023).

In the year 1939, the Nazi regime first incorporated the economic assets of Czechoslovakia, which were around ten percent of the size of Germany's own resources. Subsequently, they proceeded to annex Poland, which accounted for approximately 17 percent of Germany's economic resources. These triumphs were used as a catalyst for further territorial acquisitions in 1940, including Belgium (11%), the Netherlands (10%), and France (51%). China lacks comparable opportunities. Firstly, it is worth noting that Taiwan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is much lower, amounting to less than five percent of China's GDP. Moreover, the island is geographically isolated from the mainland due to a substantial body of water. According to Owen Cote, a research scientist at MIT, China's inability to control the sea surface prevents it from effectively protecting a sufficiently large naval invasion force and the subsequent commerce required to sustain it over several crossings of the Taiwan Straits, which span over 100 miles in width. It is worth considering that the English Channel, while being just one-fifth of the breadth of the United Kingdom, served as a significant obstacle that prevented the Nazis from successfully capturing the country (weiss, 2022).

Japan and South Korea provide the primary economic opportunities in close proximity, although Beijing lacks the necessary military might to pursue them. Due to the fact that Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan possess economies that are mostly knowledge-driven and deeply interconnected with the global economic system, their riches cannot be efficiently acquired by invasion. The Nazis, as an example, were able to seize control of the Czech armaments producer Skoda Works in order to bolster their military capabilities. However, China would face more challenges in attempting to similarly exploit the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company. The functioning of the system relies on personnel with specific expertise, who may potentially evacuate in the case of an

invasion, as well as a continuous supply chain of resources from various locations worldwide, which would be disrupted in times of conflict. Contemporary revisionists have an additional challenge in their endeavors, since their actions are limited to regional balance, while the United States has the capability to respond on a global scale. As an example, it can be seen that the United States is not engaging in direct military confrontation with Russia, but rather using its worldwide influence to impose severe economic sanctions on the nation.

Additionally, the United States is providing substantial military support to Kyiv, including conventional equipment, intelligence, and other types of military aid. In the event of China's attempt to annex Taiwan, the United States has the potential to adopt a global approach by implementing a complete naval blockade, strategically positioned far from China's territorial waters. This measure would effectively restrict China's access to the global economy. The imposition of such a blockade would have severe consequences for the economy of the nation, as it heavily depends on technical imports and primarily serves as an assembly hub in global manufacturing chains. In contrast, the impact on the U.S. economy would be quite minimal (Mearsheimer, 2001). Due to the considerable influence of the United States in the global economy, it has the capacity to employ economic mechanisms as a means of retribution against other nations, with very less concern for potential retaliatory actions. In the hypothetical scenario if China were to initiate a military conquest of Taiwan, it is plausible to anticipate that the United States would respond by implementing a remote blockade on China.

Consequently, it can be expected that Beijing would likely adopt economic retaliatory measures in response. However, the most potent economic tool at its disposal would have little impact. There is a possibility that China may choose to divest a portion or the all of its substantial U.S. Treasury securities holdings, perhaps leading to an increase in borrowing costs inside the United States (Lasater, 2000). However, it is possible for the U.S. Federal Reserve to acquire all the securities. According to economist Brad Setser, the United States has a significant advantage in this situation, since the Federal Reserve is the only entity worldwide capable of purchasing a greater quantity than China can ever offer for sale. Contemporary global standards also impede actors with revisionist tendencies. The genesis of these behavioral norms may be attributed to deliberate efforts by the United States and its allies in the aftermath of World War II. As an example, the promulgation of the proscription by Washington on the use of force for the purpose of altering international borders was motivated not just by the aim of averting significant wars, but also by the intention to solidify and maintain the postwar status quo, which proved advantageous to the United States. Russia has encountered significant resistance due to its invasion of Ukraine, primarily because it has clearly disregarded this established norm. In the realm of norms, similar to other domains, the current global environment presents advantageous conditions for the United States, while posing challenges for revisionist actors.

United States choices in new realities:

Kenneth Waltz, a prominent political scientist, made a distinction between two key elements: the distribution of capacities, which he considered a really systemic aspect, and the alliances that governments establish. According to his argument, although nations may not have the ability to choose the extent of their power, they do possess the agency to select their team. The alliance system, which is mostly centered on the United States and plays a significant role in international politics, has been in existence for over seventy years. It has acquired a certain level of structural significance, while Waltz's differentiation remains relevant. The establishment of the present global order may be attributed not only to the exertion of force, but also to the deliberate decisions taken by the United States and its allies. These decisions included extensive collaboration in both

economic and security domains first aimed at containing the Soviet Union and afterwards focused on promoting a global order that facilitated commerce and cooperation.

The decisions made by individuals continue to have significance. If appropriate choices are made, the likelihood of bipolarity or multipolarity occurring will remain remote, and the current state of a partially unipolar system will persist for many decades. One of the most significant considerations is that the United States should refrain from withdrawing its alliances and security responsibilities in Europe or Asia. The United States garners substantial advantages from its role as a security leader in these particular areas. The return of America would potentially give rise to a world that is characterized by increased risk and instability. Moreover, the diminished level of collaboration on the global economy and other significant matters that are beyond the capacity of Washington to resolve alone would be evident. Undoubtedly, during the period of partial unipolarity, the significance of alliances becomes more obvious. The concept of revisionism necessitates retribution, and given the limited availability of independent courses of action, it is imperative for the United States to coordinate its response with its allied nations. However, Washington retains significant influence in shaping such collaboration.

The emergence of cooperation among self-interested governments may occur in the absence of leadership, but it is more probable to materialize when there is guidance from Washington. American ideas often serve as a central point of focus, around which its partners tend to unite. Ensuring the preservation of United States alliances in Asia and Europe does not imply an unconditional commitment from Washington. It is essential for the respective nations to assume more responsibility in adequately safeguarding their own security. In addition to the need of increased expenditure, there is also a requirement for enhanced fiscal prudence. European allies of the United States need to enhance their capabilities for territorial defense in regions where the United States may have limited capability, while avoiding unnecessary duplication in places where the United States has a comparative advantage. In practical terms, this entails prioritizing the objective of deploying a greater number of ground forces. In the Asian region, it would be prudent for the allies of the United States to give precedence to defense systems and techniques, particularly in relation to Taiwan.

Fortunately, Taipei seems to have recognized the need of prioritizing a defensive strategy to secure the island, which has been previously overlooked for over a decade. This awakening may be attributed to the recent events in Ukraine. In the realm of economic policy, it is advisable for Washington to exercise restraint and avoid consistently pursuing the most advantageous terms in negotiations with its allies. Effective leaders are characterized by having followers who are willing to follow them voluntarily, rather than those who need persuasion or force. The fundamental basis of the contemporary global order revolves on an underlying commitment that has proven advantageous for the United States. This commitment entails that although the nation enjoys distinct advantages stemming from its control over the system, it refrains from using its position to unfairly extract benefits from its allies. Sustaining this arrangement requires policies that exhibit a lesser degree of protectionism compared to those implemented by either the Trump or the Biden administration. In the context of trade, it is imperative for Washington to broaden its perspective beyond its own interests and take into account the preferences and desires of its friends. For the majority of individuals, the answer may be succinctly stated as the ability to enter the United States market. Consequently, it is imperative for the United States to present substantial trade agreements to its counterparts in Asia and Europe, with the aim of reducing trade obstacles. When executed effectively, enhancing market access can yield favorable outcomes for both U.S. allies and American citizens, thereby enabling politicians to surmount political limitations.

Conclusion

The United States should exercise restraint in employing its military forces to alter the existing state of affairs. The two-decade endeavor of nation-building in Afghanistan and the military intervention in Iraq may be characterized as self-inflicted setbacks. The lesson should be sufficiently memorable: refraining from engaging in any future occupations. Any suggestion to deploy U.S. military forces beyond the regions of Asia and Europe warrants thorough examination, with a predisposition towards a negative response. Maintaining the existing state of affairs in Asia and Europe, although formerly a reasonably manageable task, has now evolved into a demanding and continuous endeavor. The focal point of the U.S. military should be directed on that particular area. In essence, the global landscape during the era of partial unipolarity continues to reflect several traits seen during the era of complete unipolarity, but in a modified manner. Revisionist governments are still constrained by international norms and institutions; but, they are displaying an increased willingness to defy these constraints. The United States now maintains control over the global commons and has a distinct capability to deploy military force worldwide. However, China has established a highly disputed region in close proximity to its coastal areas. The United States continues to have significant economic influence; nevertheless, it is increasingly imperative for the nation to collaborate with its allies in order to enhance the efficacy of imposed sanctions. The organization maintains a distinct ability to foster collaboration among its members; however, its ability to take independent action is limited. Indeed, the United States encounters constraints that were not present immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. However, the notion of multipolarity fails to fully acknowledge the extent of influence it continues to possess.

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