

# **World Order: Unipolar to Multipolar**

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## **Outline**

1. Introduction
2. Brief history of World Order
3. United States' Uni-polar Status
4. Determinants of World Order
  - a) Economic strength
  - b) Military power
  - c) International political clout
  - d) Ideology appeal
5. The Paradigm shift
6. Catalyst factors:
  - a) Energy resources
  - b) Iraq war
  - c) Financial crisis
  - d) Globalisation
7. Future scenario- Multipolar World
8. Would the multipolarity be beneficial to world?
9. Conclusion

History has witnessed cycles of rise and fall of civilisations, empires and regional as well as global powers. In past, military power was the only decisive factor in “balance of power” among nations. Its strength ensured their expansion and influence while its weakness precipitated their fall and disintegration. Though, it is still an important element, many other factors like economy, ideology, political stability, statesmanship and diplomacy have played substantial role in determining the status of a country among the comity of nations in this globalisation world.

The World Order has been more dynamic due to the unprecedented developments in international affairs in the last century-ranging from multipolar, bipolar and unipolar. The US has enjoyed unilateral and unparalleled status in the international affairs. But as history repeats itself, the might of American power is visibly diminishing due to neoconservative and imperialistic policies, and new centres of power are emerging to shape the “multipolar world order”.

Naturally, whenever any major power or state has shown its ambition to conquer the world and set up hegemonic empire, it has created resistance from other forces or alliance of forces. This clash of power has been the characteristics of all the periods, though; the 20th century is significantly an example of unprecedented struggle between the countries to acquire world supremacy. In the multipolar world, the conflict between European countries led to the World War-I. Till then United States of America followed isolationist policies in international realm. During first three years of war, Washington remained out of war and then declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. The success in war established an international foothold for the US.

This deadliest war of history came to an end with of the deadliest weapons (nuclear bombs), which ushered in a new era of nuclear competition. As the military strength of both the US and the USSR (former) had played significant role in defeating the "axis", they established their enormous influence in the world affairs. The resulting conflict of interest and ideology between the US and the USSR shaped "Bipolar World Order". In the aftermath of World War-II, United Nations Organisation (UNO) was created to maintain peace. However, this forum was also unable to diffuse the tension between the US and the former USSR which marked the second half of the 20th century. The period is known as the Cold War.

Eventually, Cold War ended with the disintegration of the USSR and emergence of the US as sole super power of the world— economically, militarily and politically. The then president of the US Bush coined the term "New World Order", which was significantly "Unipolar". The US has enjoyed a prominent status and role since then; its economy grew with tremendous pace, its military strength has been unmatched, its political influence in the international affairs has been uncontested, and its ideology of democratic principle earned its world leadership.

Simply, the US holds supremacy in every element of global eminence. Richard Nixon, the ex-president of the US, in his book "In the Arena", has described ingredients of global political clout as: economic power, military forces, ideological appeal, domestic political cohesion, skill in statecraft and commonality of interest with other major powers. In the light of these ingredients the US still enjoys upper hand over other countries of the world. Some of these are enumerated here.

The US also possesses a strongest military in the world with 1.4 million active personnel force. Its combat force consists of the largest number of carrier ships, fastest fighter planes with precision guided missiles and bombs. It has successfully tested anti-ballistic missile shield capacity.

More importantly, the US has led the world ideologically- for the purpose of democratic principles. It was this ideological perception on the basis of which League of Nations after the World War-I and the United Nations after the World War-II were created.

Moreover, it has maintained commonality of interest with other major powers. However, it has not been able to acquire absolute power due to increasing competition from other major powers, particularly emergence of China, resurgence of Russia, and union of European countries globally and Iran, Venezuela regionally. "The scope of America's global hegemony is admittedly great but its depth is shallow, limited by both domestic and external restraints." Says Birzinski, the former US National Security Advisor.

The US has posed and acted as a most powerful state in the last two decades, but the shallowness of its power. Other powers have challenged the hegemony of the US in the international affairs. Though, no any power has individually surpassed the US in any of the elements of balance of power, they are poised to do in the near future, given the changing paradigm.

Economically, the US is still the largest economy of the world but closely followed by Japan and China. The per capita income of Japan is higher than that of the US. China has a very growing economy with sustained growth rate of over nine per cent for the last one and a half decades. The US faces trade deficit of \$800 billion while China has trade surplus of \$150 billion a year. EU's collective GDP is now greater than that of the US. Since the launch of Euro currency in 1999, dollar had been losing its value against it constantly. Economy of Russia has been bloating its since 2000 and its GDP has been tripled. The rising oil and gas

prices have added enormous impetus in Russian economy. Commenting on the challenges to unipolarity of the US, Richard N. Hass, a scholar at US Council for Foreign Affairs, wrote in "Foreign Affairs Magazine": "Although US' GDP accounts for over 25 per cent of the world total, this percentage is sure to decline over time given actual and projected differential between US growth rate and those of Asian giants".

Militarily, US military force is said to be the strongest in the world but its superiority is not assuredly marked in contrast to the military forces' capabilities of other major powers like Russia, China, France, Germany or if the capability of communist countries is combined on the one hand and that of the EU is combined on other hand. Almost all the major powers are nuclear states. Russia claims to have antiballistic missile capability successfully developed and tested during the Cold War; China has tested a direct 'anti-satellite missile' and 'carrier cruise killer'. Moreover, in the current scenario militarism and terrorism have undermined the strength of quite larger armies. The 9/11 attacks showed how a small investment by terrorists could cause extraordinary level of damage.

Politically, the influence of the US and its unilateral posture has been seriously checked. This is manifested from nuclear imbroglio with North Korea and Iran. China proved to be the best able to influence Pyongyang. Iran has faced four sets of sanctions by the UNSC on the insistence of the US but does not seem to be ready to compromise its stance. The degree of sanctions was significantly softened due to the stand of Russia and China. "Washington's ability to pressure Tehran has been strengthened by the participation of several Western European countries and weakened by the reluctance of China and Russia to sanction Iran", says Richard N. Hass.

Meanwhile, writ of the US has been significantly challenged by Venezuela in Latin America, which is supported by Argentina and Brazil. While challenging the US authority, Venezuela is developing close relations with Russia and China. Russian President Dimitry Medvedev visited Caracas in mid 2008 and signed a nuclear deal with his counterpart Hugo Chavez. Their military cooperation is also strengthening after this result. In South Asia, India is emerging as a global power due to its robust economic growth and large population of over 1 billion.

Ideologically, US had prominence due to its ideological appeal but the practical approach to the democratic cause has been contrary to the ideology. Washington's dealing with other countries has been influenced by its economic and hegemonic interests rather than democratic principles and justice. The US has been supportive to dictatorships and kingdoms, while it has been calling others for democracy. The factor which has most stigmatised America's reputation is its policy in the Middle East where it has been biased. It calls Israel's 'state terrorism' as 'right of self-defense', while it terms the legitimate resistance of Palestinians as 'terrorism'.

Though, emergence of new powers was natural, the status of the US could remain unchallenged, had Washington transformed its attitude and policies from a unilateralist to multilateralist approach. But the unilateral and unjustified policies of the US on several accounts from Iraq war to climate change crises have only unveiled fissures in its power structure. The most controversial issues, which have placed the US at the opposite pole from rest of the world, are energy crises, Iraq war, climate change, financial crises and globalisation. These factors have rather proved catalyst in the shift from unipolar to the multipolar world.

Energy resources are vital element in foreign policy formulation, particularly in contemporary scenario of energy crises. The US energy policy is a driving force behind the

end of unipolarity. Since there is increase in demand of oil, it has two-fold effects on geopolitical front. First; the increase in demand raised the world oil prices from just over \$20 a barrel to over \$150 a barrel in less than a decade until the financial crisis plunged the oil prices. This increase in oil cost resulted in enormous transfer of wealth and leverage to energy rich countries. Secondly in order to secure energy supply, all the major powers have common interest in the energy rich countries. This competition has resulted in confrontational politics on the international stage. This is the energy demand which led the US to war in Iraq.

The Iraq war has significantly contributed to the dilution of the US power in the world. It has proved to be expensive in terms of almost all elements of power and in human terms. Historian Paul Kennedy had outlined in his book 'Imperial Overstretch' that the US would eventually decline by overreaching just as other powers had in the past. The war has cost America deaths of more than 4,500 troops and over \$700 billion as loss. Resultantly, the US fiscal position has declined from surplus of \$100 billion in 2000 to a deficit of \$700 billion in 2007. This also manifests that Washington cannot fight anymore war unilaterally.

On the diplomatic front, the US could not obtain approval from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for going into war in Iraq. The issue of pre-emptive war divided the US and the UK from their European partners — France and Germany — and other global powers — Russia and China.

The financial crisis of 2008 hit the backbone of the US economy whereas Russian, Chinese and other Asian economies have displayed quite stability. The crisis damaged not only its economy but image as well. "The financial crisis is causing major damage to US image as the stable anchor of the world economy, and American leadership, as the dominant financial superpower with free and innovative markets, is in question", says Yeongseop Rhee, of Brookings institution. In a short, the financial crisis has defined the economic multipolarity of the world.

Besides, the globalisation has transformed the world into an interdependent multipolar world. Nation States have been losing their monopoly on power and are being challenged by regional and global organisations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and corporations. Globalisation has strengthened ties and connection in economy, politics, science and technology, culture and society around the world. It is the impact of globalisation and leverage of environmental NGOs that 186 countries though reluctantly signed the Kyoto Protocol, Copenhagen Accord and now the 'Cancun Agreements' on climate change.

Above issues have reflected upon a point that no country can independently address such global issues like climate change, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, economic crisis and above all the world peace and security. It has been proved that unilateral and hegemonic efforts have been failed to change the objective law of world politics, rather, they have aroused resistance across the world.

Hence it is becoming evident that the age of 'unipolarity' is 'dissipating' and the world is 'moving towards' natural 'multipolarity'. In other words, there emerged multipowers or centres power. However, multipolarity is not an immediate reality the rather it is developing trend. As the emerging powers are strengthening and their inter-dependence increasing, world is being pushed towards multipolarity.

In the future multipolar world order, power would not rest with a few major countries but with several countries. Each having its specific prominence will have assertive say in the

world affairs. Besides the US, Japan, China, EU and India would have economic strength. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, members of the African Union and Brazil would have leverage due to their vast energy resources. Russia would have both advantages. Some countries would have importance due to their geostrategic location like Pakistan, Central Asian States, Ukraine, and Turkey as these countries are located on the energy routes through which energy resources will be routed to rest of the world. Besides, the international organisations like UNO, World Bank, IMF; regional organisations like SAARC, EU, SCO, ASEAN, AU and NGOs including environmental, social and humanitarian would be on the list of power centres.

Here a question arises; whether the multipolar world with so many power centres could ensure peace and security? There are serious concerns because previous multipolarity had led to two World Wars. The answer is assuredly affirmative. The future multipolarity is not going to be like the previous one based on independent power base of countries. On the contrary, the emerging multipolarity is the age of growing inter-dependence and mutual cooperation. The countries would not be asserting their influence individually but through regional and international organisations on the basis of democratic principles.

The strength of economy, technological advancement, availability of energy and human development depend upon the cooperation of all countries and civilisations. And a multipolar world can best serve this purpose by creating balance in exercise of power and boosting competitive atmosphere in technological and economic fields. In this regard, a scholar of Chinese People Association for Peace and Disarmament, Yu Zhongrong says, "A multipolar world is characterised with coexistence of multiple forces and multiple entities." To be precise, collective security, mutual cooperation and inter-dependence would be the earmark of multipolar world.

To achieve this purpose, all the existing and emerging powers need to develop consensus on some prerequisites. The international relations are required to be democratised. And to achieve the goals, UN is a best forum. Firstly its charter's basic principles of equality of states, majority as core of democratic system and mechanism of institutions shall be followed in true spirit in dealing with all international issues. Secondly, UN's authority must be safeguarded and enhanced to play its role to balance the power of various forces and to find just and rational solution to international conflicts like Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq, nuclear proliferation and humanitarian crises. It shall facilitate dialogue and exchange of views between different civilisations and cultures of all religion, region and countries.

As the chronicles of international politics have proved that hegemony and imperialism are the biggest threat to world peace and are the root causes of conflicts and wars, the multipolar world of 'inter-dependence' and 'coexistence' is a bid to create a harmonious world of economic stability, social justice, collective security and common development. In this way, human will see the world to embark on the path of peace-the ultimate goal.

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Kon Kehta hy k Main Gum-naam ho jaon ga  
Main tu aik Baab hn Tareekh mein Likha jaon ga