

## TOPIC

# MUTIPOLARITY, PROMOTING PEACE OR FEUILLING WAR?

## OUTLINE

### I INTRODUCTION

By strengthening strategic uncertainty among great powers, intensifying security dilemma and promoting bloc politics, multipolarity is inadvertently fuelling war. Nevertheless, by empowering international institutions and prioritizing soft power, peace can be maintained.

### II UNDERSTANDING THE TERM MUTIPOLARITY

### III HOW MULTIPOLARITY FUELS WAR

(a). Multipolarity strengthens strategic uncertainty among great powers.

- US - China - Russia competition.

(b). Multipolarity sharpens the security dilemma and fuels arms race.

- Indo-Pacific militarization

(c). Multipolarity promotes alliances and counter alliances and instigates bloc politics.

- US-led and China-led blocs

(d). Multipolarity undermines consensus building, promoting institutional paralysis.

- UN paralysis over Syria and Yemen

(e). Multipolarity exacerbates the return of hard power.

- Russian invasion of Ukraine

(f). Multipolarity accelerates proxy conflicts and indirect warfare.

- Proxy warfare in the Middle East

(g). Nationalist militarism surges due to the rise of middle powers.

- Middle powers asserting regional influence

(h). Multipolarity escalates economic contestation, disrupting global supply chains

- US-China technological decoupling

(i). Multipolarity fuels financial pluralism heightening financial security dilemma.

- BRICS de-dollarization efforts.

(g) Multipolarity intensifies ideological and normative competition.

- Liberalism vs. Authoritarianism conflict

#### **IV STRATEGIC MEASURES TO PROMOTE PEACE**

(a). Strengthening and empowering international institutions to mediate conflicts.

- Role of the United Nations

(b). Promoting preventing diplomacy to resolve conflicts before they escalate into war.

- The 2015 Iran-US backchannel diplomacy in Oman

(c). Prioritizing soft power engagement to reduce hostility among rival powers.

- The Ping Pong Diplomacy (1971)

(d). Managing great power competition through controlled rivalry and crisis management protocols.

- The US-China hotline restored in 2024.

(c). Reducing nuclear risks through updated treaties, no-first use pledges and de-escalation mechanisms.  
• The US-Russia New Start Treaty

## V CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, as the world transitions towards multipolarity, the risks of entanglements surge. To address these challenges, shared global cooperation remains imperative.

It is aptly quoted by Henry Kissinger in his book 'World Order', "Multipolar systems are the most prone to war because they contain the greatest potential for miscalculation". As the world is transitioning towards multipolarity, the risks of strategic miscalculation and great power contestation have surged. Multipolarity, by strengthening strategic uncertainty among great powers, intensifying security dilemma and promoting bloc politics is inadvertently fuelling war. From Samuel P. Huntington's "Clash of Civilization" to Henry Kissinger's "World Order" and Fareed Zakaria's "Ten Lessons for the Post-Pandemic World", all converge to say that multipolarity fuels war by intensifying ideological confrontation, restoring competitive great-power politics and weakening global institutions. Along with this, as the world transitions towards multipolarity the threat of bloc politics, return of hard power and global supply chain disruption have become inevitable. Likewise, multipolarity is also fuelling financial pluralism, challenging the hegemony of western-led global financial institutions and promoting economic

security dilemma. Nevertheless, strategic measures can be adopted to promote peace in the volatile world milieu.

Thereby, only through shared global competition, empowering global institutions and prioritizing soft power, the world can maintain peaceful coexistence.

Before charting the path forward, it is imperative to understand multipolarity. Samuel P. Huntington in his various essays on global order defines multipolarity as, "Multipolarity is a distribution of power in which several major states or blocs possess comparable capabilities, preventing any single power from dominating the international system." This highlights that multipolarity drags nations in a zero-sum game. Since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the end of Cold War (1947-1991), the United States remained the unmatched hegemon of the world. However, with the emergence of China in 2008 and its accelerated growth in military, economics and

technology, the unipolar hegemony of the United States is fracturing. Meanwhile, the emergence of Russia and its anti-western doctrine have instigated the return of hard power, escalating the risks of miscalculations and mistrust. Hence, the world, once governed by America is now unfolding in a new phase, marked by multipolarity.

Having highlighted the term multipolarity, it is now crucial to underline the potential faultlines that can fuel war.

due to multipolarity. One of the most significant features of multipolarity is that it strengthens strategic uncertainty among great powers. As the world transitions

toward multipolarity, the rise of great powers poses a Thucydides Trap to already established powers. This accelerates geopolitical contestation among great powers.

As, Ronald Reagan notes in his book "An American Life", "Multipolarity intensifies the Thucydides Trap because several rising powers challenge several established ones simultaneously." The emergence of China and the resurgence of

Russia as a counterweight to the established unipolar hegemony of the US have fuelled strategic uncertainty. This uncertainty has locked them in a zero-sum game, escalating the risks of full-scale war.

Multipolarity sharpens the security dilemma and fuels arms race. The military buildup of one state creates a security dilemma in other states which contributes to an arms race. This culminates into regional instability which ultimately spirals into global instability. The Indo-Pacific remains one of the most militarized and volatile regions of the world. The growing military and maritime competition of China and the US in the Indo-Pacific has escalated the risks of a full-fledged war. slightest miscalculations can potentially lead to a full-scale war. Henceforth, it can be argued that multipolarity exhibits the potential of morphing small-scale confrontation into a large-scale war which can lead to regional and global instability.

Multipolarity promotes alliances and counter-alliances and instigates bloc politics. As witnessed in the pre-WWI and pre-WWII era, the emergence of alliances and counter-alliances dragged the world into the most devastating world wars. The alliances system of Otto von Bismarck sowed the seeds of the World War II. Likewise, in the contemporary transitional phase of the world, the emergence of the US and Chinese-led blocs resisting on economic, security and ideological guarantees have cartographed multipolarity as a tool of fuelling economic and ideological war. Therefore, it can be stated that multipolarity by cartographing alliances and counter-alliances fuels war.

Multipolarity undermines consensus-building, thereby fuelling institutional paralysis. As multipolarity promotes multilateralism, the emergence of new regional and multilateral institutions such as BRICS, SCO etc. has been challenging the credibility of western-led global institutions.

This undermines consensus-building in global institution. The monopoly of great veto power in the United Nations has significantly lowered its integrity and credibility. The paralysis of the UNSC over Syria, Yemen and Palestine has exposed the strategic loopholes of this global institution. Hence, multipolarity is contributing to the emergence of multilateral and regional institutions.

Multipolarity exacerbates the return of hard power. Great powers showcase their military and technological might by waging wars on vulnerable states to create deterrence in the multipolar world. The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 marks the return of hard power. Russia has initiated to invade eastern European territories to expand its sphere of influence and reassert its dominance in the world. This encourages other states to use similar tactics to emerge as recognizable powers. The transformation of Iran-Israel conflict from covert operations to full-scale confrontation

marks the return of hard power in the Middle East. Hence, a multipolar world is more prone to war as it accelerates balkanization and institutionalizes the return of hard power.

Multipolarity accelerates proxy conflicts and indirect warfare. In a multipolar world, states use proxies and intelligence-led operations to expand their sphere of influence and create deterrence. This is evident from the proxy conflicts in the Middle East. Iran uses its "Axis of Resistance" (Houthis, Hamas and Hezbollah) to exert its influence in Yemen, Palestine and Lebanon and create a deterrence trap for Israel. This highlights that how a multipolar world opens channels of covert and intelligence-led operations. Such operations contribute to regional instability and can also drag great powers, thereby igniting a war that will not only have regional repercussions but also global consequences.

Due to the rise of the middle powers, a wave of

nationalist militarism emerges. As such states contest for regional autonomy. With the rise of middle powers such as India, Brazil, Turkey, South Africa and Saudi Arabia, the world order has become more complex. These nations leverage their geostrategic locations and natural resource reserves to exert great influence in multilateral and unilateral institutions. To quote Raja C. Mohan, "Middle powers survive by leveraging their geostrategic locations". These powers are now focusing on their rearmament and technological advancements to enhance their bargaining power. Therefore, multipolarity is fuelling nationalism as it did in pre-WWII era.

Multipolarity escalates economic contestation, thereby disrupting global supply chains. As the great powers prioritize national interests over global, they tend to instigate economic warfare. Such economic wars using tools of tariffs and export controls disrupt global supply chains thereupon heralding economic shocks and inflation.

The technological decoupling of the US and China has contributed to the emergence of China plus one models. Such initiatives deepen technological warfare as Fareed Zakaria articulated, "Technology has become the core of great power rivalry". This demonstrates that multipolarity is prone to economic wars.

Multipolarity fuels financial pluralism, thereupon heightening financial security dilemma. The multipolar world challenges the hegemony of the US dollar and struggles to develop alternative payment systems. The efforts of BRICS to develop alternative payment systems such as BRICS pay and barter trade system underscores its struggle toward de-dollarization. Such initiatives have triggered a financial security dilemma in the United States which further escalates great power competition. As the emerging powers are dumping the US-led SWIFT Payment system and chartographing alternatives, the world is slowly paving the way towards multipolarity which

can potentially fuel war. Consequently, it can be remarked that multipolarity by fostering financial pluralism fuels financial security dilemma.

Multipolarity intensifies ideological and normative competition. As witnessed in the Cold War, the United States and the USSR were largely dragged into war due to their ideological differences. As, it is remarked by Samuel P. Huntington, "The most destructive conflict in history arose from ideological confrontations." This demonstrates that the emergence of authoritarianism as a counterweight to liberalism has potentially intensified ideological competition.

Liberalism, led by the United States and authoritarianism propagated by China has initiated fragmentation and bifurcation of the world into two blocs. These states use geostrategic and geoeconomic tools to expand their ideological sphere of influence. Henceforth, ideological competition remains at the core of conflict in the multipolar world.

Having underscored the potential fault lines of multipolarity fuelling war, now the task there lies to chart a path forward that can ensure shared good. Firstly, it is crucial to strengthen and empower international institutions to mediate conflict. In this regard, the United Nations can play a crucial role. The United Nations must serve as a neutral arena for dialogue, mediation and peacekeeping. To quote Henry Cobat, "The primary, the fundamental, the essential purpose of the United Nations is to promote peace." United Nations an institution that emerged after the WWII in 1945 was established to prevent the possibility of the future wars. Therefore, it is essential to eliminate the monopoly of P5 and empower UN as a neutral global institute.

Secondly, promoting preventive diplomacy is crucial to resolve conflicts before they cascade into full-scale war. Preventive diplomacy uses early-warning systems, shuttle diplomacy, mediation and confidence-building

measures CBMs. to pacify tensions before they escalate into widespread conflicts. Strong diplomatic engagement through Track I and Track II diplomacy reduce misperceptions and keep nations at talking terms even during tense periods.

In 2015, the US and Iran paved the way for the JCPOA by institutionalizing backchannel diplomacy in Oman. This helped both nations to address their concerns on Iran's potential nuclear buildup and de-escalated war-like situation. This illustrates how preventive diplomacy can pave a way towards peaceful negotiations averting the risks of war.

Thirdly, prioritizing soft power engagement to reduce hostility among rival powers.

Soft power remains the cornerstone of peaceful coexistence. As quoted by Joseph Nye in his seminal work "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" "In a world of multiple powers, soft power becomes more important than coercion." Soft power, encompassing cultural,

educational and technological exchanges builds trust among nations and decreases zero-sum thinking. When people-to-people ties remain open and stakes are shared, it becomes difficult for governments to mobilize mass support for war. The Ping Pong Diplomacy (1971) between the US and China softened the relations and reduced Cold War hostility, ultimately leading to normalization of diplomatic ties. Henceforth, by undertaking sovereignty and national interests of states, peaceful multipolar world can sustain:

Next, managing great power competition through controlled rivalry and crisis management protocols. As the US-China and US-Russia rivalries intensify, the risks of miscalculation grow. Establishing crisis hotlines, military-to-military communication, state-level diplomatic dialogues and rules-based negotiations can contain great power friction and prevent escalation. The US-China military hotline restored in 2024 after 17 years of communication freeze helped prevent naval

confrontations in South China Sea from spiralling into major power conflict. By institutionalizing dialogue between the great powers and highlighting the results of rivalry, tensions can be de-escalated and the threats of zero-sum rivalry can be prevented in the multipolar world.

Lastly, reducing nuclear risks through updated treaties, no-first use pledges and de-escalation mechanisms. Nuclear weapons remain the greatest existential threats. As the great powers and middle powers are contesting to increase their nuclear warheads and achieve nuclear weapons, multipolarity has brought the world to the brink of catastrophic war.

Consequently, updating Cold War arms control treaties, no-first use doctrines, increasing transparency in nuclear deployments and modernizing nuclear risk hotlines can reduce the probability of nuclear-triggered world war. The US-Russia New START Treaty (2010) extended till 2026 capped deployed nuclear warheads and included

verification mechanisms. This shows how arms control can effectively reduce the risks of nuclear war in a multipolar world.

In a nutshell, multipolarity has strengthened strategic uncertainty among great powers which holds the potential to fuel war. Furthermore, by intensifying security dilemma, multipolarity has intensified arms race, contributing to regional and global instability. Likewise, the emergence of geopolitical, geo-economic and financial blocs has set the stage for a war fuelled by multipolarity. Additionally, multipolarity accelerates proxy conflicts, indirect warfare and intelligence-led operations. This compels rival states to take reactive actions, thereby escalating tensions. Along with this, multipolarity has mandated the return of hard power as states use hard measures to expand their sphere of influence. The ideological warfare remains at the core of multipolarity, compelling nations to choose sides and foster bifurcation of the world. Nonetheless, a peaceful multipolar world does

not remains a distant dream. By institutionalizing global cooperation through unbiased global institutions, adopting preventing diplomacy and prioritizing soft power engagement, the world can peacefully transition toward multipolarity. As Ronald Reagan remarked, "Peace is not the absence of conflicts, but the ability to handle conflicts by peaceful means."