

RENEWED POWER DYNAMICS: THE SHIFT FROM UNIPOLARITY TO MULTIPOLARITY

INTRODUCTION

There have been various developments of new geopolitical windstorms hovering around the world carefully capturing the minds of the people. The story of our time is one of such transitions. In the years following the Cold War, the world seemed to breathe in unison to the rhythm of a single voice—the liberal international order led by the United States of America(USA) with former US President George H.W Bush taking the baton. Indeed a system built on capitalism, free markets, democratic ideals, globalization and multilateral institutions. To many, it meant a watershed moment leaving behind the ideological rivalries of bipolarity and indicating the dominance of the capitalist side. Yet as we step deeper into the 21st century geopolitical index , this unipolarity seems to be realigning and readjusting.



Dhriti Kalita

Political Science Honours (2nd year)

dhriti715@gmail.com

A WORLD MOVING BEYOND UNIPOLARITY

The rise of multipolarity- a world with multiple centers of power. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 indeed made way for a unipolar world. The United States stood unmatched, its influence extending from NATO's security umbrella, UNO headquarters being physically situated in the US to the financial institutions that underpinned globalization as well as the formation of a global workspace at the silicon valley attracting the best brains. But history is seldom static in nature.

It became clear after the power dynamics changed in the early 1990s, that alternative centers of political and economic power could limit America's dominance. Thus, in Europe (EU) and in Asia, (ASEAN) emerged as forces to reckon with. In the last two decades, new centers of power have emerged: China's economic rise , India's demographic momentum and voice of Global South with the formation of SAARC, Russia's renewed assertiveness (former soviet union) and the resurgence of regional powers like Turkey, Brazil and South Africa.

CRACKS IN THE LIBERAL ORDER

The world seems to be quietly looking at the realignment and shifting of power equations questioning its very own foundations. Following dimensions of strain is quite visible from the instances—

1. Geopolitical Tensions (Lack of a worthy peace mediator)

The Russia-Ukraine Crisis hollowed the deepest fears of a peaceful international cooperation. Lack of efficiency on the part of the UN whose sole purpose was to maintain international order and maintain peace points out to deeper meanings of indicating the presence of multiple centers of power fuelling the conflict. From tension in the Middle East over the past three years that kicked off with the Israel Palestine Conflict to the deep rooted India-Pakistan rivalry (backed with external forces). All these instances point to a very possibility of World War III.

Roughly speaking, the times when certain geopolitical instances altered the world includes:

- Discovery of oil in the Middle East on May 26, 1908.
- The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6th and 9th August.
- 1945 Rise of China under able leadership of Deng Xiaoping 1978 with the launch of economic reforms.
- Collapse of USSR 1991 9/11 attacks 11th September, 2001.

2. Economic Fragmentation

Once a symbol of liberal order, globalization is retreating, sovereignty redefined. Supply chains being regionalized, Protectionism on rise .



Recent instances include the Tariff War under the TRUMP Govt. 2.0 keeping with the Trump agenda of (MAGA). This tariff crisis has disrupted the world economies with India being in negotiating terms with the US still unable to reach a consensus. This Tariff Conflict also led to new recent developments in the India, Russia and China relations when the heads of the nation met in Tianjin, China , during Shanghai Cooperation Organization(SCO) on Aug 25 & Sept 1 2025 pointing towards improvement of relations.



3. Contestation of liberal order

The values underpinning the liberal order—democracy, sovereignty, human rights, open markets are no longer uncontested. As we move into the future with the emergence of advanced technology and tools, AI; in the 21st century, sovereignty faces new threats from the digital domain. Data is the new currency of power, and global tech giants—mostly Western—shape the flow of information, surveillance practices, and even political narratives across borders. From the use of technology to invade sovereignty of a nation e.g. Pegasus, NATO's intervention to 1999 Kosovo Crisis without the consensus of UNSC to recent fall of democracy in the neighbouring countries of India. Is it not a sign of a shift in power equations? Authoritarian models have gained legitimacy, not only by asserting sovereignty but also by delivering growth and stability in ways liberal democracies have failed to do so. These instances raise a significant question as to how safe we and our data is in this changing interconnected world. Nations now struggle to protect their citizens' data and digital autonomy while participating in a borderless economy where the entire world has reasonably shrunk down into a global interconnected village.



4. Mending of old Relations

Afghanistan-India relations under the Taliban, Before the Taliban took over in August 2021, India had invested heavily in Afghanistan: development projects, reconstruction of institutions, infrastructure, capacity-building. Although there were visible strains in the relations after Taliban takeover Kabul from 2021 until the high-level dialogue that took place in January 2025 India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Taliban acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai pointing towards establishment of newer and better ties between the countries. Even though India has not accepted the forceful change of regime in Afghanistan. Being one of the neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Afghanistan territory holds a strategic significance for India. Speaking of India-China relations, India-China ties grew closer with the SCO summit in Tianjin 2025, as well as the Tariff wars imposed by Trump govt. 2.0 and India's unwavering approach towards it caught China's eye which was also suffering from the same.

From 2025 onwards, direct flights from India-China resumed establishing newer and better relations between both the countries. These cracks do not necessarily mean collapse but rather a signal to a world less comforting according to a singular international order .

MULTIPOLARITY: COLLAPSE OR TRANSFORMATION OF POWER

“The only constant in life is change” as put into words by Heraclitus . The world is evolving . In today’s uncertain world change is the only way of welcoming the unknown and stepping into the future. The global order that once appeared stable, unchallenged and unwavered is now undergoing a profound shift. For countries like India, Latin America, Africa and the Global South all lining up towards a multipolar world where their voices are heard more significantly. This is a moment to redefine international governance—to build an order that reflects not just Western ideals but global realities. The challenge lies in ensuring that multipolarity does not regress into rival power blocs like the cold war era, but rather evolves into cooperative pluralism, where diversity becomes a strength. Meanwhile, one such instance of India taking the charge of representing the voice of Global South lies in the sense that how gracefully it conducted and headed the G20 Meet 2024 and the marking the entering of the African Union.

Likewise the liberal order is not simply vanishing . Its institutions remain active , its values still inspire, and its rules continue to shape much of international life. Yet, its dominance is contested. The world is no longer defined by US-Hegemony but by pluralism. Simply speaking, multipolarity does not erase the liberal order ; it dilutes it, forcing it to coexist with peace and harmony. Viewing humanistically , this is not only a story of decline but also a possibility. Multipolarity provides a stage to voices previously marginalized.

CHALLENGES OF A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

Every coin has two sides. So far it is clear that multipolarity provides a voice to the earlier, unheard, unrecognized and under-represented part of the world. Yet , multipolarity also brings risks . A world without a dominant order can easily drift towards chaos. Competition between power giants may harden into conflict . Smaller nations may be caught in the crossfire of rivalries . Global challenges, pandemics, migration , etc. demand cooperation across borders, but multipolarity makes consensus harder to achieve. For the masses, this shift is felt in the inflation rates, rising food prices, when wars disrupt supply chains (as seen in Gaza Strip), insecurity , lack of freedom etc. The collapse or transformation of a liberal order is not merely a debate -it is about the condition of human life.

CONCLUSION: REDEFINED POWER DYNAMICS TOWARDS A SHARED WORLD

The rise of multipolarity is undeniable . Whether it marks the collapse of the international liberal order or its evolution depends on how time and tide tests the patience of the world and more importantly humanity responds to it. If multipolarity descends into rivalry, the post-Cold War Order may indeed collapse. But if it evolves into pluralism acquiring a pluralistic outlook diversifying its scope while finding a common ground, then what finally emerges is not destruction rather a rebirth. It is the era of change. The story of multipolarity is yet unwritten. It is in our hands whether it becomes a tale of fragmentation and decline, or a tale of renewal, rebirth and a shared destiny. Together we as global citizens need to be much aware of the ongoing recent developments for a better world that we all have borrowed from the future offsprings.

