

Navigating the Post-Unipolar World amidst Current Wars: Implications for Nepal

- *Colonel Saujanya S.J.B. Rana*

Abstract

This article explores the road to and implications of the Russo-Ukraine and the Hamas-Israel wars as the consequences of a rapidly transforming great power politics, transitioning from unipolarity to multipolarity. Drawing from scholarly perspectives and open-source resources, the effort has been to give an outlook extending beyond the wars themselves. The focus is on exploring the potential repercussions of this geopolitical shift the world over, but more importantly for a small country like Nepal. A bifocal lens of that of John J. Mearsheimer's realist approach and that of Graham Allison's Thucydides Trap is used to gauge into the state of affairs of Eastern Europe and the Middle East to highlight the examples of such consequences. The conclusion extrapolates the conspicuous duality in the relationship between the great powers- The United States, China, and Russia and analyzes its potential implications for Nepal, drawing insights from the consequences of the Russo-Ukraine and Hamas-Israel wars.

Keywords

Hamas-Israel, multipolar, post-American, realism, realist, Russo-Ukraine war, security, small state, Thucydides trap, unipolar

Introduction

The outcomes of rapidly shifting great power politics consequently to the Russo-Ukraine and the Hamas-Israel Wars—at least for now—are worth examining. While the author's observations are mainly based on scholarly opinions and open-source resources emanating from multiple poles, they are compelling enough to create content in their own right. Overall, the thesis of this article is plain and simple—the Russo-Ukraine and

the Hamas-Israel Wars are merely the consequences of the shift to multipolarity from the United States-driven unipolar world. In that sense, this article is more on the effects of the shift to multipolarity—essentially treated as an independent variable—and hopefully something that Nepal can draw from.

Lit-review: The Gap

The current literature on great power politics, particularly focusing on the United States- China-Russia relations, reveals a significant gap concerning the direct implications for smaller states like Nepal. While there are studies that explore the Russo-Ukraine and Hamas-Israel conflicts, they predominantly center around the interactions of the major world powers. Comprehensive insights into how these dynamics impact regions already mired by historical geopolitical woes such as South Asia, and the consequences for smaller states are missing. Therefore, the absence of a nuanced examination of implications for Nepal represents a notable gap.

Method

This article is qualitative and draws insights from scholarly analyses, open-source resources, videos of lectures, and geopolitical literature to explore the consequences of shifting global power dynamics. The primary focus of the Russo-Ukraine and Hamas-Israel Wars is in effect to draw deductions. Scholarly articles and reputable news sources listed in the references form the foundation for understanding key events. Thematic content analysis is applied to extract pertinent information from the sources used for this article.

Perspective From a Bifocal Lens

John J. Mearsheimer claims that the world is no more unipolar. He in fact gives the timeline of when the shift to multipolarity actually occurred—sometime around 2017 (Mearsheimer, 2023). He also outlines in the order of precedence the United States, followed by China, and then Russia as the three great powers of the world that we live

in today. Explicitly enough, a fairly recent article on Foreign Affairs calls this phenomenon the "post-American world" (Zakaria, 2023). Suffice it to say that the potential for both cooperation and conflict amongst and between the great powers in different shapes and forms is therefore inevitable, at least from a realist point of view.

However, to dissect the intricacies of insecurity versus the security of great powers and its consequences, a closer look at the phenomenon as coined by Graham Allison "The Thucydides Trap" proves to be helpful (Allison, n.d.). To put his theory in layman's terms—conflicts are imminent when a ruling power such as the United States is challenged by a rising power such as China. While Graham Allison mostly delves into the potential conflict between the United States and China, Russia's place in the great power politics equation is equally important. Particularly so, because this article mostly draws from examples of the events that unfolded in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and very little on the newly coined Indo-Pacific.

Therefore John J. Mearsheimer's identification of the shift to multipolarity when superimposed on Graham Allison's Thucydides Trap can signify that small states are now vulnerable. "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Mearsheimer, n.d.), is perhaps a stark reminder of potential outcomes—out of many—for small states trying to navigate the post-unipolar world. In addition, considering where Nepal is located geographically gives her all the more reason to find a reasonable answer. While this article deliberately excludes Nepal's regional woes, the shift to multipolarity is a signal for Nepal to gauge the relationship of duality between the great powers.

Displacing Unipolarity in Eastern Europe and the Middle East

Now segueing from the context to the state of affairs of the not-so-distant past, let's first consider the events that unfolded in Eastern Europe. Orange revolution of 2004, the conflict in South Ossetia in 2008, the 2014 Euromaidan revolution and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine leading to the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the Minsk accord that

never materialized, and finally the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. While there are conflicting narratives of how and why these events took place, a relatively convincing theory when gauged through the lens of great power politics points toward the efforts made by the United States to contain a potential competitor. For Russia, an obligatory effort to displace the United States-driven unipolarity in Eastern Europe while flexing its muscles despite the odds.

Elsewhere, since the promulgation of the Carter doctrine in 1980, the United States got the license to be omnipresent in the Middle East, primarily for energy security. The doctrine states that "an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf will be considered a threat to the United States of America, and as such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force" ((Mearsheimer, 2022). Now, considering the events of the not-so-distant past in the Middle East, perhaps this offers a reasonable explanation as to why things turned out the way they did vis-à-vis the constant conflicts involving the United States in the Middle East and its unipolar stance.

While the Carter doctrine still stands strong to date, the Russian entry into the region is equally impressive. A gradual and small scale of Russian support to Syria since 2015 changed the course of the Syrian civil war and perhaps saved President Bashar al-Assad's continuation. Likewise, Russia's position on the Hamas-Israel War also contrasts that of the United States to the point that it is willing to host Hamas representatives in Moscow, which is clearly not pro-Israeli (Weiss, 2023). This clearly substantiates Russian recovery and her rise since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, China's position in both wars has been fairly significant. Concerning the Russo-Ukraine War China's official position is all about neutrality, peace, dialogue, and de-escalation. The Chinese diplomacy is not so different also in the case of the

Hamas-Israel War, it is rather cautious (Millender, 2023). Nevertheless, in both cases, China's leverage to influence the outcome of the wars is noteworthy and contrasts with the collective narrative of the West led by the United States. The case in point—the Middle East is no longer an uncharted territory to China.

Likewise, the relevance of the Abraham Accords (Abraham Accords, 2023), when compared to China brokered truce between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Wang, n.d.) is questionable. Additionally, the recent visit to the Middle East by President Putin amidst the Hamas-Israel War further shadows the Abraham Accords. These are clear signs that the efforts of these new developments are largely to displace the unipolarity of the United States also from the Middle East.

Implications of Waning Unipolarity

So, what do both wars imply after all? In reality, the consequences of both wars are becoming disruptive by the day in many ways. Eastern European states, particularly small states that were used to unipolarity now seem nervous with the decline of significant support to Ukraine. Hungary is adamant about not letting Ukraine into the European Union (Harmash, 2023). We see less of the Russo-Ukraine war being covered by the media also exacerbated by the indecision of the United States Senate to pass the bill to significantly support its allies in both wars (BBC, 2023).

The post-World War II institutionalist organizations such as the United Nations itself and its member states are widely divided on both issues. Even the collective West is showing signs of polarized opinion on the same (Judy Asks, n.d.). Relatively, the effort of the United States to bring together the Arab states and Israel in the Middle East is now in limbo when compared to China mediated truce between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Gause, 2023). Turkey a NATO member is vehemently opposing heavy heavy-handed approach of Israel and so are other Muslim states the world over (Cafiero, 2023). Above

all, Houthis are now engaged and as a result, the Red Sea via Bab-el-Mandep is disrupted.

On the other hand, the world is also witnessing abnormal phenomena. The massive death toll and the displacement of civilians in Gaza are seriously questioning the utility of Human Rights being perceived differently in Ukraine and Gaza (AfricaNews, 2023). Surprisingly, both Ukraine and Israel seem to echo the same narrative of fighting for democracy and Western civilization (Rayman, 2023). Conclusively, the poles have now become many, and the interests of many are feeding multiple poles.

But on the positive side of things, small states such as Qatar with meaningful diplomatic clout since the Taliban truce, are now at the forefront besides the great powers (Qatar's Enhanced Diplomatic Clout, n.d.). It is seriously challenging the norms of who is and is not the prime mediator. This however is also a demonstration of a small state gradually building soft power in a rapidly polarizing world.

Implications for Nepal

Firstly, the decision-making vis-à-vis Nepal's foreign outlook in a multipolar world is going to be challenging. The theory versus practice of Nepal's official stance on both wars can serve as examples because they are dichotomous. Nepal officially voted against Russia but unofficial instances of Nepali migrants contributing to the Russian effort cannot be disregarded. Likewise, Nepal initially condemned Hamas' 7th October attacks in Israel, but Nepal is also one of the member states to vote in favor of an immediate cease-fire in Gaza despite bearing Nepali casualties and potential Nepali hostages.

Secondly, the potential for Nepal to be caught between a rock and a hard place when it comes to great power competition is now obvious. However, this by no means should be allowed to compromise the security of her neighbors. Nepal should remain

cognizant of the fact that China is already a great power, while India aspires to become one. Nonetheless, Nepal's decision to officially vote against Russia seems to have overlooked the position of her neighbors. Perhaps her interests are best suited when aligned to also accommodate her neighbors. After all, we're all *Prisoners of Geography* as Tim Marshall put it (Marshall, 2016).

Thirdly, the disruption of the supply chain in the Arabian Sea from what we are witnessing at Bab-el-Mandep and potentially at the Straits of Hormuz can have negative implications. Nepal's dependence on imports (fossil fuel and other supplies) has the potential to be more expensive, which will therefore require some serious looking into by responsible authorities.

Fourthly, the polarizing opinions of great, middle, and minor powers vis-à-vis conflicts around the world will impact where and how the United Nations can intervene. This will also have implications on how and where the largest troop contributor in the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations can and is willing to engage. This can have precipitating effects on Nepal's domestic politics including the services involved.

On the positive note though, the potential to benefit from a non-unipolar world exists. Historically during the Panchayat Era, Nepal achieved a lot from the then bi-polar world. One can always argue that times have changed since the Panchayat Era, but in essence, the foreign policy of Nepal remains the same.

Conclusion

What matters the most—for small states everything is about security, particularly when the world is re-ordering itself. While the Melian dialogue is a stark reminder of how things can go wrong, Nepal's geostrategic position is not entirely the same as Melos. It is a land-linked country snug comfortably between a great power and an aspiring great power. Therefore, Nepal's geolocation demands a sensible stance amidst the ongoing shift without violating the security vulnerabilities of her neighbors. Nepal's advantage in

aligning her interests with that of her neighbors' security concerns should therefore remain a constant, irrespective of what goes on beyond these geographical land masses. Perhaps it is wiser not to be nosy in order to keep one's neighborhood prosperous and peaceful—even in a global village.

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