

# The Threats of Unipolar Structure on Global Security and Stability

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**Abstract:** The emergence of the United States (US) as a global hegemony had roots in national and international conditions prior to World War II, that war provided the US with the historical opportunity to establish its global hegemony. United States global hegemony was not only a consequence of economic, political, and military domination, but also a reflection of the diffusion of cultural and ideological values that advanced the role of the United States as a controlling power in the world. Hence, the United States assumed the mantle of legitimacy, wrapped in the cloak of hegemony with its ideological presumptions that “US global dominance was...the natural result of historical progress..., rather than the competitive outcome of political-economic power” (Smith, 2003). This intervention explores the inherent prospects of a dominant unipolar global power as symbolized by the US. The paper provides workable recommendations with respect to what needs to be done in order to maintain global peace. If it is achieved it would boost peace, trade, and enhance the economic condition in the world.

**Keywords:** Unipolar, United States, Hegemony, Legitimacy, Ideological Presumptions.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the structure of the international system has had two constants: first, a unique political ‘organizing principle’ by which states are arranged, namely, the absence of an effective authority to which states can appeal for protection; and, second, a similar ‘character’ of states, namely, their tendency, as a result of their finding themselves in the same context of anarchy, seek to fulfill similar functions such as defense, intelligence and representation of interests towards one another.

A third element that can be used to understand the international structure relates to its polarity. Waltz defines polarity as the distribution of power among the great powers during a given period. In essence, polarity is the degree to which military and economic capabilities are concentrated in the global system that determines the number of centres of power or ‘poles’.

When these poles appear, there is often formation of competing coalitions or blocs composed of allies that align with one of the major competing poles or centres of power. This is called polarization. Waltz affirms that the polarity of the international structure affects the level of international ‘stability’ that obtains during that period.

Waltz defines international stability largely in terms of:

Duration of time during which the structure of the international system, that is, the number of great powers, remains in effect.

The risks of war among the great powers - Karl Deutsch and David Singer have defined stability as “the probability that the system retains all of its essential characteristics: that no single nation becomes dominant.

Waltz defines polarity as the distribution of power among the great powers during a given period. In essence, polarity is the degree to which military and economic capabilities are concentrated in the global system that determines the number of centres of power or poles. Unipolar structure is a type of international system that describes a single country with complete global hegemony.

This structure serves as a central power that establishes and enforces rules and dominates military and economic instruments. It settles disputes between and among subordinate units. In another development, it resists attempts by subordinate units to achieve independence or greater autonomy and may gradually attempt to lessen or eliminate the autonomy of subordinate units.

## II. THE EMERGENCE OF UNITED STATES' HEGEMONY

While the emergence of the United States (US) as a global hegemony had roots in national and international conditions prior to World War II, that war provided the US with the historical opportunity to establish its global hegemony. United States global hegemony was not only a consequence of economic, political, and military domination, but also a reflection of the diffusion of cultural and ideological values that advanced the role of the United States as a controlling power in the world. Hence, the United States assumed the mantle of legitimacy, wrapped in the cloak of hegemony with its ideological presumptions that "US global dominance was...the natural result of historical progress..., rather than the competitive outcome of political-economic power" (Smith, 2003).

In understanding the new international order of today, one must start at the top with the United States. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the US enjoyed the seat as the only super power in the world. Combined with nuclear capabilities unchallenged by any other nation or combination of nations, the US had the victory of the Cold War to push it forward in the new unipolar world. To top off this victory, the Americans have continued to grow and expand their power. An example is the Clinton era which enjoyed a booming economy and unparalleled advances in technology that allowed the nation to solidify its role as the economic leader of the world. The strength of the nation is reflected in its massive military prowess and its influence in the international social order. The following analysis will evaluate the strengths of the US in the unipolar system:

### 2.1 Economic Power

The United States has an extremely high amount of leverage when it comes to economy. As the biggest and most powerful economy in the world, a status which is now being poignantly challenged by China, the US has managed to link its success to other countries. While many would say that this might not be a smart move because the country has to depend on other nations, it is actually one of the main reasons countries would not challenge the US. To reach this point, the US has pursued foreign policies that make the world conducive to the capitalistic environment the US flourishes in. This has led to the new trend of globalization that has been a critical element in developing a system in which many countries create a significant economic relationship with the US. Walter Russell Mead refers to this as "sticky power" in the sense that it entices many countries to join because of economic benefits and then makes them stay by creating dependence to the system. This system has allowed the US to build the strongest economic machine in history that depends on the fuel of world markets to run. Over the past decade the US has added to its share of world product, manufactures, and high-technology production; increased its lead in productivity; and regained or strengthened its lead in many strategic industries.

This achievement by the US was prior to the financial crisis but today they have lost the title to China. The reason is that China reclaimed its dominance as the worldwide leader in manufacturing output. Their success relies on two comparative advantages that the US simply does not have. First, they have a gigantic labour force which can produce more goods. Secondly, Chinese labour is cheaper than US labour.

### 2.2 Military Power

The US still maintain the military programme that boasts power, size, and finesse. This military stands as the only armed force that could plausibly attain global power with the capability of fighting two full-fledged wars at the same time. It dominates every military aspect: technologically it is the most modern military in the world; it has extensive ground forces; the only Navy with transcontinental force; a prevailing air force; an overwhelming nuclear arsenal; and continued investment and development in communications, intelligence and military logistics and command. Not only does the US have leverage as a military power, it also exercises much power through the political arena. The US has vast amounts of control over the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the OECD as well as very favourable relations with the booming economies of the European Union and Japan. It can join forces with regional powers to make strong alliances in strategic places of the world. It also can choose to disregard international norms when it pleases, this evident by the war in Iraq. One cannot deny that in today's world the US is the hyper power and the leader of the unipolar structure.

### 2.3 Culture

America does not just have economic, military and political strength. The nation has also begun to export its culture and ideals, described by Joseph S. Nye as “soft power”. The importance of this soft power can be easily overlooked, but it is a critical element of US dominance. American culture is expanding everyday into the lives of people all over the globe. They watch MTV and wrestling while they idolize American artists and Hollywood stars. This not only creates a huge market for American entertainment goods it gives people around the world a way to relate to the US. They wear American clothes; listen to American music, and dream of sometime living the American life.

Waltz defines international stability largely in terms of duration of time during which the structure of international system, that is, the number of great powers, remains in effect, however Karl Deutsch and David Singer have defined stability as the “probability that the system retains all of its essential characteristics: that no single nation becomes dominant, that most of its members continue to survive; and that large-scale war does not occur.” They asserted that the system has the capacity for self-regulation: the ability to counteract stimuli that would otherwise threaten its survival. Security involves the establishment of a safe and secure environment for the local populace.

### III. HOW UNIPOLARITY HAS THREATENED GLOBAL SECURITY AND STABILITY

The emergence of unipolar world following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the beginning of the United States hegemony because it has become the world super power possessing influence far beyond any other State. This assertion was made by Charles Krauthammer (1991:23) and was concurred by (Ikenberry, 2004:609). Brzezinski, (2004:16) noted that the US is wandering into “hegemonic quicksand” by stubborn unilateralism and by squandering its power in Iraq twice in 1991 and 2003 with some allied support and also overwhelmed Serbia in 1999.

Another issue of US hegemony that threatens global security and stability is the “Pre-emptive War”. President George W. Bush in the 2002 report to Congress in the National Security Strategy of USA argued that Americans were increasingly threatened by terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. To address this, President George W. Bush announced that “As a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed... (The only path to peace and security is the path of action).” It therefore holds to say that the President declared that US reserves the right to strike perceived enemies before they attack America. The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan was among those who disagreed with President Bush on the pre-emptive war by US on Iraq and indicated that it was a threat to world peace and stability (New York Times, February 8, 2005). This, in reality is more than a threat to global security and stability as US can on any day cry wolf of any country and therefore attack when there might not be any wolf to cry of as in the case of Iraq. After attacking Saddam Hussein of Iraq on suspicion of possessing nuclear weapons; it turns to be false however the harm had already been caused. The fact that a single country, the US can defy the authority of the UN which is the highest global body in terms of ensuring world peace because of its military and economic power is a serious affront to global security and stability.

There is also the argument that US unipolar system will be peaceful, but only as long as the US hegemony acts like one (Wohlforth, 1999: 23). This leads some scholars to worry that if the US refuses to play the leading role in the world drama, then the system becomes unstable, leading to greater violence and other negative consequences (Lal, 2004).

Speaking in an international conference in 2007, Russia’s President Vladimir Putin argued that the US aggressive policy had made the world more dangerous than during the cold war. During that period of bipolar confrontation, Putin argued, there “was a fragile peace, a scary peace, but it was fairly reliable as it turns out. Today, it is less reliable” (Washington Post, February 11, 2007).

The theory about the rule of the game in a unipolar system also suggests that lesser powers try to escape dominance. Arguably, that explains why many Europeans favour transforming the existing 60,000 - soldiers Euro corps (with troops from Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Spain) into a de facto EU Army to rival or even to replace NATO which US dominates. A former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher once put it “the real drive towards a separate European defense” is based on the unstated goal of “creating a single European super state to rival America on the world stage” (BBC News, December 12, 1999). In the Washington Post of April 30, 2003, the French President, Jacques Chirac explained at an international conference that in order to have a balance for world peace and stability there was the need to have a strong Europe, as well as a strong US. This shows that the unipolar structure of which US is the hegemon, threatens global security and stability.

Deutsch and Singer posit that “as the system moves away from bipolarity toward multi-polarity, the frequency of war should be expected to diminish”. It therefore also holds to say that as the system moves away from multi-polarity to unipolarity, the frequency of wars should be expected to increase.

Many theorists and practitioners believe that international stability is most likely when there is a balance of power. A balance exists when no single state or coalition of states dominates the international system; it operates in multi-polar systems but not in unipolar systems.

According to balance of power theory, the development of imbalances among a system’s major powers is especially dangerous and threatens to engulf the system in destructive warfare.

These assertions go to confirm that unipolar structure threatens global security and stability. This is evident in the case as US (the current unipolar super power) on the global scene in the bid to promote its foreign policy on democracy and markets unilaterally abuse the sovereignty of states by forcefully imposing democratic governance principles on them as well as open market principles. Resistance to these principles led to insurgence of fundamentalists groups.

For instance, the unilateral invasion of Iraq by the US has caused an insecurity and instability in that region. Islamic fundamentalist groups such as Al-Qaeda which has turned itself into a terrorist group has emerged just to resist US’s impositions. Secondly, Al-Qaeda activities are linked to the troubles in Mali, as well as the Bokoh Haram imbroglio in the North Eastern region of Nigeria in addition to the fallout from the US dominance in NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in Libya where President Gadhafi was overthrown. Another instance is the Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez who was proving intransigent to US impositions.

Again, unipolar structure threatens global security and stability if people refuse impositions from super power and who is ready to go any length to maintain its stands. An example is the North Korea who is prepared to use nuclear weapon should the US attempt to force anything down its throats. Since there is no equal match of power, an intoxicated or power-drunk superpower can cause insecurity and instability through its activities which would have grave consequences for world peace.

#### **IV. HOW UNIPOLARITY HAS HELPED GLOBAL SECURITY AND STABILITY**

There is a view point which emphasizes that alliances reduce the possibility of system-wide interactions, which in turn increases the chances of conflict. Alliances tend to control their members, thus limiting interactions with members of other alliances. For example, NATO and Warsaw Pact members had limited interactions across the bloc lines compared to within the blocs. But with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of power centres- the European Union, Germany, Japan, Russia and probably China-stability is likely to prevail (Meiertons, H. 2010).

Also, since the signature of the Westphalia Treaty to date, it is almost fair to conclude that a unipolar system is most likely to stem wars in the world and most especially in new epicenters of international conflict - Africa and the Middle East (Cohen-Tanugi, L. & Holoch, G., 2009).

Nevertheless, with unipolarity, the US has had relative success in the mobilization of the rest of the world to ensure that conflicts in Angola, Sudan, Congo, and Serbia among others end or do not escalate or last as they normally would have during the Cold War. If wars among developing nations are stemmed and the capabilities of the emerging nuclear states are capped, there is high likelihood that there would be stability.

The US currently seems to be able to mount direct or indirect deterrent measures against all the developing nations combined and with a coalition with one or two allies in the United Nations Security Council, deter the emerging nuclear states from grossly destabilizing the international system.

Furthermore, globalization and the wave of democratization in the world are most likely to strengthen the US and her allies as well as put fundamentals in place that prevent the likelihood of States going to war in the future (Routledge, 2007). This shows that unipolar structure helps in securing peaceful international relations no matter how fragile it is. This is corroborated by the fact that the economy of the hegemon is the engine that drives international economic growth and development. In order to preserve its network of alliances, the hegemon is the political broker who moderates disputes between other powers, thus keeping them from escalating into serious conflict (Rourke, 12<sup>th</sup> Ed.). This is truly so because conflicts mar relationships therefore the role of a hegemon in ensuring that nation states live in harmony cannot be over

emphasized (Rourke, 12<sup>th</sup> Ed.). For instance, the intervention of the US in the Israeli-Palestine conflict as well as the Israeli-Egypt conflicts attests to this.

Another factor is that hegemonic power seeks to bind other States into the global order and thus plays a leading role in developing global institutions that manage international security and economic relations. The hegemon is often the source and usually a propagator of ideas about world order and security. The role of the US as a unipolar structure in the formation and management of supra organizations such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an example of how the unipolar structure has fostered peaceful international relations.

Furthermore, international relations theorists are unanimous on the respective advantages of a multi-polar, bipolar or unipolar system from the point of view of world peace and stability. There is no question that the two world wars took place in multi-polar context, whereas the bipolar world of the Cold War and the post- Cold War unipolar world avoided the internationalization of conflicts and guaranteed certain stability. Waltz affirms that the polarity of the international structure affects the level of international stability that obtains during that period because there is often formation of competing coalitions to blocs composed of allies that align with one major competing poles or centers of power. This shows that unipolarity would be the remedy to global security and stability.

Realists theories assume that bipolar system possesses the stability because each dominant state exercises a mitigating influence on the respective other state. Compared with that, supporters of a hegemonic stability theory consider a unipolar system as the most stable because the hegemon is willing to guarantee unilaterally the persistence of the state system favorable to it according to Duncan, W.R. et al.

## V. CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of the foregoing, it is worth arguing that the unipolar structure as we have it now, has the ability to foster global security and stability. However, the absence of war does not necessarily mean that there is peace and therefore there is global stability. There is greater evidence that, unipolar structure has the capacity to more than threaten global security and stability if not handled responsibly. There may be reprisal actions that may jeopardize the already fragile security and stability being enjoyed.

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