


Chapter 3

On Unipolarity's Inner Contradiction Inherited From Bipolarity and Its Actualisation

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ABSTRACT

Unipolarity has been fundamentally flawed due to its being an alteration of the bipolarity of the established and institutionalized central dialectic of two poles representing two contradicting theses. Bipolarity ended when one resigned from its position, outpacing the collapse of the system's infrastructure. This end preserved some fundamental institutions, norms, and practices of bipolarity within the ensuing unipolarity as a flaw next to the unipolar thesis, despite their contradictions, in particular as constituent parts of the individual intersectionality of the USSR's successor. The course of the unipolar era reflected the potential of the actualization of this inner contradiction. This potential was circumvented until 2007 and could be postponed for a time afterward until it became impossible to do so. The war in Ukraine seems to have firmly established the confrontational actualization of the flaw.

I. INTRODUCTION: ON THE BIPOLARITY AND ITS END

For a few decades, the general environment of interstate relations was characterised by the bipolarity. It constituted a relatively short yet eventful time period compared to the duration of the multipolar appearance of the international relations. Be it a

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-6735-3.ch003

novelty, an evolutionary “progress” or an anomaly, it was a unique setup. In line with Waltz’s description, the bipolar international structure was two superpowers’ presence next to each other, each with an uncontested superiority to other major actors in terms of power/capabilities of –before all– military and –however arguably– economic nature, along with other parameters of power. They were influential over all parts and geographies of the system, they were not in an absolute need of allies to remain “poles” of the bipolar state of affairs, their “systemic” position within the entirety of the sphere of international relations meant that the bipolar setup had no –at least in the sense of isolation– periphery (Waltz 1964, also Waltz 1979), as any event of some significance would be translated, in some form, into the relationship of the two poles. Their relative lack of need for allies did not mean the undesirability of them, for their presence would be of positive effect in terms of burden– sharing and of their relative positioning toward each other (Waltz 1964).

In such a setup, events, phenomena and states of affairs within the system gained meaning and took shape on the ground of a universal reference to the relationship between the two poles, in reference to which the actors found their positions. Here, being non-aligned became meaningful only with reference to the two poles setup, defining the non-aligned actors’ individual positions relative to the bipolar state of affairs. Being an “independent major power”, for example like the case of China, gained meaning basically in reference to the two poles and their relationship¹. Being allied to a pole meant being within a quite rigid alignment structure (also see Waltz 1967; Waltz, 1979, pp.168– 170; Raymond and Kegley 1990) in comparison with the (generally) option– rich multipolarity –even including the times of the bipolarisation of the multipolar setup such as during the periods of the Thirty Years’ War, Seven Years’ War, Napoleonic period and the two World Wars–, where the diffusion of the gravity centers and the –relative– multitude of balancing/bandwagoning possibilities were providing actors with means of *renversement des alliances*, making appear, within limits, a fluctuating alignment environment.

The bipolarity was fundamentally different from the multipolarity not only for the apparently solid centrality of the two specific actors was not conducive to alignment fluctuations. The said centrality was also “dialectic”²: It did not reside solely on the mere presence of the two actors balancing each other, but also on differing –and opposing– individualities of them –in general contrast to the presence of a multitude of major powers in a multipolar setup–, which were expressed in terms of normativity (capitalism/ liberal democracy and “anti– imperialism”/ socialism) which appeared to be mutually exclusive, reflecting on governmental, political, administrative, social, “legal” structures and practices of the two entities. It was, *referentially*, an environment shaped by the dialectical relationship of two theses or two *Weltanschauungen*.

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