

The Russian Ukraine War's Impact on The Emergence of Multipolar World Order

Lara AbdelRazik*

Faculty of Economics and Political Science- Future University in Egypt.

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Abstract : The United States emerged as the sole super power country after the cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union 1991, and its dominance was particularly significant in Europe, and Middle East countries where America first ideology controlled most of their decisions. However, the United States dominance and the fact of having a sole power country to control the world is no longer as effective as it was before the Russian Ukraine war.

Russia became a threat to the unipolar system, and it encouraged the emergence of a new multipolar system after the war alarmed United States that China, and Russia are emerging, and the liberal system is eroding. The hegemony of Russia on the indo-pacific region, the exploitation of African countries natural resources, as well as the establishment of military bases, and the increase of Russian military forces tunnels are all considered a threat to the effectiveness of the liberal system. The west finds it hard to comprehend Russia's geopolitical thinking, but what they can do is basically related to the use of power, and that's a proof that liberalism exists only as a theory.

This paper argues the impact of the Russian Ukraine war on the shifts in the international order as a consequence of the rising power of Russia and China through the lens of liberalism and realism perspectives.

Keywords: Russia Ukraine War, Unipolarity, Multipolarity, Liberalism, Realism.

INTRODUCTION

Returning Ukraine to Russia's control has been a long-term goal of Moscow since the breakup of the Soviet-Union. Russia followed and adopted an offensive strategy of forcing Ukraine to join the customs union and to abandon its association with the European union which led to a revolution in Ukraine as well as the situation in Ukraine developed against Russia's interest, where Moscow decided to intervene with military means, to divide Ukraine, through the occupation of Crimea then Donbas(Menkiszak,M;2016)¹. The war in Ukraine has two main sources, the first one is related to the longstanding Anglo American grand strategy of Nato consolidation as a tool for political and economic European domination, the second one is related to Russia's grand strategy. Russia's adoption to a geopolitical and nationalistic agenda of confrontations in response to Nato's increasing intervention in out of area activities, and the United States illegal invasion for Iraq, Serbia, Libya increased the possibility for triggering a struggle for Ukrainian sovereignty and their independence became hard, as well as it led to a united states and Russia proxy war (Cafruny, Fouskas; 2022)². The current global system has been transformed by the Russia Ukraine war, it is exactly a wakeup call for the united states' global power and its western allies. There is a

¹ Menkiszak, M. (2016). Why War Came to Ukraine. In *Russia's Long War on Ukraine* (pp. 2–8). German Marshall Fund of the United States. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19013.4>

² Cafruny, A., Fouskas, V. K., Mallinson, W. D. E., & Voynitsky, A. (2022). Ukraine, Multipolarity and the Crisis of Grand Strategies. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2084881>

* Corresponding author E-mail: Lara.abdelrazik@fue.edu.eg

real and a big concern regarding western leaders' failure to form a broader coalition against Russia.

The globe was marked by unipolarity, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became solely the global power. Despite that they survived, and they became the sole superpower, neo- realists' scholars predicted the return of multipolarity (Alabo,2023).³

Overview

The crisis in and around Ukraine has clearly demonstrated that the world has changed, traditional and new threats did not vanish with the advent of a polycentric world, but the conditions in which they appeared became qualitatively different (Izhak, 2016)⁴. The war has been revealing and transforming the balance of power on global and regional level, and on the normative side as well, the conflict challenges alter the rule based international order which affects the established norms and traditions. These changes are changing the way in which international society operates and shifts the rules of the games. The war's impact is multifaced and it not only affects or influences the global distribution of power, but it affects the existing power dynamics. It tends to make existing power distributions more explicit, as well as exposing limits of the west capabilities, it became clear that the western hegemony, while still influential, is no longer as effective as it was. The power in today's world is not heavily in the hands of the states. However, concentrated more on the hands of non-state actors, and conceptual divides also existed such as global north vs global south and democracies vs autocracies. The sustained position and ascendance of China propelled by the implementation of the one belt, one road initiative, alongside the consolidation of Russia during the 2000's. the Russian Ukraine is the constituent element for regional conflicts (Kapitonenko,2024).⁵

Today, there are only two countries with their economic size, military power, and global leverage to constitute a pole: the United States and China. However, other countries won't be anytime soon, and the absence of other poles in the international system is evident and clear, and the world to be transformed from unipolar to multipolar should simply consists of three or more power countries, for instance: India was the third largest spender on defense, which is considered one indicator to measure power, while their military budget is only one quarter of China. India in the future may one day be a pole in the system, but that day belong to the distant future. Japan also for example as well has the largest economy in the world but its GDP is less one quarter of China's. India, France, and Britain are the next four largest economies in the world, but they are even smaller. The European Union as well is not considered a third pole along-side with America and China, because there is simply no unified European defense, security, or foreign policy.

Moving towards taking Russia, it does not qualify as a third pole in the international system. However, Russia can play a supporting role for China, because despite their land area, massive natural resources, and the vast amount of stockpile nuclear weapons, but on the other side, their economy is smaller than Italy's and a military budget equaling only one quarter of China's at most. The expansion of BRICS as well is interpreted as a sign that the multipolar world order is here. However, blocs are too heterogeneous to function as poles. In the long term, the world may indeed become multipolar (Bekkevold, 2023).⁶

The landscape of global diplomacy is experiencing substantial changes, the current geopolitical environment is fragmented and unpredictable, highlighting the urgent needs to address the challenges and opportunities that arise from multipolarity. The contemporary multipolar environment requires a reevaluation of their policies to incorporate with state, non-state actors, and international institutions. The implications of multipolarity are profound since it requires the rethinking of traditional diplomatic strategies which lead to configuration of global

³ Tamunopubo Big-Alabo, PhD & Adokiye Big-Alabo, PhD, 2023. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS), vol. 7(8), pages 529-542, August <https://ideas.repec.org/a/bcp/journal/v7y2023i8p529-542.html>

⁴ Izhak, O. (2016). The Threats and Challenges of a Multipolar World: A Ukraine Crisis Case Study. *Connections*, 15(1), 32–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326427>

⁵ Kapitonenko, Mykola. (2024). HOW THE RUSSIAN UKRAINIAN WAR IS TRANSFORMING INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER. *Actual Problems of International Relations*. 1. 26-35. 10.17721/apmv.2024.158.1.26-35. View of HOW THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR IS TRANSFORMING INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER

⁶ Bekkevold,2023. No, the World Is Not Multipolar. Stop Saying the World Is Multipolar

governance structure (Ramjit, 2025).⁷

The primary threats in three significant documents published by the United States of America after the war were reviewed to understand the international structure of the world, the 2022 national security strategy document of the United States indicates that Russia and China are creating various challenges, because Russia ignores the rules and regulations of the international order and poses an urgent threat to the international system and poses an urgent threat to the international system. Furthermore, China's intentions to restructure and reform the international order and to prove dedication towards improving their economic, diplomatic, military, and technological capacity. China has global dimensions, and their position challenges the United States geopolitically and not only limited to the Indo-Pacific (Yazar, 2023).⁸

Theoretical Framework

One war, many theories. However, this paper will focus more on analyzing the Russian Ukraine war from liberal and realist perspectives, the problem is being examined through the lens of two prevailing ideologies in the field of international politics. Realism is a theoretical framework within the discipline of international relations.

Realism scholars are certain that the individual possesses a propensity towards being self-centered, self-interest, and the pursuit of power, and asserts that international relations revolve around the dynamics of power politics. On the other hand, liberal thinkers sought to establish a global framework characterized by open markets, international institutions, cooperation, democratic community, progressive transformation, shared sovereignty and adherence to the rule of law. In the ongoing conflict, Russia is backed by proponents of realism, while Ukraine is backed and driven by liberal ideologies, because realist scholars have provided justifications for Russia's military actions, while liberal scholars declared that the invasion is undemocratic, and it poses a danger to Ukraine humanitarian concerns and rights. However, realist scholars argue the opposite, they do believe that the state assumes an essential role as the main player within the international system and is driven to undertake all necessary measures to safeguard their own interests as much as possible. According to realists, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia can be rationalized by three main justifications, the first one is that Russia sought to safeguard its national interests, political, energy, and resource considerations. Secondly, Russia's invasion can be seen as a means for power maximization as well as they aimed to showcase its hard power capabilities in the region. Thirdly, the invasion can be seen and perceived as a measure taken by Russia to protect and strengthen their security concerns.

Moving towards viewing the Russian Ukraine war from the liberal perspective, liberal intellectuals criticized the war by mentioning that it is considered a significant threat to global peace and security, they contend that the internal political dynamics of Russia, Putin's foreign policy, the ineffectiveness of the international institutions are the main reasons behind the existence of war. Liberalism explains the global system by emphasizing the dynamics of cooperation and soft power. According to the perspective of liberals, the ongoing conflict may be attributed to Russia's opposition to Ukraine's progress towards becoming a fully democratic nation and establishing closer ties with western countries (Berebon, 2023).⁹

⁷ Ramjit (2025). Global Diplomacy in the Multipolar Era. Law, Economics and Society; Vol. 1, No. 1; 2025
<https://doi.org/10.30560/les.v1n1p107>

⁸ Alkanalka, M. (2023). Towards a nuclear multipolar world and its spillover effects. KOCATEPEİİBFD, 25(2), 194-205.
<https://doi.org/10.33707/1275045>

⁹ BEREON, C. (2023). Analysing the Russia-Ukraine Conflict from Liberal and Realist Perspectives. GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis, 6(2), 87-98. Retrieved from
<https://www.gnosijournal.com/index.php/gnosi/article/view/235>

Conclusion

The Russian Ukraine war led to dramatical and radical shifts to the world entire world, raised awareness regarding the geopolitical policies shifts in Russia, Ukraine, China, Global south countries. What happened after this war is a clear demonstration of mistrust between the west themselves and with eastern countries as well. Citizens started to worry about the effectiveness of international institutions, and the only way to solve this crisis is that the United States should coordinate and collaborate effectively with other liberal democracies, as well as the reformulation of new international treaties, agreements, and institutions.

Russia's invasion violates the international law and United Nations charter, and it became hard to eliminate the erosion of the liberal world order, and now the United States is no longer the sole super power country due to the rising role of multipolarity in the international system. Till now the west finds it hard to comprehend Russia's political geo-political thinking which reflects that there is a huge gap between what liberalism promises and what it delivers, also the United States turned tables against Ukraine now and made it harder to predict what might happen in the future, but it became clear that liberal democracies are operating informally to uphold the international order.

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