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## TRANSITIONS IN GLOBAL POLARITY AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA'S STRATEGY TOWARD SOUTH ASIA

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** This study intends to explore the discourses on patterns of systemic polarity. The study of these discourses helps in the development of the discipline of International Relations. The study also explores the foreign policy of the United States - being the greatest power of the time and claiming to be the custodian of the prevailing international order – towards South Asia.

**Methodology:** This is a qualitative explanatory and exploratory study. The specific method utilized to conduct the study remains the discourse analysis.

**Main Findings:** The study finds that international polarity is a continuous process of transition. These are a combination of systemic and sub-systemic actors and factors that contribute to this transition.

**Applications of this study:** The study is useful for students and scholars of International Relations, Area Studies, Strategic Studies, and allied disciplines. It is equally useful for policy practitioners.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** The discourses on patterns of international polarity have contributed to the development of International Relations as a discipline. A significant debate on the discourses of international polarity has been the pattern of post-Cold War and Post-9/11 orders. While there has been a relatively dominant claim that this era overall shows evidence of unipolarity; there is an equally influential claim that the international order appears multipolar. There is however a need to address a primary question that demands an inquiry into the type of multipolarity in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 eras as it is assumed that the dynamics of international order and great power rivalries in this era are significantly different from the earlier patterns of international multipolarity. This inquiry is informed by focusing on the policies of great powers toward south Asia and the transforming geostrategic and economic relations between significant South Asian states.

**Keywords:** *Polarity, United States, South Asia, Afghanistan, Unipolarity, Bipolarity, Multipolarity.*

### INTRODUCTION

The arguments speculating the re-emergence of bipolarity in the post-9/11 international order gained prominence especially since the incidents of confrontation on the one hand between the United States (US) and Russia in Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria, while on the other hand due to increasing economic competition between US and China. Assuming bipolarity may be emerging; a fundamental question in this regard is whether post-9/11 bipolarity is different – and perhaps more complex – compared to the bipolarity of the Cold War years. Speculations regarding the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan have further intensified the debates on the nature of the emerging international order; the revival of a great power strategic confrontation; and the relative insufficiency of Cold War theorizations on bipolarity to explain the new version of bipolarity. As theorizations on patterns of polarity have systematically contributed to speculations regarding changes in the global order, this article reviews the theoretical discourses on patterns of polarity in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 eras and examines the aforementioned questions while primarily tracing the emerging trends in US strategies towards South Asia. This basic theoretical approach is directed toward forging a perceptual construct (Udo-Akang, 2012; Wilson, 2001) to focus on the South Asian region where the interplay of US interests and the pattern of global polarity, as well as interests and changing strategies of greater and emerging powerful states, can be observed. This construct has been developed in the first stage through a chronological narration of assumptions and arguments of IR theorists on transitions in polarity. The second stage comprises a deconstruction of the academic arguments and identifying specific trends suggesting changes in global polarity. The purpose is to analyze the US's modern global strategies and their likely impacts on other greater powers. It is assumed that these trends are likely to transform the nature of global polarity. Having developed a theoretical approach to focus on strategic trends, this article traces the realist, liberal and cosmopolitan, and anti-imperialist arguments on polarity as they evolved during the Cold War and post-Cold War years. The purpose is to compare Cold War and post-Cold War events and discourses to explain the nature of emerging international order and patterns of polarity.

Polarity as a theoretical concept in international relations theory attained intellectual refinement especially during the Cold War years; while the sub-disciplines of IR such as international strategy and international political economy employed polarity to speculate upon the re-defined interests of greater powers and the probable effects of these re-defined interests on strategic policies as well as transformations in international order (Galtung, 1971; Gavin, 2004; Gilpin, 2001). During the Cold War the confrontation between the US and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and the image of two greater powers confronting each other with a heightened risk of nuclear war – accentuated

the concept of bipolarity – which in turn authenticated and strengthened the primary assumptions and foundational principles of influential traditions, especially political realism and evolved as well as enriched its sub-paradigms (Fettweis, 2004). Realism attained a prominent place among the theories of IR, however, the critical analyses of realist assumptions during these years, also suggest fundamental epistemic deficiencies in theorization and speculations about the end of the Cold War and the nature of polarity in the post-Cold War order. This is the primary justification for including realism in this study, while the critical perspective shall also include the aforementioned theoretical traditions.

The realist scholars despite contributing significantly to the post-Cold War theorizations on emerging nature/s of polarity; remained significantly influenced solely by the strategic confrontation during the Cold War, the evolving concept of bipolarity, and trends in the nuclearisation (Mearsheimer, 1990). The Realist arguments promoted a relative bias toward multipolarity, suggesting multipolarity is unstable and undesirable. Although not self-fulfilling, these arguments appeared to suggest logic in favor of a bipolar or a unipolar world. This logic resonated till the end of the Cold War and found a significant voice in the post-Cold War realist discourses on polarity which majorly developed theoretical foundations and perceptual lenses by drawing comparisons between bipolarity and unipolarity (Krauthammer, 1990). The overall IR discourses on polarity during these years remained dominated by a combination of academic arguments suggesting a relative skepticism towards multipolarity; with few displaying a sense of familiarity and assurance towards bipolarity, while others professing a fascination towards unipolarity. Realism evolved significantly as a result of such comparisons – strengthening the notion that post-Cold War order is likely to evolve as unipolar and relatively stable – also suggesting multipolar global order may be undesirable (Zoppo, 1966). While the gradually evolving knowledge and professed wisdom of Cold War bipolarity broadly authenticated realist claims; few realists interpreted confrontational trends during the earlier phases of multipolarity, as bases for warnings regarding the unfathomable complexities in alliances, crises, and military confrontation expected in global multipolarity – which had been regarded as the most significant contributing factors leading to the outbreak of the First and Second World War. Such discourses combined with nuclearisation during the Cold War years substantiated realist scholars' post-Cold war concerns and further magnified their assumptions, where the US had been projected as the superpower able to create a new world order, maintain global security, justify the use of force and develop strategic alliances.

On the contrary, while through the early 1990s, the US deliberately disengaged from conflict areas, which were the remnants of the Cold War, the discourses on US hegemony and efforts to create a peaceful international order appeared to dominate the later part of the 1990s. The euphoria associated with US hegemony and a new world order (Kissinger, 1994; Ruggie, 1998) was also supported by globalization and cosmopolitan field (Held, 1995; Kleingeld, 1998; Kymlicka, 1995) discourses and arguments; going to the extent of advocating pre-emptive military strategies – disregarding the lingering injustice, inequality and implosive resentment among a large swathe of conflict-ridden regions across the globe.

While the post-Cold War had been interpreted as turning Unipolar; it also displayed a power vacuum at the international level and burgeoning competitions and rivalries between emerging powers such as China, India, and Russia. In addition, September 11, 2001 (9/11) and the global and cosmopolitan discourses (Beck, 2000, 2007; Kaldor, 2003) vocalized elemental questions regarding the nature of military and economic security in post 9/11 global order as well as the nature of 'polarity' in transforming international order. It is assumed and claimed that post-Cold War power confrontations and multipolarity appeared different in comparison to the multipolarity of pre-Cold War years. In addition, due to the transformed nature of war, especially by the US in the post-9/11 era, the previous arguments on unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity demand rethinking. Therefore, post-Cold War multipolarity requires explanation and may also be usefully employed to analyze the current strategy as well as geo-economic compulsion and options facing the major global powers, especially the US from the perspective of its interests in South Asia.

The chronological parameters of analyses as delineated in this article include Cold War, post-Cold War, and post-9/11 eras, and I begin with brief explanations of bipolarity, unipolarity, and multipolarity since these patterns evolved in this order in the post-Second World War era. To focus on South Asia, these patterns of polarity shall be discussed and related to the regional dynamics peculiar to this region. The purpose is to identify the significant areas of theoretical convergences, from eras of bipolarity and unipolarity to the recent trends which appear multipolar. The identification of these points of convergences shall serve the purpose of highlighting the transformed nature of alliances, regional economic structures, and strategic dynamics in South Asia in a multipolar world. Therefore, it may be stated that this study focuses on multipolarity to analyze the degree of vulnerability and instability in post-Cold War and post-9/11 order.

While focussing on polarity, the major powers studied are the US, China, and Russia since these states are greater powers having interests in South Asia; however, the primary focus shall remain on US's role towards South Asia since the US is also a great power capable of influencing the global order. The South Asian states included in the analysis are India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The evolving regional trade and economic corridors such as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will also be discussed. To elaborate on the nature of current relations between the US and the South Asian states, US-India, US-Pakistan, and US-Afghanistan relations will be chronicled in the first stage. In the next stage, the relations between India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan will be examined while simultaneously referring to US's interests, approaches, and options. Finally, the options for cooperation among the



South Asian states and major powers shall be highlighted. The conclusion shall allude to a few emerging trends and possible transformations in the international order.

This article focuses on the changing dynamics of the distribution of military power in South Asia given post-Cold War multipolarity. This factor may also be useful to understand the nature of order in South Asia and also suggest whether the greater powers may employ military means to alter the nature of strategic alliances. It will be contemplated whether post-Cold War multipolarity reinstates the risks of nuclear war and mutual annihilation or reduces them. In addition, it will be analyzed whether multipolarity in South Asia presents greater possibilities/chances of economic cooperation between states to promote amicable resolutions of conflicts. Multipolarity as a concept shall be employed to explain the strategic as well as geoeconomic compulsions and options for the South Asian states as well as the major global powers. Regarding the role of greater powers, it will be studied whether Russia's ongoing confrontations with the US are likely to increase, resulting in challenging US interests internationally. In addition, it is assumed that China appears to have shifted its strategic confrontation with the US and is economically competing and cooperating with it. While in recent years the US selectively employed economic and strategic coercion in dealing with China; it will be studied whether China is likely to strategically ally with Russia to balance against the US. Given these dynamics, the primary focus shall remain on the US and its relations with the aforementioned South Asian states.

To address these questions this article begins with an introduction to polarity and highlights various recent arguments on post-9/11 multipolarity.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted using qualitative explanatory and exploratory techniques. Specific methods utilized to conduct the study remain critical discourse analysis. The sample used for this study remains the discourses about polarity which range from the debates about unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity. Data consists of primary and secondary sources.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Polarity and International Order

A strategically resourceful state may be regarded as a 'Pole' if it surpasses other similar states by attaining and extending its territorial influence and controlling population and natural resources. Polarity is understood as the distribution of power among states. As conceptualized in the discipline of IR polarity suggests the concentration of states with varying powers into global arrangements which signify the commonality of political ideologies, economic interests, and military strategies. Moreover, a concentration of states around the most powerful and hegemonic state is also referred to as polarization. It has also been explained as a conglomeration where actors from distinct subordinate systems develop a positive and integrated interaction within their sphere of influence of the respective pole, while such interactions appear to cause tensions with states related to other poles. While polarity suggests the distribution of power between the states, polarization refers to the tendency of actors to cluster around the international system's most powerful states. These interactions and antagonisms are materialized such as military alliances, intergovernmental organizations, trade and aid agreements (Rapkin et al., 1979), and events that transform the global order such as wars, occupations, and the creation of military bases. During the Cold War, the two competing ideologies of Communism/Socialism as one camp and Democratic Capitalist promoted their specific interests and strategies, such as the creation of two poles or Centers supported and strengthened by respectively allied states creating spheres of interests or composed of Peripheries (Galtung, 1971). Therefore, bipolarity had been explained as a combination of conditions where most states were organized into two hostile coalitions led by dominant superpowers; whose military superiorities surpassed those of the allied states. Such superpowers developed a system of global nuclear deterrence (Wagner, 1993). According to the traditional Cold War Theory (Halliday, 1989, 1999), bipolarity and Cold War represented the two contending poles engaged in measures short of war, crises management, a general policy of non-cooperation, proxy wars, and various patterns of the balance of power exercised as a consequence of the proliferation of tactical and strategic weapons. The terms such as client state, containment, deterrence, structural imperialism, mutually assured destruction, pre-emption, long peace, and nuclear alarmism; lead to specific perceptions, images, and reactions among powerful and less powerful states during the era of bipolarity. These terms implied that bipolarity appeared to induce an acceptance of the military dominance and superiority of relative poles and their ability to annihilate the adversaries, therefore, substantiating the ideas of deterrence and enduring peace. The notion of security remained dominated by a balance of terror rationalizing the huge investments in military infrastructure. However, the disintegration of the USSR not only questioned this logic but also highlighted a significant deficiency in the theorizations about Cold War and bipolarity; as the disintegration of one pole, the end of the Cold War and bipolarity had not been conceptualized or foreseen in these discourses. Post-Cold War discourses on polarity and international order advocated for bipolarity as a more stable system based on assumptions of bipolarity theory, equality theory, and nuclear theory of long peace. It had been argued that equal bipolarity, the singularity of the dyad, complimented with nuclear weapons and fear of mutual annihilation lead to long peace; while multipolarity and multiple dyads are vulnerable to buck-passing, military coercion by the greater power, wars due to hyper-nationalism and misinterpretations and miscalculations during nuclear posturing and crises (Mearsheimer, 1990). It had also been argued that economic liberalism and democratic peace are fragile notions – insufficient to promote peace in Europe and the worst and most dangerous post-Cold War order in Europe will be a non-

nuclear Europe, while a non-nuclear Europe will be prone to devastating conventional wars as well ([Mearsheimer, 1990](#)). These arguments suggested nostalgia for the Cold War; however, these concerns appear misplaced. Obsolescence of war further strengthens the neorealist and structural realist argument that fears of the devastation of wars ensure peace. However, the transformed domestic conditions in European states due to the processes of democratization, minimization of hyper-nationalism and the social imperial motives for war, and fear of nuclear annihilation as a result of nuclearisation during the Cold War had reduced the risks of Europe falling into its old warlike ways.

The mainstream and structural realists argue that power-related inequalities in a tripolar or multipolar world are likely to motivate relatively greater powers to unite against the greater (super) power. Such alignments are not necessarily intended to subdue and overcome the sole greater power; however, the greater power, to pre-empt such a possibility, may be inclined to offer greater deals to one of the great powers ([James, 1995](#)). The recent Sino-US economic cooperation may be viewed from this perspective. The structural realists have argued since the end of the Cold War that unipolarity is likely to lead to multipolarity since relatively greater power tends to offset the power of the largest state. Moreover, they argue that the US may be regarded as a hegemon in the Western hemisphere; but it is not a global hegemon and in the long-term Russia and China are likely to find themselves singularly or collectively in a military confrontation with the US. These claims appear to be based on the presumption that presently the world is a multipolar ([Fettweis, 2004](#)). The mainstream and Structural Realist's image of the present multipolar world includes the present US, Russia, and China as major powers capable of bringing significant change. According to this perspective, on the one hand, there is a lingering strategic confrontation between US and Russia (which may be observed in Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria), while on the other hand the US and China appear to compete as well as cooperate economically. Structural and Offensive Realists further argue that the disintegration of the USSR and the nature of the confrontation between the US and Russia have compelled China to rethink its interests and cooperate with the US; even though during the Cold War bipolarity, the US and China were hostile antagonists. They, further, argue that in case China rises to the status of a dominant geoeconomic and military power capable to challenge the US's hegemony; Russia is likely to ally with the US to contain China ([Mearsheimer, 2017](#)). While these theorizations appear centered around the state and the international system, on the other hand, the globalists and peace research thinkers present a relatively elaborate structure considering global movements such as anti-war, environmental preservation, and feminism as dynamics affecting the agendas of the states. Moreover, they view multipolarity as an octagonal structure with the poles of Latin America, the United States, Russia, China, India, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union, and Africa. They further see global civilizations as Western Liberal, Western Marxist, Muslim/Islamic, Buddhist, Japanese and Chinese. The economic goals in such an order are minimum income for every individual, free education, and basic facilities. The political goal is the organization of around two hundred states, which comprise around two thousand nationalities; therefore, a political organization may be attained through creating federations inside the states with multiple nations and confederations between states. The military goal is the criminalization of war as a means of policy, as incidents of wars have overall been minimized, although US and Israel are the two exceptions. The cultural goal is a dialogue of civilizations. The social goal is the liberation of marginalized people and global identity ([Galtung, 2015](#)). In addition, Neo-Marxists observe the emergence of a global Wall Street System ([Gowan, 1999](#)) an extension of the influence of US's domestic entrepreneurs and Wall Street globally. Furthermore, the discourses from the cosmopolitans include suggestions for the rise of a Multitude ([Hardt & Negri, 2005](#)) in the form of a global civil society and evolving global movements. The nature of power, war, alliances, and cooperation in such a multipolar world has significantly affected the US grand strategy.

The forthcoming sections chart, detail, and assort various conceptualizations of polarity as well as the changes in the international strategies of great powers and south Asian states in response to strategic trends of multipolarity in the post-9/11 era. The final sections elaborate US's relations with south Asian states as well as the conflicts and competitions among these states. The conclusion presents the argument about the nature of international order.

### **Bipolarity, Unipolarity, and Multipolarity**

The bipolarity of the Cold War was categorized as polycentrism, which lays constraints as well as provided strategic opportunities for regional actors. This transition was observed at two levels: a gradual dominance of the US over the USSR – ironically branded as 'joint custodians' of the New World Order; and the transformation of the nature of Patron-Client relation between the superpowers and their dependent states ([Carney, 1989](#)). From 1988 onwards, Michael Gorbachev's 'new political thinking' proclaimed that USSR shall not challenge, compete or deter the US; but rather work in harmony – if not in active cooperation ([Carney, 1989](#)). Post-Cold War international order projected new compulsions, challenges, and opportunities for great powers, especially US.

The primary assumption to regard the US as a leading power actively transforming the post-Cold War unipolar order was its ability to surpass all other states in the 'power gap' which suggests a calculation of military forces in action at the time of actual conduct of war and hostilities ([Wohlforth, 1999](#)). This implies that other greater powers not only need a great amount of military power to minimize the gap between them and the US military arsenal but also have to develop strategies and tactics as well as economic and geostrategic influence to challenge the US as a unipolar power and induce a structural change in the global order.

As the unipolar power, the US developed its grand strategy comprising unilateral as well as multilateral offshore balancing, while selectively engaging with its allies by accommodating and leash-slipping. The US therefore may not maintain its primacy without raising the levels of insecurity among the other great powers. This is the reason for the US considering unilateral offshore balancing a viable strategy (Layne, 2006). On the other hand, unipolarity may present the secondary powers with incentives such as resistance to unipolar power's capabilities under the presumption that the hegemon may find it difficult to engage on multiple fronts and may resort to subtle strategies including soft balancing, sporadically hiding, binding, delegitimizing or norm entrapment (Ikenberry et al., 2009). The presumption that unipolarity is likely to lead to balancing and bipolarity or multipolarity appears to ignore the fact that military, economic and strategic capabilities of nations cannot be sectored and separately weighed. The enormous capability gap and unipolar power's geographic offshore location imply that local balancing has the potential to impede internal and external efforts to restore systemic equilibrium (Wohlforth, 2012).

The arguments suggesting a gradual decline in US hegemony observe China's growing influence as one of the international factors and deteriorating the US domestic economy and developing fiscal crisis as the primary domestic factors. As opposed to the claims of Realists, it is further argued that China in its rise has developed a collaborative mechanism with the US where both are reciprocating in the economic sphere. This has minimized the possibilities of military confrontation between the two while increasing the confrontation between US and Russia. While China and Russia do not equal to the US in the military equation; the US while cooperating with China has managed to compensate for its economic imbalances and has also maintained its hegemonic and militarily dominant status and policy of international prestige in comparison to Russia. The rhetoric of the war on terror suggested a conflict in which international society became a participant, confronted with the exterior enemy, rather than setting the conflict between states. This discourse gradually developed the concept inimical to the notion of war as a limited activity (Plunkett, 2011). The rise of another South Asian regional power, India, and its gradually growing strategic relations with the US, significantly affects the relations between China, Russia, and Pakistan and demands an inquiry from the theoretical perspective of multipolarity.

It had been argued that post-Cold War multipolarity appears different from the various patterns of multipolarity that preceded the Cold War, which had been regarded as unstable as well as a contributing factor to the first and second World Wars. The multipolarity of the interwar years was regarded as unstable by political analysts, especially those advocating the Realist interpretation of international relations. The Realist post-Cold War discourses on multipolarity focused on Offense Defense balance including military balance, cumulative power resources, and strategic beliefs. It had been argued further that Bipolar systems are marginally less warlike, but the frequency, magnitude, and severity of war in multipolar and bipolar systems can be better explained by the stable balance between offensive and defensive forces (Hopf, 1991).

So far, the multipolar years have not displayed crises close to nuclear war, as were the case of nuclear confrontations during the Cold War years. During the Cold War years, perhaps China at the edge of nuclearisation gave the US most causes for fear (Gavin, 2010); but China's nuclearisation was also complimented by US-China dialogue and minimized the chances of China's hostility. This pattern of confrontation continued during the post-Cold War era when US and China continued a strategic confrontation; however, in the post-9/11 era, China and US engaged in calculated economic cooperation and competition, while minimizing the strategic and military race. China currently has 240 nuclear warheads and around 135 intercontinental ballistic missiles and is increasing the number of these missiles (Yeisley, 2011). China may have unrealistic strategic ambitions if it expects to challenge the US with such strategic capabilities. However, by the same standards, Israel may pose a greater threat to world peace and perhaps a challenge to the US interests if there is discord in US-Israel relations. These trends appear to suggest that transitions in military power and the likelihood of conventional wars in post-Cold War nuclearised multipolar remain relatively high.

Wohlforth questioning the presumption that power shift in a return to bipolarity or multipolarity will not raise the specter of great power wars employs the psychological theory of social identity he claims that identity, status hierarchies, and non-instrumental motives play a significant role in the great power's pursuits for their interests and ends (Wohlforth, 2009). In so doing, a relation is drawn between the probability of status competitions and their links to polarity. This approach also alludes to the role of the decision-making elite who act on behalf of the state and are expected to drive utility from the dominant state's status in international society. In a multipolar order, the greater states may resort to revisionism; in bipolarity dominant and greater powers may strive to develop a hierarchy while in unipolarity there is a likelihood of stratified hierarchy and second-tier states seeking favorable comparison. Unipolarity is likely to shape strategies of identity maintenance in ways that dampen status conflicts (Wohlforth, 2009). Considering the current international order, the rising powers have great material reasons to prefer the status quo. This suggests that peer competition under unipolarity may be managed by developing an order that accommodates the material needs of the second-tier powers (Wohlforth, 2009). Given these arguments, Russia's confrontation with US and European powers appears to suggest that Russia may employ embargo, retortion, or selective and limited war in a new multipolar work where strategic alliances are not clearly defined.

In addition, relatively weaker states that occupy critical strategic positions can extract concessions from the US under crucial circumstances, as had been the case of Uzbekistan and Pakistan in the post-9/11 era. Similarly, Russia and China

collaborating in SCO appear to portray a soft balancing behavior. States sharing technologies without forming alliances also qualifies as soft balancing. A different example is the EU-3 (France, Great Britain, Germany) peace negotiations with Iran which increased pressure on it while minimizing the chances of unilateral action by US (Walt, 2009). Post-9/11 wars initiated by the US have enabled great and emerging powers to consider maintaining or acquiring strategic power, adding new dynamics to this era of multipolarity.

The term multipolar nuclear interactions and tipping point suggest that 9/11 has provoked major powers and nuclear threshold states to reconsider the utility of otherwise abjured nuclear weapons while such aspirations to nuclearise are likely to further complicate the nature of conflicts (Gavin, 2010). According to this perspective, North Korea and Iran are likely to lead to a chain reaction of proliferation in their specific regions. With Iraq out of the nuclear equation, the rhetoric axis of evil is likely to be continued. If rouge behavior may be characterized as threatening war and violence to neighbors, disregard and violation of international norms, human rights violations and support of terrorist organizations and such behavior may be associated with Iran and North Korea, then during the years of bipolarity; the strategic discourse evolving from the US projected USSR and China as rouge states that pursued nuclear weapons. Since the end of the Cold, War China had evolved as a nuclear power, maintaining minimum deterrence, controlled nuclear posture, and first-use doctrine (Gavin, 2010). However, the actual possibilities of nuclear terrorism appear remote considering the complexities of developing nuclear weapons and detonating mechanisms.

Taking a brief look at history, the dynamics of great power conflicts leading to global wars have been traced to great power behavior before the Second World War. It has been claimed that currently Russia and China appear to display strategic ambitions similar to Germany and Japan; India appears to imitate Italy, while Japan appears compelled to rethink its security and strategic policy. Russia's confrontation with the US and NATO and its renewed pursuance of nuclear ICBMs leading up to the declared military modernization by the year 2025 have been interpreted as evidence of its brewing strategic confrontation with the US and its imperialist trends in its near abroad (Callinicos, 2009). China's evolving global geoeconomic strategy and growing influence in states such as Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, and North Korea have been interpreted as the creation of buffers and semi-vassals. Japan appears surrounded by growingly erratic and volatile neighbors. The lingering nuclear confrontation between North Korea, South Korea, and the US along with China's moves towards Senkaku Islands, has forced the creation of the Japan National Security Council. India appears to flex its military capabilities frequently; however, it is still bogged down by domestic political corruption and sharply increasing poverty (Colucci, 2015). China has a different view of multipolarity based on its values such as agreement on respect for sovereignty and territoriality of other greater powers, non-aggression, non-interference, and peaceful co-existence, however, China's participation in global affairs remains low and it appears not to fully accept global norms, rules, and institutions. China does not promote revisionism or a radical re-configuring of the distribution of power at the international level (Johnston, 2003). These transformations in China's grand strategy suggest its aspirations to rise as a global actor and transform the South Asian geoeconomic order.

Multipolarity may not be regarded as multilateralism given the various dynamics of great power management where conflicting dynamics of security and identity merged with traditional state strategies such as the balance of power and deterrence lead to unilateral as well as multilateral outcomes. A need to differentiate between transatlantic multilateralism and collective unilateralism led to Russia's opposition to post-9/11 US grand strategy (Makarychev & Morozov, 2011). Cold War revisionism developed a fundamentally radical ontology placing the developing states or the global South at the pivot of analysis, encompassing the world revolutionary movements, uneven patterns of capitalist developments, different ideologies of states, and peculiar types of leaderships, to develop a dialectical relation between developing states and the geopolitical competitions between the two superpowers. A theory of the global Cold War provides an analysis of the South for observing the spatial and temporal globalizing logic inherent in the contradictions of capitalist development; while the great power confrontation suggests the linkage between domestically induced socio-economic changes and its magnification to geopolitical policies (Saul, 2011). One new reality of the post-9/11 order is that Russia has appeared as a challenger to US international influence and the Cold War notion of it being projected as a power promoting socialism, and the early post-9/11 notion of it not being regarded as an imperialist power – similar to the US – have been put to question.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

### US policy toward South Asia

#### *Indo-US relations*

This pattern of extended alliance can be traced to the ideas of the off-shore balancing (Layne, 1997), and the sub-imperialism (Bond, 2004). A regional capitalist state may be regarded as sub-imperialist. India's status has also been explained as a member of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), implying that despite their anti-imperialist potential, BRICS states have promoted neo-liberal and imperialist practices that facilitate capital accumulation, resource extraction, and expansion of their markets (Bond, 2014). The US and India formulated a strategic alliance, especially since US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2008, under which the US offered civil nuclear cooperation to India in return for India placing all its civil nuclear facilities under IAEA exchanges. The expansion of security and geoeconomic networks across Europe and search for strategic and corporate allies to support US military-

related industry strongly resonates in official documents, statements, as well as policies and priorities of the US administrations and, are outlined in the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2014, which emphasizes creating global security as its second pillar of defense its defense strategy and collaborating with strategic and economic partners to achieve common (geoeconomic and corporate) goals (Mabee, 2016). The Asia-Pacific alliances including Australia, Japan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, and Thailand are expected to expand with the inclusion of Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, and India. The Defense Technology Trade Initiative (DTTI) between US and India is expected to develop a geostrategic partnership with India's defense industrial base and promote business ties between the two defense industries (Mabee, 2016). In addition to the military-industrial and corporate collaboration, the US appears to favor India as a regional actor in South Asia (Mabee, 2016). Another significant factor that is determining the nature of Indo-US relations remains the arms industry. Though India, under Prime Minister Modi, is trying to develop its defense industrial base with the slogan of 'Make in India', it still is one of the largest importers of arms in the world. India imports around 70 percent of its defense technology from Russia. Recently it has been trying to diversify its import options, thus creating incentives for the United States, France, and other Western states. Ashley Tellis notes, 'I think there is a clear strategic judgment in India that ... Moscow represents the past, Washington represents the future. As the US-India relationship is still in its early stages, it is best to see it as a potential case of US-centric military modernization, rather than a complete success (Mabee, 2016).

#### *US-Pakistan Relations*

Since joining the US's war of terror in (Afghanistan) Pakistan has experienced cooperation as well as dissonance. The war in Afghanistan and pursuit of Al Qaeda and Taliban through drones became one of the most significant irritants while the Salala incident worsened the relations making Pakistan block NATO's supplies to Afghanistan; in turn, the US reconsidering its assistance (National Defence Authorisation Act May 18, 2012) to coerce Pakistan to aggressively fight terrorists. The increasing confrontation between the two states led to the US ceasing military training of Pakistan armed forces personnel and ceasing the Coalition Support Fund. Confrontation with the US also contributed to Pakistan being placed on the 'grey list by Financial Action Task Force in June 2018. The rift was further widened by the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's statement to warn the International Monetary Fund (IMF) saying the Trump administration will not allow it to lend US dollars to Pakistan for repaying China (Ibrahim, 2018). The statement is seen as Washington's apparent response to Beijing's One Belt, One Road initiative, which includes the 62 billion dollars CPEC package for rebuilding Pakistan's decaying infrastructure and reviving its economy (Ibrahim, 2018). However, China Foreign Minister Wang Yi clarified that China is not burdening Pakistan with loans while engaging in projects for CPEC.

#### *US-Afghanistan Relations*

One of the debates in the broader discourse on multipolarity among US academia and subsequently resonating in the policies of US policymakers is the use of terms such as failed, collapsing, and rouge states. As opposed to the Unipolar world, the Multipolar world did not pose a threat of mutual nuclear annihilation to the greater power and war may be seen as a policy to promote its global 'liberal' agendas. The liberal internationalist, cosmopolitan, and neoconservative advocacy for war to 'fix' the failing, collapsing (Zartman, 1995) and rouge states also appeared in the works of President Ashraf Ghani in his co-authored works with Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States* (Ghani & Lockhart, 2009) and have played a significant role in the manner in which the US has employed war, tried to introduce neoliberal reform and subsequently accept the gradually increasing role of privatized military firms in war-torn Afghanistan. The outcomes of the US war and occupation of Afghanistan suggest that these discourses have viewed the problem from a perspective that suggests a compulsion to use war to liberate the failing, collapsing, and rouge states. The liberal reforms in Afghanistan and Iraq have not produced the dividends expected (Al-Ali et al., 2009; Rostami-Povey, 2007), and the US has realized the importance to negotiate with all of the factions and actors in Afghanistan.

### **Regional dynamics and role of the US and other major powers**

#### *Indo-Pakistan Relations*

The present Pakistan government has extended confidence-building measures and India appears not to reciprocate in the same spirit. The World Bank claims that the current trade between India and Pakistan is less than 2 billion dollars, while Pakistan has the potential to enhance trade with India to 37 billion dollars and with South Asian states to 67 billion dollars from 23 billion dollars. India may expect Pakistan to reciprocate and grant India's Most Favored Nation (MFN) status. Pakistan came close to granting India MFN status in 2013, which was renamed Non-Discriminatory Market Access (NDMA). Ideally, India may expect to utilize Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement to perhaps help Indian goods be transported to Afghanistan. India and Pakistan perhaps are more likely to find it difficult to promote bilateral trade however, if the trade is to be regarded as the engine of growth in the domestic economies of the South Asian states as well as the source of creating competition, specialization, enhanced quality of exportable goods, creation of massive profits and foreign exchange surpluses and reinvestment; then perhaps China, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan can benefit more from multilateral trade agreements based on the country of origin standards (Malik, 2016). The current US administration appears to prefer 'country of origin standards', labor provisions, and access of agricultural producers to regional markets as may be observed in the Trump administration's new deal to replace the North Atlantic Free Trade Area (NAFTA) by promoting the United States Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA)

promulgated after the recent G20 Summit (Buenos Aires 2018). While China has already assisted Pakistan by initiating CPEC; the US will benefit from promoting multilateral trade by exercising its influence, especially in the global trade institutions. Far from the times of developing National Missile Defense by the US to prevent the strategic threat from China; US and China have developed a relationship of cooperation since China's inclusion in the World Trade Organization (Malik, 2016). China receives Foreign Direct Investments and its Sovereign Wealth Funds manage the reinvestment of foreign exchange reserves and investments in bonds and funds in the international market as well as the US's domestic financial and entrepreneurial organizations. Therefore, CPEC may serve as an infrastructure for Pakistan to utilize the Chinese model of generating foreign exchange reserves and investing in the international market. Pakistan, therefore, needs to plan and learn from US and China and develop its own Sovereign Wealth Funds (Malik, 2017). The proposition by Pakistan to initially trade with China in its currency appears the right first tender step toward monetary stability, production, and trade.

#### *Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations:*

Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have soured since the US war on Afghanistan although in July 2010 the signing of the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement expected the building of railways across Afghanistan. Bilateral trade has benefited both countries over the years due to the low transportation costs, and this led to Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan reaching a record 2.4 billion dollars in 2012, before dropping to less than 1 billion dollars due to poor relations, the frequent closures of border crossings and the drawdown of US-led forces in Afghanistan, which had received the bulk of their supplies from Pakistan (yusufzai, 2018). Afghanistan's transit trade via Karachi seaport and the Pakistani overland route had been on the rise but has gradually declined. It may be reduced further when the Indian-funded Chabahar Port in Iran becomes fully operational for Afghan exports and imports, bypassing Pakistan (yusufzai, 2018). The US and China may be able to play a role in including Iran in future trade-related negotiations between Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.

Chaman-Kandahar-Herat railway line, Peshawar-Kabul Motorway, and completion of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline and Central Asia-South Asia Project CASA-1000 projects can realize the potential of South and Central Asian regions by providing the shortest access through the seaports of Gwadar and Karachi (Ibrahim, 2018). The Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) agreed upon on 6 April 2018 sets the framework to strengthen relations, particularly on mutual security and economic issues.

#### *Indo-Afghan Relations*

India and Afghanistan are expected to cooperate in the fields of rural development, bilateral businesses, Hydroelectric power projects, iron extraction, steel production, road building, and supporting education in Afghanistan. These agreements have been signed between the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and the Afghan National Standardization Authority (Bureau of Indian Standards, 2018). These agreements are expected to improve trade and diplomatic relations between south Asian states, however, military cooperation between India and Afghanistan is likely to result in reactions both from Pakistan and China.

### **CONCLUSION**

The post-9/11 international order displays evidence of multipolarity with the rise of Russia and China as great powers. Russia appears to capitalize on its military capability to attain diplomatic and economic interests, while China has capitalized upon its economic power to gain influence at the international level. While China is likely to proactively prevent any military misadventure against its interests, it may not see it in its interest to strategically or militarily ally with Russia to form a power bloc against the US. This is an alternative explanation to the structural and offensive realists who argue that the disintegration of the USSR and the nature of the confrontation between the US and Russia has compelled China to rethink its interests and cooperate with the US; even though during the Cold War bipolarity, the US and China were hostile antagonists. Drawing further from the same assumptions they argue that in case China rises to the status of a dominant geoeconomic and military power capable to challenge US hegemony; Russia is likely to ally with the US to contain China (Mearsheimer, 2017). The evidence of multipolarity in current international relations appears to have accentuated the need for minimizing incidents of war, promoting negotiations, and promoting trade between developing states. The options for negotiation, conflict resolution, and regional multilateral trade capitalizing on the economic power and promoting the exchange of tradable goods according to 'country of origin standards' in South Asia may be explored if major powers such as the US, China, and Russia exercise their influence in global financial and trade regulating institutions. The nature of post-Cold War multipolarity demands that the US reassess its interests and engage with the other greater powers and regional states, especially towards conflict resolution and the promotion of regional trade. Considering the compulsions of transforming global order, the possibility of Russia actively engaging in conflicts such as Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria to initiate a crisis for strategic as well as economic bargaining with the Western powers (the US and European powers) may be regarded as likely. Given these new trends, the US is likely to face economic as well as strategic challenges from Russia and China.

### **LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD**

The study dealt with the issues of systemic polarity and how its discourses and the resultant policies of the United States



impact South Asia. Future studies can be conducted about other regions.

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