POWER POLITICS, BIPOLARITY, ITS IMPLICATIONS

Bipolarity can be defined as a system of world order in which the majority of global economic, military and cultural influence is held between two states. The classic case of a bipolar world is that of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, which dominated the second half of the twentieth century. International political economy according to Robert Gilpin is “the reciprocal and dynamic interaction in international relations of the pursuit of wealth and the pursuit of power” (Gilpin, 1987).

CONCEPT OF BIPOLARITY

The concept of bipolarity has significant implications for global order.

* Firstly, two rival powers cannot remain in equilibrium indefinitely; one has to surpass the other and therefore conflict is inevitable in a bipolar world. Of increasing importance also, is the emergence of power blocs, which arise as lesser powers fall under the influence of one or other of the superpowers. In this regard, global order is not stable during periods of bipolarity, but instead, warfare appears to be necessary for the resolution of rivalry between two superpowers. In this context, it seems fitting to describe a bipolar world as one that is in “dynamic equilibrium,” where the two sides are equal in power but one may achieve a higher power for a short time before the other matches that power again to re-establish the balance.
* Morgenthau believed that bipolarity was “a mechanism that contains in itself the potentialities for unheard-of good as well as for unprecedented evil.” According to him, it “made the hostile opposition of two gigantic power blocs possible” but also held out the hope of regulating that opposition through a symmetry of power maintained by moderate competition (Morgenthau, 1985). Waltz attributed the absence of war to bipolarity, which, he maintained, was less war-prone than multi-polarity. He believed that war arose primarily because of miscalculation; states misjudge the power and cohesion of opposing coalitions. Waltz argued that the international system was undergoing a peaceful transition from bipolarity to multi-polarity and insists that the international system remains bipolar even after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

**The basic characteristics of international systems are as follows:**

1. The character of the actors (sovereign national states, non-state actors);
2. distribution of power (balance of power, dominance of one actor over the others);
3. distribution of wealth (a gap among the wealthy and the poor actors);
4. polarization (flexibility of alliances);
5. the goals of the actor (e.g. to conquer a territory);
6. the tools that are used in order to promote the goals (e.g. weapons, diplomacy);  
   mutual dependence and mutual vulnerability.

**Classification of international system according the distribution of power:**

1. **Unipolarity** – there is only one dominant actor who rules the whole system. E.g. Roman Empire.
2. **Bipolarity** – there are two poles (two key actors) who make alliances with the other actors. E.g. Cold War (USA vs. USSR).
3. **Multipolarity** – more centers of power. E.g. present

**POWER**

Power is often defined as the ability to get another actor to do what it would not otherwise have done (or not to do what it would have done). A variation of this idea is that actors are powerful to the extent that they affect others more than others affect them. These definitions treat power as influence.  
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CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

A characteristic feature of IR after the end of Cold War is anarchy. Thus, some authors call the existing international system anarchic. It is necessary to highlight that anarchy does not mean uncontrolled chaos. On contrary, it is possible to observe concrete rules. The system of IR is called anarchic because there is no central authority that would be able to enforce these rules. After the end of World War II, it was believed that Organization of United Nations (UN) could have been such an authority. However, this premised was not confirmed.

The other typical feature of contemporary international system is multipolarity. Multipolarity is a situation when more than one centre of power appears. After the end of Cold War and the failure of Soviet Union, the only remaining superpower is the United States of America (USA) concerning technology, economy and army. At the same time, most of the authors agree that there are more centers of power. China and India have been showing a significant economic potential. State of Israel is considered to be a military superpower. Simultaneously, there are the regional powers: Brazil in Latin America, Republic of South Africa in sub-Saharan Africa, Russia in Central Asia, and Germany and France in Europe.

The end of the Second World War did not signal a return to normality; on the contrary, it resulted in a new conflict. The major European powers that had been at the forefront of the international stage in the 1930s were left exhausted and ruined by the war, setting the scene for the emergence of two new global superpowers. Two blocs developed around the Soviet Union and the United States, with other countries being forced to choose between the two camps.

The USSR came out of the war territorially enlarged and with an aura of prestige from having fought Hitler’s Germany. The country was given a new lease of life by its heroic resistance to the enemy, exemplified by the victory at Stalingrad. The USSR also offered an ideological, economic and social model extending as never before to the rest of Europe. Furthermore, the Red Army, unlike the US army, was not demobilised at the end of the war. The Soviet Union thus had a real numerical superiority in terms of men and heavy weapons.

The United States was the great victor of the Second World War. Its human and material losses were relatively low, and even though the US Army was almost completely demobilised a few months after the end of hostilities, the United States remained the world’s leading military power. Its navy and air force were unrivalled, and until 1949 it was the only country with the capacity to produce nuclear weapons. It also confirmed its status as the world’s leading economic power, in terms of both the volume of trade and industrial and agricultural production. The US now owned more than two thirds of the world’s gold reserves and the dollar became the primary international currency.

The conflicts of interest between the new world powers gradually multiplied, and a climate of fear and suspicion reigned. Each country feared the newfound power of the other. The Soviets felt surrounded and threatened by the West and accused the United States of spearheading ‘imperialist expansion’. For their part, the Americans were concerned at Communist expansion and accused Stalin of breaching the Yalta Agreement on the right of free peoples to self-determination. The result was a long period of international tension interspersed with dramatic crises which, from time to time, led to localised armed conflicts without actually causing a full-scale war between the United States and the USSR. From 1947, Europe, divided into two blocs, was at the heart of the struggle between the two superpowers. The Cold War reached its first climax with the Soviet blockade of Berlin. The explosion of the first Soviet atomic bomb in the summer of 1949 reinforced the USSR in its role as a world power. This situation confirmed the predictions of Winston Churchill, who, in March 1946, had been the first Western statesman to speak of an ‘Iron Curtain’ that now divided Europe in two.