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Peter W. Schulze**MULTIPOLARITY AND MULTILATERALISM: COOPERATIVE OR RIVAL CORNERSTONES OF A NEW WORLD ORDER**

Today we are nowadays confronted with a strange asymmetry: While the technology driven processes of globalization are interconnecting societies and creating networks of mutual interdependence in all sectors of live, the adaption of a political order to such revolutionary changes is behind time. This discrepancy creates the present unease, conflicts and uncertainties which haunt our societies. The classical question is thrown into the open: Are the fundamental forces unleashed by the technological revolution and its impact on changes in socio-economic relations strong enough to create a balanced world order based on peaceful cooperation among the various multipolar actors?

The analysis carried out in the article allows us to state that Multipolarity and Multilateralism do not need to exclude each other. In a way they can coexist. Even more: Multilateralism could create the basis of a multipolar global order which accentuates more cooperative than conflicting issues. Despite the fact that both concepts are based on different modes and follow different objectives, their interplay mirrors much more the present complex social, economic and technological reality.

Keywords: multipolarity, multilateralism, world order, conflict, globalization, hegemony.

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Introduction

Andrey Kortunov, CEO of the influential Russian Think Tank RIAC and undoubtedly one of the most brilliant Russian foreign policy analysts argues convincingly that the concept of Multipolarity is a product of the 20th century and not a recent invention [5].¹

Nevertheless, Multipolarity experienced a rebirth at the end of the 20th and in the beginning of the 21st century in Russia, China, and the EU. It never left the scene in the US foreign and security community or the US Congress. Nowadays, different versions of Multipolarity are floating around and surprisingly there is even a competition where, when and who created the concept first.

Theoretical basis

In post- Soviet Russia the concept is first and foremost connected with the late foreign and then Prime Minister **Yevgeny Primakov**. The concept was conceptualized in the middle of the 1990s rebuking the fallacies of the “romantic Western” orientation of Russian foreign policy under Andrei Kosyrew.

The primary objective of Primakov’s concept was to form a multipolar alliance between Russia, China and India to balance the hegemonic influence of the US in global politics. The concept never materialized: All three potential actors were either economically and politically too weak, or, as Russia, entirely engulfed in mastering the domestic challenges of the transformation process after the demise of the USSR. However, the guiding idea is still a structural element in today’s Russian foreign and security policy which is pivoting away from a partnership with the EU toward Asia [4]². The concept of Greater Asia is definitely an essential

¹ There is the Western version which traces Multipolarity to the changes in the international economy in the 70s of the last century with the rise of Asia, the EU, and OPEC’s dominance in energy policies and other detrimental developments which weakened the global position of the US. In Russia, during the catastrophic decade of the 1990s the concept is usually associated with then Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov. Beijing claims its own version of Multipolarity which evolved during the 1990s and combines multilateral and bipolar elements.

² “Russia’s numerous opponents and adversaries want to lock the country up in a geopolitical ghetto and, isolate it as much as possible from the rest of the world. Economically, by imposing numerous sanctions and other restrictive measures related to trade, finance and the transfer of modern technologies. Politically, by attempting to drive Russia

and structural element in contemporary Russian global thinking [7]. But the Kremlin is cautious about the fact that a multipolar order is already in the process of being established. The role and position of the US in military, economic, and financial matters, both in South East Asia and within the transatlantic alliance/NATO/EU is still too strong to speak about a real demise of US hegemony or its loss of supremacy in global politics. Combined, and despite public declarations, the involved states act as client forces and stem against the transition of the present to some extent unipolar global system into a Multipolarity mode.

Westerns reflections about the origins of Multipolarity vary from the Russian view. There are traces of such a concept in the expert circles of the US. But they are secondary if not irrelevant in comparison to the country's political mainstream to maintain its global reach and preserve at any costs the objectives of global supremacy. Officially Washington did never embrace the concept of Multipolarity despite fundamental technological and economic changes in the international environment. In a way one may argue that challenges against US global supremacy developed since the 1970s. But their impact was not felt until the end of the first decade of the new millennium. Nevertheless, feeble attempts to prepare against such potential future challenges and to cope with such changes were produced. Institutions like the Trilateral Commission (1973), Bilderberg³ et al. were founded in order to create a common consensus on shared objectives among Washington's allies and to keep them under control. Washington's main objective, to defend its global leadership and preserve the leading position of Western powers against challengers and competitors remained lively until today.

In the Europe, the EU and its main member states like Germany, France and Italy are associated with being strong supporters of the multipolar concept. And opposite to the contemporary debate in the US, Multipolarity is not seen as a competing force against Multilateralism. One could argue they are twins. Both concepts share similar convictions and are in a way complimentary.

The Peoples Republic of China is the most recent new comer to the idea of Multipolarity. The idea was formulated in the 1990s with the rise of China as a potential economic and political super power⁴. In view of Chinese experts Multipolarity differs fundamentally from the US position on global politics, and shares basic aspects of the European perception. The Chinese notion combines structural elements of the former bipolarity system and new elements, i.e. a multitude of new actors will play a considerably important role in shaping the new emerging global order.

As Kortunov convincingly argues, Multipolarity did not evolve from a hypothesis of the 20th century into a fully fledged theory of international relations. And in reality, a multipolar shaped world did not arise yet. Instead the new design of the world order is rather different: it is Multilateralism, based on interests and not on geopolitical state actors or power blocs which are in constant need to "balance each other". Kortunov defines Multilateralism as a network of corresponding regimes based on and interwoven by political, economic and cultural ties. Those networks result in a state of mutual interdependency. Multilateralism other than Multipolarity is shaped by commonly agreed ideas upon institutions and stages of deep cooperation, even integration. Such design will be more appropriate to describe the complex and multifaceted world we are facing in the future or in which we are already in. This future world will be more "complex and contradictory" [5], composed of a large number of different actors, interacting and participating in global politics

As a result, Kortunov's verdict is harsh: Multipolarity will evaporate in the historical process, go down in history comparably to the short lived and temporary unilateral world order ruled by the hegemonic position of the USA after the demise of the USSR.

Origins and diverse schemes of Multipolarity

Kortunov's argument is well taken, but he defines Multipolarity in a too narrow historical context. His starting point is the classic version of the Concert of European powers which prevailed in the 19th century. However, there we may imagine that there are many versions of Multipolarity possible. Let me just describe briefly three other possible schemes:

into a corner in international organizations, from the United Nations General Assembly to the Council of Europe. And strategically, by undermining the very foundation of the international arms control regime, destroying the bilateral and multilateral talks and pushing Moscow towards strategic isolationism and a new arms race:"

³ Bilderberg Conferences dating back to the origins of the Cold War (1954) are the pre-runner for forming common and consensual objectives between European and US-American representatives of politics, media, military, academics and secret services to cope with and contain the Soviet Union's influence in Europe and globally.

⁴ However, there is ample evidence that structural elements of the concept can be traced back to Mao Zedong.

1. **The lone warrior scenario:** A group of sovereign not allied powers acting according to their national interests independently. They may be bound by cultural, economic, political and even family ties, share similar ideological and religious beliefs, but will act and pursue their objectives either in a cooperative or conflicting manner.
2. **The alliance or block-building scenario:** Each of the powers which could play a role as a potential pole look for support, mostly to smaller or weaker states, in order to strengthen their competitive position versus opposing rival powers. This could be done in a cooperative or enforcing manner, but would definitely split the multipolar arena into opposing building blocks.
3. **The bipolar or tripolar deformation scenario:** The multipolar system composed of powers not approximately equivalent in economic, military and social strength will force to bandwagon weaker states. The system will eventually transform into a bipolar or tripolar order of stronger poles surrounded by alliances and supporting states [2]⁵.

Kortunov is right if referring that the ideal conditions of the Concert of European powers gave peace and stability to Europe for nearly 100 years, despite two intermediate wars. However, neither the war of Prussia against Habsburg of 1866 nor the consecutive war and victory of Prussia against France of 1870/71 did destroy the system. However the ascend of the German empire after 1871 created among other factors the preconditions for a slow death of the multipolar order. The challenges to the multipolar consensus of the ruling feudal power elites were both domestic and external.

The struggle for mastery in Europe (A.J.P. Taylor [8]) destroyed the feudal consensus and led to rivalry among states, unraveling the balance of power. Further this development was linked to an imperialist race to swallow up colonies. In addition, the feudal systems were domestically threatened by the socio-economic emergences of the bourgeoisie and its political demands of regime change.

To sum up: one needs to be reminded that changes in the international system of states, in the global order, hardly ever took place in an evolutionary process. Instead, in retrospect such changes which occurred in 1815 (Congress of Vienna), 1919 (Treaty of Versailles) and after 1945 (Yalta and Potsdam) were results of wars and revolutions.

The Golden Century of Multipolarity

The Vienna system of peace, restoration of feudal supremacy and a power balance among the European great powers at that time was truly multipolar and lasted for nearly one hundred years. It was based on a Concert of European powers which were ruled by social and cultural homogenous elites, sharing similar stages of economic development. Those powers were relatively comparable in military terms of strength and influence. And above all, the system was flexible to adjust to changes in power constellations by forming coalitions and alliances in order to keep all powers confined to the primary agreed goal of balance and to keep a status quo situation alive. Ideologically they were united in blocking attempts of regime change.

The system showed strength as long as internal and external conditions did not alter. But its static mode could neither absorb the political and economic nor militarily rise of the German empire after 1871. Nor could the system take up the emerging divergences caused by industrial-technological developments. Both factors undermined the idea of balance. Rivalries among the participating states in Europe were growing, reaching to the sphere of colonialism. In addition, as Kortunov argues, a further cause for the breakup of the European Concert of powers was associated with the slow but steady change from autocratic-feudal state systems to constitutional monarchies and democratic societies at the end of the 19th century. Awakened national themes, agitation and polarized public opinion destabilized the autocratic systems from within. These trends played a decisive and destructive role well before 1914. All three factors, Germany's rise to a dominant power in Europe, the effects of industrial technological revolutions, and the emergence of ferocious and aggressive nationalism definitely contributed to the end of the European concert of balanced powers, ended the golden era of European Multipolarity. Further on, all these factors plus the disastrous results of the Versailles Treaty blocked the creation of a fair and balanced multipolar system in Europe after 1919.

The world which emerged after 1919 was definitely different and less multipolar, attempting to exclude the Soviet Union and Germany as pariah states from participating as equal actors in the concert for

⁵ Valery Garbuzov introduces the term Polycentric Multipolarity in order to describe the relations between the US and China and between the US and Russia.

European peace and stability. Bloc building and exclusion of states dominated the political landscape in Europe, resulting in a highly imperfect state of Multipolarity.

After 1945 the main actors of Europe, France, the UK, not to speak of Germany, ceased to be decisive or balancing powers in the emerging bipolar system. The idea of Multipolarity vanished from Realpolitik in the emerging bipolar world. From 1949 until 1991 the US and the Soviet Union split Europe into two hostile camps. There was no trace of Multipolarity noticeable. But strangely enough underneath the bipolar structure sets of Multilateralism developed within the two camps.

Taking into considerations such historical experiences, a new world order, even a multipolar one, may emerge, but its breakthrough might take a long time to finally achieve an ultimate form. It will be accompanied by war, upheavals, failed and failing states and persistent conflicts, causing uncertainties, fear and unpredictability among its actors and within its societies. Quoting the former German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, it looks like we have entered already such a transient era, in which the world seems to be in disarray. And Steinmeier's verdict is shared among the experts communities globally. The transient international order is currently characterised by chronic instability, regional and global turmoil, and a dramatic decline in its ease of governance [7].

Undoubtedly; the current international order is in transition, driven by the interplay of its main actors: Washington; Moscow; Beijing; and less significantly, the European Union. Other emerging powers are also challenging the present arrangement and if successful, they will eventually create a multipolar global order [7].

Given the diversity in economic, political, cultural and military terms of the present international decisive actors, especially if one includes the potential challenging states of the threshold or newly industrialized world, a multipolar world would be fundamentally different from the successful and prosperous Concert of Europe system which granted stability and peace from 1815 to 1914. Given the fundamental differences between the main and the challenging actors the multilateral order, if it emerges, would resemble more a tripartite or quadripartite order, interlaced with bipolar building blocks [9].⁶ In this view the Chinese description of Multipolarity could resemble more the future reality than other theoretical narratives of the West or Russia.

Obviously, the present but transient global system of today is strongly structured by prevailing bipolar conditions and some hard to pin down elements which do not allow the building of flexible coalitions or alliances. Bipolar elements exist in both relationships of the US with Russia and China [3].⁷ The EU is somewhat sandwiched in between. But nevertheless the US-EU or transatlantic bloc is certainly a structural and insurmountable very powerful reality [1]. The EU follows the IR axiom of “bandwagon”, i.e. to team up with the strongest actor, the US, to protect itself or to avoid being pushed into a situation to burden itself with international obligations and responsibilities. Conclude. It is unlikely that this bloc will break up or that individual member states will leave it. Equally unlikely seems that the whole bloc will seek an alliance or intense cooperation with Russia to counter Beijing. Moscow and Beijing are presently singular players not supported by determined alliances or coalitions of other states. Both formed a community of common interests, which cannot be defined as an alliance.

The central question is whether the emerging multipolar order can provide security and welfare for the international community. Or, will we see policies based on protracted narrow definitions of national interests, undermining opportunities for trust and confidence-building among the driving forces of the transformation process? Are we bound to reawaken memories of the bipolar, Cold War era, with its proxy wars, and antagonistic ideologies, dividing the global system in hostile camps?

⁶ Timoveev looks at four possible scenarios which may shape the new world order and discusses the effects on Russia. He distinguishes between the following scenarios:

1. Liberal Order: an Attempt of Adaptation
2. Strategic Autonomy and the New Multipolarity
3. Bipolarity 2.0
4. A New Anarchy

Timoveev concludes that all four scenarios are ‘ideal types’, and that many other options are possible. Accordingly, these “scenarios are not mutually exclusive”. They can “appear in succession” and in combination with other forms. He wraps up his argument that for Russia the New Multipolar scenario could be best, but would be full of risks as well.

⁷ The latest RIAC report, “RIAC Forecast 2019-2024”, demonstrates a fierce and differentiated internal debate in Russia's expert community on global developments, i.e. what kind of world order will possibly emerge and what will be Russia's role and position in the transient period.

These questions demand an answer: are the driving actors of the multipolar global order, i.e. China, the US, Russia and the EU plus emerging challengers from the developed world powerful and persuasive enough to create such a balanced multipolar global order?

The answer seems clear: They are neither persuasive nor powerful nor willing to create such a balanced multipolar world [6].⁸. The parameters to define a multipolar balance between multipolar poles are becoming increasingly multifaceted. Resulting changes affect the role and position of its members. The reference to the concert of European powers of the 19th century or to the interwar period, even to the bipolar era cannot apply anymore to the prerequisites of our epoch. Kortunov is right in his verdict that “a permanently growing number of independent variables” make the evolution of a stable and balanced system of Multipolarity nearly impossible.

Conclusion

A hybrid form of Multipolarity and Multilateralism

Multipolarity and Multilateralism do not need to exclude each other. In a way they can coexist. Even more: Multilateralism could create the basis of a multipolar global order which accentuates more cooperative than conflicting issues. Despite the fact that both concepts are based on different modes and follow different objectives, their interplay mirrors much more the present complex social, economic and technological reality. In such context they differ fundamentally from the traditional European Concert of Powers of the 19th century. Such concept rested on hereditary cultural and political ties between ruling elites. Economic interrelations, mainly trade relations, existed but common institutions were not established and interlinkages between civil societies were rarely given. The bipolar concepts of the 20th century created political, militarily, economic and ideologically camps of deep integration, but interactions between the opposing camps/poles were narrowed mainly to defense and security matters. The civil societies of both camps barely interacted.

Paradoxically, after the breakdown of the bipolar order multilateral approaches gained momentum even during the short lived unipolar state of the international system in the 1990s and in the first decade of the new millennium. Multilateral relations boomed, stimulated by the rapid technological penetration of nearly all scientific, economic, and cultural sectors of states and societies on a global scale. As a result we are nowadays confronted with a strange asymmetry: While the technology driven processes of globalization are interconnecting societies and creating networks of mutual interdependence in all sectors of live, the adaption of a political order to such revolutionary changes is behind time. This discrepancy creates the present unease, conflicts and uncertainties which haunt our societies. The classical question is thrown into the open: Are the fundamental forces unleashed by the technological revolution and its impact on changes in socio-economic relations strong enough to create a balanced world order based on peaceful cooperation among the various multipolar actors?

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⁸ Fyodor Lukyanov, “Beijing got the global trend right, which, by juggling with two fashionable slogans of this year, can be formulated as #MeFirst. States are increasingly putting the interests of their own internal stability higher than international issues, and global governance is giving way to local governance.” Speaking of Europe, Lukyanov remarks that the EU and their major member states despite complaints about US foreign policies cannot do anything to influence or stop Washington’s objectives in the Iranian case. Europe will agree “ex post” on Washington’s policy to isolate Iran.

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МНОГОПОЛЯРНОСТЬ И МНОГОСТОРОННОСТЬ: СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО ИЛИ СОПЕРНИЧЕСТВО В ОСНОВЕ НОВОГО МИРОВОГО ПОРЯДКА

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Сегодня мы сталкиваемся со странной асимметрией: в то время как технологические процессы глобализации объединяют общества и создают сети обоюдной взаимозависимости во всех сферах жизни, адаптация политического порядка к таким революционным изменениям запаздывает. Это несоответствие порождает нынешнее беспокойство, конфликты и неопределенность, преследующие наши общества. Обнажается классический вопрос: способны ли фундаментальные силы, высвобождаемые технологической революцией и ее влиянием на изменения в социально-экономических отношениях, создать сбалансированный мировой порядок, основанный на мирном сотрудничестве различных многополярных акторов?

Проведенный в статье анализ позволяет утверждать, что многополярность и многосторонность не обязательно должны исключать друг друга. В каком-то смысле они могут сосуществовать. Более того: многосторонность могла бы создать основу многополярного глобального порядка, в котором акцент делается больше на сотрудничестве, чем на противоречиях. Несмотря на то, что обе концепции основаны на разных модусах и преследуют разные цели, их взаимодействие в гораздо большей степени отражает современную сложную социальную, экономическую и технологическую реальность.

Ключевые слова: многополярность, многосторонность, мировой порядок, конфликт, глобализация, гегемония.

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