

Polarity

Unipolarity

The term unipolarity is used to describe a system with only one great power and its close allies, whose power and capabilities outweigh by far that of all the other states in the system. Power is not so concentrated as to produce a global empire, though. In any case, unipolarity should be distinguished from hegemony and empire, terms that refer to political relationships and degrees of influence rather than to distributions of material capabilities.

The unipole feels a compulsion to seek more because increased power brings new fears, leading to excessive expansion. It is not only hubris that leads it to be concerned with everything but the identification of its national interest with everything that happens in the world for the sake of its security.

Bipolarity

Bipolarity describes the condition in which there are two major poles in the system or two alliances-blocks-coalitions under the leadership of two antagonistic powers.

In a two-power competition, a loss for one appears as a gain for the other, and thus they both perceive their antagonism as a zero-sum game. Overreaction by either or both of the great powers is the source of danger in a bipolar world. Bipolarity encourages the two great powers to turn unwanted events into crises.

Factors that give stability to bipolar systems

- 1) There are few chances for conflict, and there is only one possible pair of great powers that can fight each other.
- 2) Power is more likely to be evenly distributed, and there are few chances for the great powers to cooperate against smaller states.
- 3) Wrong calculations are discouraged.

Multipolarity

Multipolarity describes a system in which there are more than two great powers. It is the most common type of polarity throughout history. Power in multipolar systems tends to be unequally distributed due to the existence of many great powers. However, the disparities of power in a multipolar system can be managed by balancing actions. No state can dominate the other if they form a balancing coalition against it.

According to Hans Morgenthau, the advantage of multipolarity is reflected in the triangle flexibility- uncertainty-prudence. From the multiplicity of actors derives flexibility (in the soft

game of alliances), which enhances uncertainty, the latter being a source of prudence in the behaviour of states.

Factors of instability

- A) The number of potential collisions is high.
- B) The maintenance of the balance of power is hard.
- C) The potential for misunderstandings and miscalculations is high.

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