

# Multilateralism and ideology the keystones for the transition to multipolarism

Emanuel Pietrobon  
University of Turin, Italy



International Institute for Global Analyses

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International analysts and political scientists are still debating over of the most fashioned topics of the post-Cold War era: the transition to multipolarism. Thirty-one years later the extinction of the Soviet Union as a historical state actor the international arena is in turmoil: the United States is trying to slow down its weak but evident decline, China has stopped hiding behind the umbrella of the peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*) and has shown its world-extended hegemonic agenda by unveiling the Belt and Road Initiative, Russia is trying not to lose further positions in Eurasia and a number of regional powers are emerging and others are on their way.

Way back in 1993, whereas in the United States spread the belief that the end of the Cold War would lead to the so-called “unipolar moment”, a concept theorized by the political scientist Charles Krauthammer, a very interesting treatise by Cristopher Layne about the possible evolution of the distribution of power went quietly: “*The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise*”.

History proves that Layne was right: new and great powers have emerged, and others are yet to appear. But this structural transformation, which is still ongoing, has not led yet to multipolarism. The contemporary situation might be described in Huntingtonian terms, namely uni-multipolarism, although – as we will see in the next pages – the use of this concept is problematic and only in part helpful.

The international arena is “uni-” because the multi-level primacy of the United States is as evident as incontrovertible. No power in the world has the capability to simultaneously project hard power and soft power in every corner of the planet in such a vigorous way as the United States'. For laymen and those who barely know the vocabulary of international relations: soft power is the ensemble of the non-physical instruments employable to build and strengthen a hegemony, like cultural influence, ideology and diplomatic prestige; hard power describes the

physical force, namely the military power, employable both to safeguard the status quo in one's backyards and to potentially extend the domination in parts of the globe controlled by other powers.

The international arena is “multi-” because the *pax americana* born out of the World War Two and strengthened by the USSR collapse and the disappearance of the Communist world – let us remember: we are speaking of the American-centered liberal order studded by multilateral institutions – is more and more unstable and the erosion of the foundations on which it rests, it goes on and on.

The rise to power of Donald Trump under the eloquent motto “*Make America Great Again*”, later turned into “*Keep America Great*”, must be read in this context of recovery and run-up aimed at preserving the increasingly deteriorated status of global policeman. It is thanks to that title – whose legitimacy and origins date back to an époque prior to the two world wars, namely the concept of Empire of Liberty developed by the influential founding father Thomas Jefferson – that the United States managed to conquer global hegemony and the *pax americana* will be able to resist the disintegrating force of history only at one condition: to keep being the global policeman.

It comes as no surprise that the manichean vision of international relations and of the world itself, divided into good forces and evil forces, has been brought back in limelight in the years of Trump. But the focus, this time, has been shifted from Moscow to Beijing, since the latter is the true target of the White House.

The American decline, whose speed Trump is trying to reduce, is based on a combination of exogenous and endogenous reasons.

Exogenous reasons: the globalization has made it possible a low-cost transfer of knowledges, competences and capital with no historic precedents. This movement fostered cycles of growth, development and capital accumulation otherwise impossible – or hardly achievable – which later reverberated from the economic sphere to the political and military fields. China skillfully used the globalization as an opportunity to take revenge against the West and planned in detail and with a very long time horizon its domestic goal, that is the emancipation

from the condition of underdevelopment and backwardness, and its foreign agenda, which is aimed at getting redemption for the century of humiliation (*bǎinián chǐrǔ*).

But it wasn't only China that enjoyed the fruits of globalization: let's think of the Asian Tigers, the Gulf oil-monarchies, India, Turkey, and so on. The West overlooked this scenario but the truth is that the ongoing reduction of the gap between the global North and global South is the natural and obvious consequence of foreign direct investments, economic and cultural interconnection and offshorings.

Endogenous reasons: the United States is in part responsible for its own cultural and geopolitical decline, and this event occurred in the wake of a centuries-old tradition well-explained by the historian Paul Kennedy in "*The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*". Interracial tensions, terrorism, political violence, crime epidemic, pauperization, plutarchy, deterioration of the political class, pulverization of the social fabric driven by processes of materialism, hedonism, atomization and hyper-individualization; all these elements are indicative of the very precarious health status of the United States.

The health status of the world's only superpower entered a disease stage in the aftermath of the counterculture revolution of the 1960s and since then it has been a non-stop worsening. It wasn't Trump to make the United States teeter on the brink of collapse, as the mainstream analysts suggest, he merely inherited a very bad situation and his attempts to reverse this process set on fire the country as a whole.

As a further evidence of this anti-mainstream line of thinking, let's only think about what Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in 1993. That year the now-dead political scientist published "*Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century*", claiming that the United States was facing the risk of not exploiting to the fullest the win against the coercive utopias of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the Fascism and the Communism) because the society seemed to have been entrapped by the chimera of permissive cornucopia. And it is precisely the permissive

cornucopia, in short, the main and primary cause of the American decline: the United States can no longer afford to be the global policeman due to its urgent need to undergo regenerative treatment because it has become the sick man of the West.

Returning to the main point, which is the one about the modern-day distribution of power, if we analyze that “multi–” more in-depth it is possible to understand that the United States is no longer able to defend its own national interest unilaterally, be it the European Union or be it the Middle East the battleground in question; the United States must rely on the services provided by third parties which are not mere satellites, on the contrary in most cases they are small and medium regional powers with their own foreign agendas. What makes these powers willing to help the United States is that their agendas are often complementary to the American one. These powers, which are for instance Poland in the European Union and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, are too weak to act in a completely independent way in international relations but, at the same time, their influence in regional affairs is such that Washington needs their involvement if aims at fulfilling its goals.

Since this system is in perennial motion, by describing the current reality in terms of uni-multipolarism is much more than anachronistic, it's wrong. For at least six years now we can speak legitimately of uni-bi-multipolarism, where that “bi–” stands for Russia and China.

The watershed event has been Euromaidan, the color revolution that for some analysts has led to the official reboot of the Cold War between the West and the East. Verily the Cold War between the two blocs never stopped nor paused: from 1991 to 2014 the hard containment, namely physical and evident, was replaced by a soft containment, based on regime changes, underground infiltration operations and enlargement of the EU–NATO community, only to eventually return to its original form.

In short, there is no neo-containment: it's a forever containment. It is not the Cold War 2.0; it is the mere reopening of a hegemonic clash which decreased in

intensity for thirteen years. Endless containment, or forever containment, is a concept that I personally coined with reference to the case studies of Russia and Iran, two civilization states facing encirclements by rival powers from times immemorial because of their geostrategic position and of the natural wealth contained within and under their soil.

It's history itself to suggest the existence of endless containment. In the Russian case the containment didn't start with Henry Truman and George Kennan, and not even with the 19<sup>th</sup> century's Great Game, because episodes of warfare carried out by the main powers of the European system can be found even before the rise of Napoleon. Anyway, the watershed event that turned existing Russophobic attitudes and feelings into a concrete and institutionalized policy, which over time extended and crystallized, has been the Crimean War.

Returning to Euromaidan, this revolution, along with the following start of the Sino-American confrontation, determined the rise of a revolution-powered paradigm shift in international relations: the birth of the Russo-Chinese strategic partnership. These two powers together are getting to slow down the Western plans in Asia and Africa and have been contributing to avoid the collapse of the remaining left-wing regimes in Latin America.

Euromaidan proved very useful to Russia: it gave impetus to restart the works within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), a long-overlooked project in whose orbit has been now incorporated Iran via free trade agreements. The Trump administration's muscular policy convinced China to speed up the works within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the New Silk Road. If the two powers will ever manage to find a way to amalgamate these two ambitious project of regional integration, something implying a perfect spartition of Asia in clearly delimited spheres of influence, they would preclude to the West the dominion over the Mackinderian Heartland and in doing so they would achieve the double result of giving the coup de grace to unipolarism and of marking the birth of an Asian-centric multipolar order.

And it is precisely from the introduction of the EAEU and of the New Silk Road that it is possible to understand what is going on in the international arena: multilateralism is the bridgehead to multipolarism. Russia and China have been observing the EU model for years and learnt a priceless truth from it: economic functionalism and multilateralism are the antechamber for growth and they are capable of performances even higher if and when they are accompanied by an ideological element.

It is in this context of intellectual lucubration that must be read Russia's and China's promotional campaign of multipolarism after years of oblivion, and more in particular the sponsorship of the so-called Eurasianism. This ideological element is with no doubt more present in Russia, also because China already possesses one (Communism), and its employment has got a little moment of popularity even in some right-wing circles of the West.

Multilateralism is essential for the promotion of hegemonic plans otherwise hardly implementable, whereas ideology is the fundamental ingredient to make a multilateral project cohesive. The case of the European Union, indeed, teaches that economic interconnection and ideological semblance (europeanism) are not enough: a strong and identity-linked glue is needed.

It is mandatory to speak about ideologies in the context of the debate over multipolarism for one reason: it is not true that they died with end of the Short Century. Francis Fukuyama and his followers were wrong: liberalism has not fully prevailed, the battle in the field of ideas is alive more than ever; even inside the post-historical and post-identitarian West.

Ideologies are also the engine from which is produced the energy to build new multilateral institutions with which to masterfully sponsor projects of hegemonic expansion.

Poland and Hungary, under the banner of a Central Europe-focused exclusivist and Christian illiberalism, have turned the Visegrad Alliance into a pole of power alternative to the Paris–Berlin axis – and they did so with Washington's approval – and they are trying to build a cordon sanitaire from the Baltic Sea to the



Black Sea with the double goal of containing Germany and Russia; a modern-day actualization of Poland's founding father Józef Piłsudski's Intermarium (*Międzymorze*).

And then there is Turkey, which abandoned the anti-historical dress of fareastern appendix of the Western civilization and rediscovered its Eurasian calling as shown by the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, popularly known as the Turkic Council (*Türk Keneşi*), an international organisation serving as a platform for dialogue and intergovernmental cooperation composed by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and likely to be joined by Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Hungary. It is possible to understand Turkey's great accomplishment – because the member states of the Turkic Council have shown a very high degree of cooperation at the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic – only by means of a word: ideology.

Pan-Turkism is turning out as one of the brawniest vectors of the multipolar transition, being the force which is flaking off old orders and writing new alliances and which is bisecting Asia, interposing Turkey between the hegemonic dreams of Russia (EAEU), China (BRI) and the West. Whoever will prove able to win Turkey's favour, because it is a great power reborn, will have the keys to control Eurasia.

In the end there is another ideology endowed with the potential of giving legitimacy to powerful multilateral architectures. This ideology is being tied Turkey and Hungary but it could – and should – be used even by Russia: I'm speaking of Turanism.

Turanism is a school of thought whose origins date back to the late nineteenth century and which proposed – and still proposes – to build a political axis among those States inhabited by peoples coming from the magic, wild and remote steppes of Turan, like the Magyars, the Tatars, the Mongols, the Samoyeds, the Saamis and the Turks.

It is in the name of Turanism that Hungary entered the Turkic Council as an observer member, that it is investing in Tatarstan and that it is forming strategic partnerships with Turkey, Japan and the post-Soviet –stans, and so on.

And it is in the name of Turanism that Turkey, via culture centres, non governmental organisations and multilateralism, is expanding its range of action beyond the Turkic Council, for instance in Mongolia, Hungary and within Russia itself, in republics like Tuva and Yakutia. These two recently joined the World Turks Qurultai (*Dünya Türk Kurultay*), an organisation tied to the Turkish secret services (MIT, *Millî İstihbarat Teşkilâtı*) and engaged in the magnification and exaltation of the features uniting those peoples, sons of Turan, geographically distant but spiritually close.

The twenty-one century, far from being the era of the West-sponsored cosmopolitan, homologating and massifying liberalism, is turning out to be an epoque of great identity upswing, namely of resurgent nationalisms and religious revivals. It is by understanding and seizing the opportunity offered by this often-ignored upswing that it is possible to understand the tremendous success of political forces like Poland's Law and Justice, Hungary's Fidesz and Turkey's Justice and Development Party.

The distribution of power in the international arena is being re-written by state actors characterised by apparent junior roles, an objective truth that the United States has already understood and which is using to slacken the falldown of unipolarism.

The contemporary order is, as we've seen, extremely complex and it is not possible to describe it by means of one term, because it would be reductive, simplistic and therefore wrong. The order is still “uni–” because the United States is declining – true – but between it and the potential challengers there exists a very deep gap in terms of endowment, and projection capabilities, of hard power (military force) and soft power (cultural influence, ideology, diplomatic persuasion).

But the order is undoubtedly “bi–” because Russia and China have given rise to a concrete-made multi-level axis working as a bulwark against Western expansionism in every continent through diplomatic cooperation, joint initiatives and development of multilateral institutions positioned antagonistically to the American-centric liberal order.

In the end, the order is also “multi–” because new regional powers, both of small- and middle-sized, have risen and others are beyond the horizon. Each of them is endowed with a certain degree of freedom of action and driven by micro-hegemonic ambitions manifested in the formation of alliances and transnational networks based on the employment of NGOs, development funds and multilateral institutions. We've seen the case studies of Turkey, Poland and Hungary but it's not only them; several others are in this game: there has been Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian Alliance (but as of today this project has become lifeless), there is the African Union, the Arab League, and there is the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations).

Paradoxically this multipolarity is an obstacle to the transition to multipolarism because it is being wisely exploited by the United States with the double objective of maintaining untouched the status quo at international level, that is the *pax americana*, and of hindering the Moscow–Beijing axis' agenda for the emancipation of Asia.

In the light of this, we might rightfully define this reality as an imperfect multipolarity, or an antagonistic one: multipolar in the strictly literal sense of the term, because there are new poles of power, imperfect or antagonistic because this post-Cold War development has had no positive repercussions on the multipolar transition, quite the contrary it is being exploited as an *instrumentum regni* by the United States with which to avoid a *translatio imperii*, namely a transfer of power from the West to the emerging powers of the Asian East.

Last point. History proves that multilateralism has greater probabilities of positive outcomes where is present an ideological component working as a glue; a fundamental tied to the Schmittian friend–enemy dichotomy. That glue has been

seen by Russia and China in the so-called Eurasianism but this ideology has an underlying problem: it's artificial. And manufactured ideologies, as Europeanism shows very well, don't have the capability of resisting to the disintegrating force of time and of creating enduring alliances because of their fictitious nature – and fiction implies weakness.

Furthermore, Eurasianism will not be able to contribute in a very significant way to the Russo-Chinese dream because of another reason: a number of Asian powers are working for preserving the status quo, like India, as they are part of those rising poles of power that we've called imperfect or antagonistic. Accordingly, the strategy for the multipolar transition must be based on two pillars, ideology and multilateralism, and on one instrument, compromise instead of intransigence.

Regional international organisations are useful to the extent that get to hide hegemonic ambitions of their members and contribute to create a dialogue-friendly environment capable of facilitating the task of making win-win deals for every signatory country. In short, it will by means of multilateralism that it will be possible, eventually, to lay the foundations for the effective making of Eurasianism which, today, far from having taken root in the field of action it is still entrapped in the field of ideas.

In light of all this Russia should continue to promote Eurasianism at higher levels, that is as the final stage and leit motif of international cooperation, and it should seriously take into consideration the adoption of a not artificial ideology to be employed at lower levels, namely to condition the public opinion. That ideology, clearly, can't be pan-Slavism nor a kind of Russo-centric ethno-nationalism. It must be Turanism.

If a small power like Hungary got to masterfully exploit Turanism, a tenfold result might be achieved by Russia, the world-largest country, a land inhabited by about 185 ethnic groups, most of which coming from the lands of Turan and whose true origins date back to the dawn of time.

It's Russia, not Hungary nor Turkey, that might and should take the opportunity of the identity momentum to take the lead of a pan-Turanist international movement: it is Russia's very nature, variegated and heterogeneous, to allow this possible scenario. By infiltrating and conditioning the Turanist movement the Kremlin would not only manage to improve the relations with the post-Soviet and Turkic neighborhood – with the considerable outcome of lessening the power of attraction of Ankara's anti-Russian pan-Turkism and pan-Turanism – but it would also achieve another goal, much more urgent: the protection of its own territorial integrity. Indeed, by letting foreign powers, especially Turkey, free of interacting with Turkish- and Muslim-majority Russian republics, Russia is leaving the door open for the entry of a Trojan Horse.

So, ideology and multilateralism, these two are the keystones for the multipolar transition and for overthrowing the American hegemony and its surrogates, the antagonistic multipolarities, which keep making Asia (and the world) fragmented and ungovernable.

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