

The age of nonpolarity essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

According to Richard Haass, the world is moving from a unipolar system (a system where one country dominates militarily, culturally, and economically) to a nonpolar system, where power is concentrated in various actors, and where no state dominates. If what Haass claims is true, this carries with it many implications to the US, considering that they were the dominating country in the previous unipolar system. Haass references the fact that US power has been diminishing in relation to other countries in terms of economic, political, and cultural influence. He also examines the rise of emerging powers, which see their influence being limited due to their own limitations (China's issue of high population and high poverty) and the emergence of other actors (NGO's, terrorist groups, militias, etc.

) that exert considerable power, as proof that international relations is moving away from a unipolar system and towards a nonpolar system. A complete shift towards a nonpolar system is debatable; rather I see the system is currently in a transitional stage, where the United States is positioned as possessing far greater power and influence than any other institution or individual (be it a non-governmental organization, nation-state, politician, etc.), but are constantly faced with changes and trends that challenge its power and authority, such as globalization. Before discussing any further whether or not international relations is undergoing a change, an analysis of what nonpolarity is, as well as the distinction between this systems and others, must be made.

An analysis of what the implications for the US is essential as well.

Nonpolarity is basically a state where a nation does not hold a monopoly over power and influence; rather, power is concentrated within various

actors such as NGO's, political leaders, corporations, etc. Also, the power that each individual actor can leverage varies. This differs from multipolarity, a system where several states are in power and is defined as the control of various superpowers (Pre-WWI).

Bipolarity is the presence of two superpowers heavily influencing the system (Cold War Era). The most apparent difference is with realism. While realists see short-term gain and constant conflict as the norm, nonpolarity looks to forego short-term gain for the sake of long-term benefit. Haass stated that cooperation between nations, reinforced by increased trade, should be the norm.

Haass identified what he saw as being the negative consequences of nonpolarity to the US and how the US should attempt to combat these problems. Some of these problems have to do with the current trend to globalize. This trend was analyzed by Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, using a "human security perspective." He stated that because of globalization, people are constantly faced with threats that emerge due to: easier dissemination of information, increased movement in labor and capital, and the ease in regulation of various marketplaces, among other factors.

The threats that Fukuda-Parr mentioned, directly relate to what Haass explained were the problems faced by the US. Haass touched on the issues of security and called on improving Homeland Security to address this issue. Combating terrorism is one of the threats the US will continue to face in a nonpolar world. Another threat Haass noticed was the rise in the power of oil producing nations.

Because of this threat, Haass called for a reduction in oil consumption and in the introduction of US energy initiatives to reduce the growing power that oil producers have. Going along with security, Haass denounced the use of Preventive strikes (attacks on capabilities when there is no indication of imminent use) since this could make the system unstable. Finally, integration through increased trade was also one of the solutions, since attacking a trading partner can do more harm than benefit. Haass, in my opinion, makes a great point that US dominance and influence is being corroded and the unipolar system is changing. However, US hegemony is still present. The manifestation of US power is not explicitly noticeable, but that is not to say that it is non-existent; this is defined as soft power.

An example, English continues to be the language of business and it is commonly used worldwide. Also, the US's influence can be seen through the subtle demonstration of economic power. Although corporations are becoming highly global and can't be exactly associated with a country, the images that some American corporations portray can be directly associated to some aspect of American culture. For this reason, the presence of corporations such as Microsoft, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, McDonald's, Wal-Mart, etc. are seen as the extent to which American economic power can reach.

More importantly, however, is the influence the US has on world trade. The financial crisis in the US had a worldwide effect, demonstrating the importance of the US economy in international relations. All these factors contribute to keeping the US as a dominant nation. However, US influence continues to diminish.

The US no longer has the influence that it did in the past, and it will continue to diminish as other actors gain more importance. Again, whether or not the current state of affairs points to a shift towards a nonpolar world is debatable. However, there is consensus that US influence is not as strong as in previous years.