

The Post-Cold War International Political Development in Europe: From Bipolar to Unipolarity Structure

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This paper explores the international political development in Europe during the post-Cold War era starting from 1989. The focus of discussion is Europe in the first decade of the post-Cold War era. The end of the Cold War had a great impact on the political and institutional development in Europe. The economic weaknesses of the Soviet Union since the mid-1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1991 strongly influenced the changes of the former communist states of Eastern Europe. The former communist states in Eastern Europe became democratic states and then became members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Why did the former communist states become democratic-capitalist states after the Cold War ended? Why they join NATO? Which International Relations Theory could be applied in explaining and analysing the changes and political development in Europe? The former communist states becoming democratic-capitalist states had relationship to their political economic position during the communist regime and the achievement and position of the Soviet Union's economic state since the mid-1980s. The role played by American is important in influencing the foreign policies of the former communist states and why they joined NATO? The structure of international politics is important in explaining the post-Cold War Europe. There was a close relationship between the international structure and the changes at the European regional level. This paper concludes that the changes of international political structure in the European continent from a bipolarity structure to a unipolarity structure strongly influenced the policies of the former Eastern European communist states. The existence of only one single strong power, a unipolarity structure, made it easier for America to control and dominate Europe. The Theory of Structural Realism (especially



Offensive Realism) could be applied in explaining the international politics and institutional development in post-Cold War Europe.

Keywords: *Eastern Europe, Soviet Union, The United States, Bipolarity, Unipolarity, Structural Realism, Post-Cold War.*

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the international political development in Europe during the post-Cold War era starting from 1989. The focus of discussion is Europe in the first decade of the post-Cold War era. The discussion in this paper is divided into five parts: (i) The first part discusses the methodology; (ii) The second part is a discussion of Europe during the period of the Cold War (1945-1989; the bipolarity structure period of Western Europe; Eastern Europe and Cold War security Alliance (NATO and Warsaw Pact); Europe during the Cold War from the end of Second World War until 1989 - the period that was coloured the bipolarity structure); (iii) Thirdly, the post-Cold War era starting from 1989; (iv) Fourthly the theoretical discussion; (v) and, finally the conclusion. This paper concludes that the changes of international political structure in the European continent in 1989, from a bipolarity structure to unipolarity structure strongly influenced the policies of the former Eastern European Communist states. The existence of only one single strong power, unipolarity structure, made it easier for America to control and dominate the whole of Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union influenced the position of the Eastern European communist states. The Theory of Structural Realism, especially Offensive Realism, is useful in explaining the changes in international politics and institutional development in post-Cold War Europe.

I. METHODOLOGY

This part discusses the research problem, scope of study, objective of study, research questions, theoretical framework, and literature review.

Research Problem

The impact and relationship between the regional political development and the changes of the international political structure. How the changes of the international political structure from a bipolarity structure from 1947 until 1989 affect the changes of regional political structure in Europe. How the changes at the systemic level influence the European regional level?

Scope of Study

The scope of the study is the political and institutional changes in the European continent after one decade of the end the Cold War (1989/1991-2001). This study covers the political development in Europe after the changes of the political structure from a bipolarity structure

that was dominated the continent of Europe from 1947 - 1989 to a new structure after 1989. Europe after 1989 clearly was not influenced by the bipolarity structure. The power line between Western Europe (under United States dominance) and Eastern Europe (under Soviet Union influence) was clearly demolished after 1989. Europe after 1989 was totally different compared to Europe during the bipolarity structure of 1947- 1989.

Objectives of Study:

This study has three main objectives:

- i. to explain the changes of political structure and institutional changes during the period of bipolarity and unipolarity structure.
- ii. to discuss the relationship between the changes of international political structure and political/institutional development in Europe after the end of the Cold War.
- iii. to analyse how useful Structural Realism/Offensive Realism is in analysing the post-Cold War period in Europe.

Research Questions:

This study has three research questions:

- i. what are the changes in Europe during the period before and after the end of the Cold War in the European continent?
- ii. what are the changes in Europe after the end of the Cold War? How did the international political structure influence the changes in Europe?
- iii. to what extent is Structural Realism/Offensive Realism important in explaining the political and institutional development in Europe after the end of the Cold War?

Theoretical Framework

This study applies the Theory of Structural Realism, especially Offensive Realism. Structural Realism emphasises the importance of international structure in explaining international relations (Viotti & Kauppi, 2012). States in the international system consider highly the international structure and it becomes one of the important factors in their foreign policy decision-making. States are not really free in their foreign policy because they have to consider the international political structure in any decision, at a national or regional level (Jackson & Sorenson, 2016). Structural Realism not only could be applied during the Cold War period (during the bipolarity structure, 1945-1989), but also beyond the Cold War after 1989 (unipolarity, multi-polarity or uni-multipolar). The international structure compels the state in the system to act in certain ways. The changes in the international political structure influence the changes of the foreign policy, especially for the small state in the international system.



Offensive Realism is different to Defensive Realism. What causes states to compete for power in Defensive and Offensive Realism? Both Offensive Realism and Defensive Realism compete for power because of the nature of the structure of the international system. In Defensive Realism, states seek power for security and for their survival in the system. The power that states require in the Defensive Realism is not to dominate the other state, but more to survive and to maintain the stability of the system. In Offensive Realism the main and final objective of power is not just for survival in the system, but for dominating the other state with the final objective to be a hegemonic power, the strongest power in the system. The final goal is to dominate the other state in the certain region or in the whole system if possible (Mearshiemer, 2014).

Literature Review

The changes of the international structure and the impact to the political and security development in Europe have been widely discussed by the scholars of politics and international relations. The changes of the international structure since late the 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 strongly influenced the political development and security arrangements in Europe. Regional political structure and security in Europe after 1989 was totally different compared with the Europe before 1989. Undoubtedly the changes of international political structure from a bipolar to a unipolar structure was the main factor that was responsible for the new power configuration, security arrangements and power relations in Europe after 1989.

Ball claimed that the NATO eastward expansion into Eastern Europe is important for regional political stability and security (Ball, 1998). He based his argument that the NATO expansion into Eastern Europe could deter Russia from entertaining or engaging in territorial revisionism to recover lost territories or to intimidate Eastern European states. The NATO eastward expansion could promote stability and security in the East European region by providing reassurance to its new East European member states (and also for the non-NATO members in that region). Russia would be obliged to take into account the strategic fact that any threat or use of force against an East European state would provoke a response from the NATO member. With NATO in Eastern Europe, Russia would have to stop and consider the consequences of any such threats or military action. McGwire raised a different argument with the NATO expansion into Eastern Europe (McGwire, 1998). He argued that the NATO eastward expansion was a policy error. It would reduce the good relations and cooperation with the Soviet Union leaders, especially with those who opposed the democratic reform in Russia. The NATO expansion would create a line of division between Russia and Eastern Europe.

Mearshiemer (1990) argued that the political stability in Europe after the end of the Cold War would be suffer more than in the past forty-five years (from the period after World War II until the end of the Cold War ended in 1989). He relates this with the structural change from a abipolar to multipolar political structure. Europe without the superpower would probably not



be as violent as the first 45 years of the twentieth century (1900-1945) but would probably be substantially more prone to violence than the first four decades of the twentieth century. What is the basis for Mearshiemer's pessimistic conclusion? He argued that the distribution and nature of military power are the main sources of war and peace in Europe (Mearshiemer, 1990). The 'Long Peace' in Europe was a result of three fundamentally important conditions; firstly, the bipolar system of military power in Europe; secondly, the approximate military equality between the United States and the Soviet Union; and thirdly, the reality that both of the rival superpowers were equipped with an imposing arsenal of nuclear weapons. The withdrawal or collapse of the superpowers from Europe would give rise to a multipolar system. That multipolar system with many superpowers (Germany, France, Great Britain, Russia and Italy) would be prone to instability. According to Mearshiemer's 1990 article, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was principally responsible for transforming a historically violent region into a very peaceful place. The demise of the bipolar structure in Europe and the emergence of a multipolar Europe will produce a highly undesirable return to the bad European instability.

Kramer discussed the Soviet Union and sphere of influence in Eastern Europe (Kramer, 1996). He argued that there was a close relationship between the economic factors and the Soviet policy towards Eastern Europe. His study concluded that the transformation of the Soviet policy in Eastern communist states in 1985-1991 was strongly influenced by the weak Soviet economic position. Due to a weak economic position, Gorbachev could not control Eastern communist states at the end of the 1980s. Under the Gorbachev administration, he avoided military intervention in Eastern Europe and maintained Soviet influence as was practiced by the previous Soviet leader. (Keylor, 2003), also relate with economic factor and military in explaining the Soviet influence in Europe beginning from mid-1980s. He concluded that Soviet's loss of power and sphere of influence in Eastern Europe was prompted by two factors: a weak military position and the economic weakness. Soviet under Khrushchev and Brezhnev had considered the satellite vital to the Soviet union's security interest in Eastern Europe and had therefore intervened in Hungary and Czechoslovakia respectively to preserve Soviet control. Soviet policy under Gorbachev was different to the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and Brezhnev.

Method:

This study uses a qualitative method using secondary data from books, academic journals, newspapers, online sources etc. Books and journal articles written by structural realism scholars such as John Mearshiemer and Kenneth Waltz are widely applied in this study. The study emphasises the relationship between the systemic or structural level and the state/regional is widely used in this study.

II. EUROPE DURING THE COLD WAR 1945-1989/1991

Europe during the period of the Cold War (1945-1989) - bipolarity, Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the Cold War security Alliance (NATO and Warsaw Pact).

During the period of 1945-1989 the regional political stability in Europe was strongly influenced with the bipolar international political structure. The continent of Europe was clearly divided into two blocs, Western Europe and Eastern Europe (Deighton, 1996). The two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, clearly created the spheres of influence (Kramer, 1996). Western Europe was dominated by the United States and Eastern Europe was dominated by the Soviet Union (Heater & Berridge, 1992). The bipolarity structure balance of power influenced the stability of Europe for almost half a century (1945-1989) that was totally different with the first half of the twentieth century. During the first half of the twentieth century (1900-1945) Europe was coloured by two great conflicts, i.e. the First World War 1914-1918 and the Second World War 1939-1945. The period of 1919-1939 (the inter-war period) also was not so stable, especially in the 1930s.

How to explain the long period of stability (the Long Peace) in Europe from 1945 until 1989? What theory could be applied in explaining the long period of stability? The long period of stability in Europe from 1945 until 1989 could be explained using the Structural Realism Theory. The emergence of a bipolarity structure in Europe after the end of Second World War contributed to the stability. The degree of political stability in Europe after 1945 was totally different than the political situation in Europe before 1945. The operation and power configuration in Europe before 1945 was based on the multi-polarity structure. The large numbers of major powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, Italy, the United States and Japan) tended to create the unstable condition. Structural Realism argued that a bipolarity structure is more stable than a multi-polarity structure.

The bipolarity structure after 1945 (only two superpowers, i.e. The United States and Soviet Union) contributed to the more stable political condition. A bipolarity structure is better than the multipolar structure because a bipolar structure provides greater European stability and peace. The peace and stability of Europe in the period of 1945-1989 (bipolarity period) is based on the three arguments (Jackson & Sorensen, 2001, p.89).

1. First, the number of great power conflicts is fewer (two great powers; the United States and Soviet Union) and that reduces the possibilities of a great power war.
2. It is easier to operate an effective system of deterrence because only two great powers are involved.

3. Because only two great powers (the United States and Soviet Union) dominate the international system the chances of miscalculation and misadventure are lower.

The bipolarity structure (the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union) from 1945 until 1989 was principally responsible for transforming a violent region before 1945 into a very peaceful and stable region after 1945 (Mearshiemer, 1990, p. 11). The stability in the bipolarity structure and instability in the multi-polarity can be summarised in the Mearshiemer's Neorealist Stability Theory diagram below.

Mearshiemer's Neorealist Stability Theory

Condition of Stable Bipolarity	Condition of Unstable Multipolarity
Europe during the Cold War (1945-1989, Long Peace, Stable and No Great War)	Europe before 1945 (1900-1945, Two Great Wars; 1914-1918 & 1939-1945)
Two Superpowers (The United States and the Soviet Union)	Several Great Powers (e.g Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, Italy)
Rough Superpower Equality	Unequal and Shifting Balance of Power
Nuclear Deterrence	Conventional Military Rivalry
Conquest is Difficult	Conquest is less difficult & more tempting
Superpower Discipline	Great Power indiscipline & risk taking

Source: Jackson & Sorenson, 2016, p. 80).

III. EUROPE DURING THE POST COLD WAR ERA

The changes/political and institutional development in Europe after the end of the Cold War.

The collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s (officially in December 1991) strongly influenced the changes of the international political structure in Europe from a bipolarity to a unipolarity structure. When one of the superpowers collapsed (the Soviet Union), only one superpower dominated the international system. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States was the single superpower dominating the international system, especially in Europe. In the continent of Europe, clearly regional structure changed dramatically from a bipolarity to a unipolarity structure. Some regions, like the Asia Pacific region faced a different impact; the collapse of the Soviet Union did not dramatically change the East Asia Pacific region to a unipolarity structure. The impact of the collapse of Soviet Union is different in the



East Asian region because in the period from 1971 until 1991 the Asia Pacific region and especially in the East Asian region did not have a bipolarity structure like Europe. The structure in the Asia Pacific during the period of 1971-1991 was tri-polarity structure with three major powers dominating the Asia Pacific region: the United States, the Soviet Union and China. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, China still existed as a strong power in the East Asian region. China's position in the global economy and military-politics become stronger after 2010 when China became the second world largest economic power. The tri-polarity of Asia Pacific from 1971-1991 influenced the post-Cold War regional political structure of Asia Pacific (Yahuda, 2004). The changes of the international structure after the end of the Cold War, from a bipolar to unipolar structure had a great impact on the regional political and institutional development in Europe.

The NATO Eastward Expansion and Collapse of the Warsaw Pact

NATO was established in 1949 with the main objective of security for the non-communist states especially in the North Atlantic and Western Europe. Twelve countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, the United Kingdom, Portugal, The United States, Canada, France, Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands) became the earliest members of NATO. In 1952 NATO expanded to the South East Europe when Greece and Turkey became NATO members. West Germany became the fifteenth NATO member in 1955. Spain joined NATO in 1982 as NATO's sixteenth member. The enlargement of NATO members until 1982 never raised any controversial issues because it was seen to strengthen NATO in achieving their objectives in confronting and containing the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact (Jackson & Sorenson, 2007).

After the end of the Cold War, the number of NATO members expanded to the former Eastern communist states (former members of Warsaw Pact). The collapse of the Soviet Union had a direct impact on the Warsaw Pact (Kramer, 1996). The security alliance that was responsible in protecting the Eastern communist states and Soviet Union security in the Eastern Europe was dissolved in 1991. The NATO eastward expansion began in the early 1990s. In 1999 the Republic of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland became the first group of the former Warsaw Pact members to join NATO. In March 2004 seven countries in the Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union territories joined NATO; the countries were Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The joining of the seven countries was the largest round of enlargement in the NATO's history since its establishment in 1949.

The expansion of NATO into the former Soviet Union's sphere of influence since the end of the 1990s was due to the weakness and the collapse of the Soviet influence in the Eastern Europe. The dissolve of the Warsaw Pact in 1991 was the symbol of the fall of Soviet Union in maintaining her power position in Eastern Europe. The changes of the NATO membership were one of the direct impacts of the changes of the international and regional political



structure. Without structural changes it was impossible for NATO to expand their influence into Eastern Europe.

The Collapse of Eastern Communist States/Soviet Union satellite and the expansion of democratic liberalism to Eastern Europe.

The collapse of communist ideology in the Soviet Union satellite states in Eastern Europe has close relations with the economic position and the political changes of the Soviet Union. Since the mid-1980s, the Soviet Union economic state started declining and facing serious economic problems. The death of the strong and radical communist leader in early 1980 paved the way to the emergence of the liberal communist leaders, Mikhail Gorbachev. In improving the Soviet Union economic problem, Gorbachev introduced and implemented new policies; Glasnost and Perestroika. Western liberal ideas and openness flowed into the Soviet Union (Keylor, 2003). Nevertheless, the new ideas and Gorbachev's transformation did not improve the Soviet Union economy but destroyed the communist ideology and weakened the Soviet Union as a strong world power (Reynold,2000).

Under the Michael Gorbachev's administration, the liberal economics and democratic elements flowed into Eastern European communist states. Western investment was encouraged by the former communist states for economic purposes. At the same time liberal democratic ideas flowed and influenced the Eastern European public.

The collapse of the Soviet satellite state in Eastern Europe in the end of the 1980s and early 1990s was the result of the weak control of the Soviet Union over Eastern Europe due to the weak position of the Soviet Union economy (Kramer, 1996; Bornstein,1981)). In December 1988, Gorbachev pledged to reduce Soviet forces in Eastern Europe. Gorbachev's military policy was in contrast to the previous Soviet leaders. Gorbachev wanted to avoid military intervention in Eastern Europe. Democratic influence spread into Eastern Europe. For example, in June 1989 a parliamentary election was held in Poland, giving Solidarity an overwhelming victory. In August 1989 a Solidarity-led government came to power in Poland (Keylor, 2003). This non-communist government in Poland was the first non-communist government in Eastern Europe since the advent of the Cold War. The victory of the non-communist government in Poland in 1989 influenced other Eastern European communist states and paved the way for the establishment of democratic states in Eastern Europe (Keylor,2003).



IV. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS: OFFENSIVE REALISM AND POST-COLD WAR EUROPE

Structural Realism/Offensive Realism & the political and institutional development in Europe after the end of the Cold War

What is the theory that could explain the political and institutional changes in Europe (especially in the Eastern Europe) after the end of the Cold War? The Theory of Offensive Realism could be applied in explaining and analysing the political changes since end of the 1980s and the NATO eastward expansion in the 1990s and early 2000s. The action taken by the a unipolar power in the new international structure was not solely for security and survival, but more than that. Offensive Realism (Mearshiemer,2001) is different to Defensive Realism. Defensive Realism argued that power is needed in order to be secured and to survive in the international anarchical structure. From the Offensive Realism perspective power is needed, not just for survival and security, but for dominating the entire system, The final goal in Offensive Realism is to be a hegemonic power.

The action taken by the unipolar power (the United States) after the end of the Cold War was to dominate the entire international system, because by dominating the entire system it would assure no other state or combination of states would be able to go to war against the United States. All major powers strive for that situation. It is impossible for any major power to become a world hegemony. Mearsheimer argued that it is possible for a major power to be a hegemonic power in their own region. The United States has been the hegemonic power in the Western hemisphere since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823.

The two regions that are important for the United States' position are Europe and the East Asian region. The United States needs to protect Europe and the East Asia region. These two regions are important for the United States and he must make sure that no regional hegemony arises in these two regions. The great powers that have potential to challenge the United States hegemony in these two regions are Germany in Europe and Communist China in East Asia. Historically the United States confronted Imperial Germany in the First World War (1914-1918), Nazi Germany in Second World War (1939-1945) and the Soviet Union during the Cold War (1945-1991). During the Cold War, the United States established NATO in 1949 to protect Western Europe and his hegemonic position in the Western Hemisphere. If Germany or the Soviet Union became a hegemonic power of Europe, it would be free to intervene in the Western Hemisphere and most probably threaten the survival and security of the United States. That is the reason why the United States intervened in the First World War in 1917 when Great Britain and France became very weak and there was possibility of Germany winning the Great War 1914-1918. During the Cold War period (after Second World War) the United States divided Germany into four divisions and controlled Germany. The division of the United States, Great Britain and France formed West Germany. The United States and his allies



established NATO in securing Western Europe from the Soviet Union dominating. The United States' position would not be secure if the whole of Europe was controlled by the Soviet Union.

The United States intervention in the East Communist states and NATO's eastward expansion to the former Soviet Union satellite state were the United States' strategy in avoiding the creation of a new hegemonic power in Europe. With that action, the United States controlled the whole of Europe (East and West). It was possible for Germany to become a new strong military power after the end of the Cold War. The United States was also secured from the Soviet Union domination in the East Europe because the Soviet Union very weak militarily and economically in the 1990s. The weaknesses of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and 1990s was a great opportunity for the United States to control the whole of Europe. The perspective of Offensive Realism could be applied in explaining and analysing the political and institutional development in Europe in the post-Cold War. The great powers are always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rival, with hegemony as their final objective.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that the changes of international political structure in the European continent from a bipolarity structure to a unipolarity structure strongly influenced the policies of the former Eastern European communist states. The former communist states in Eastern Europe changed their policies after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved in July 1991 and former Warsaw Pact members (former Eastern communist states) joined NATO. After the end of the bipolarity structure (after the collapse of the Soviet Union) the regional political structure changed from bipolarity to unipolarity. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, American was the strong single power in controlling and dominating the European continent. One single strong power: unipolarity structure, which made it easier for American to control and dominate the whole of Europe. The Theory of Structural Realism, especially Offensive Realism, could be applied in explaining the changes of the European politics and institutional development in post-Cold War Europe.



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