

Multipolar globalization: Iraq, Afghanistan+20

Top US policy makers concede that in the buildup to the Iraq war there was no clarity about why the war was undertaken, and now there still isn't. WMD was just a bureaucratic compromise. If the reason isn't clear, the purpose isn't clear, how can one decide how to wage war and whether a war is won? Parallels between the Afghanistan and Iraq wars include phony victories (bought from local forces), phony aims and claims (train Afghan army, secure women's rights, bring democracy), shifts of alliances (allies become outcasts), creating 'homeless Sunnis' (who later join IS) and militant forces (who form the Taliban). If we compare these wars with Pakistan as a case of ongoing cold war damage, do wider parallels emerge? Securitization and chaos create opportunities. Local forces may go freelance (Mujahideen, Al Qaeda, Taliban; IS; Northern Alliance; Pakistani Taliban). Cold war regime changes continued decolonial counterinsurgency and colonial struggles of divide and rule, and Iraq and Afghanistan are part of this series.

Great Powers and civilizations

The great powers play key roles in the organization of globalization in view of their size, influence and membership of the UN Security Council. The US portrays a world divided in democracy vs autocracy and proposes a rules-based order. Russia's approach hinges on nationalism and Realpolitik. China maintains worldwide engagements and abides by the UN Charter. The world majority adheres to the UN Charter and seeks to balance great power geopolitics or seeks realignments and new institutions. The global South, middle powers and small countries have diverse agendas. This paper compares civilizational histories, analyzes links between concentration of power and narcissism, and examines the cold war and its aftermath in light of new research.

We have entered an era of multipolarity, but much thinking continues in unipolar terms, in terms of lumping concepts such as modernity and capitalism. In a multipolar era, thinking in plural terms is more relevant and appropriate, but runs counter to formidable pressures towards convergence that are built into the status quo and international institutions, and into macro theories in social science. Ideas of convergence upon the model of Anglo-American capitalism and liberal democracy are continuously rehearsed in mainstream media, as if the 'rise of the rest' is supposed to follow in the footsteps of the rise of the West. The macro theories in sociology are clustered around the categories of modernity and capitalism. While macro theories are important in that they are part of the classical foundations, the flipside is that since their rise has correlated with the rise of Europe and the West they come with in-built centrism, a view from the West as the center, a hegemonic view. This article discusses (1) oscillations towards and away from convergence in actual contemporary dynamics, (2) sociology of convergence thinking, (3) counterpoints, (4) the case of China, and concludes with open-ended reflections.