

1. Characteristics and Cycle of the Foreign Policy Promoted by the United States Superpower

From a long-term perspective, US foreign policy has been swinging in wide spans. The policies taken by the Bush Administration after 9/11 were very special, though they emphasized liberal values such as democracy and freedom. The policies even embraced the possible use of military actions in order to disseminate these values. These policies differed from those taken by the US Government before that time.

Barry Buzan, a British political scientist, uses the term superpower in his analysis of a US-centric international system after 9/11. A superpower, as Buzan puts it, must satisfy two conditions: its influence must be able to go beyond individual regions such as Asia, Europe and the western hemisphere; and it must project its values. In contrast to superpowers, Buzan characterizes a major power as playing important roles in the region it belongs to, although it has less influence over other regions and does not project universal values. Buzan sees international politics as based on two axes: the links between great powers and regions, and the allocation of power in each region. In some regions, a superpower plays a key role as a major power of the region it belongs to, while in other regions a superpower basically constitutes a part of the traditional balance of power. A superpower exercises its direct influence in a region that lacks a substantial major power.

General types of actions by superpowers may be classified as hegemonic actions, imperial actions, and actions of ordinary major powers. US foreign policy is cyclical; if we study its basic types and the cycle of those types, we can more easily grasp what actions are taken by the US. A change in US policy has a significant influence over a region or a country. When the US switches to a policy that seeks balance from a distance, Northeast Asia sees a type of international politics that is quite different from when the US prioritizes freedom and democracy. The difference arises from whether the overwhelmingly strong power opts to influence only the foreign policy of the third country or whether it includes the third country's domestic politics and political system as well. The difference also arises from the point whether the US opts to seek consensus or simply use military power as means to manage the international system. Hegemonic actions usually involve the intent to control the foreign policy of a third country. In the case of acting based on consensus, the US acts as one member a group of equals. In the case of imperial actions, the US seeks to influence the domestic policy of a third country.

The cycle of US foreign policy can be identified as realism, liberal multilateralism and neoconservatism. Realism puts more emphasis on narrowly-defined national interests and less emphasis on values of freedom and democracy. Liberal multilateralism emphasizes the values of freedom and democracy, and also uses multilateralism as a means by which to spread such values. Neoconservatism espouses the deployment of a policy that mixes power and national interests that sometimes turns to unilateralism. Past administrations can be classified as having realist policies under George H.W. Bush, liberal multilateralist policies under Bill Clinton and, after 9/11, neoconservative policies under George W. Bush.

Henry R. Nau argues the concept of realism as follows. First, there is a crisis such as 9/11, whereby power is actually exercised to address the crisis. When this phase is over, multilateralism

is developed, whereby multiple countries work together. However, when an idea arises arguing that multilateralism involves various compromises and thus proves inefficient, a foreign policy that is nationalistic and based on a narrow scope of national interests develop. In US foreign policy, these patterns emerge on major occasions.

When the Vietnam War ended in the first half of the 1970s, Michael G. Roskin presented the concept of the generational paradigm. He argued that when we observe US foreign policy from a long-term perspective, we can identify changes that occur in a cycle of about 20 years. Simply put, it is a repetition of two paradigms. From the Spanish American war at the end of the 19th century to World War I, the US stepped up its external engagement, carrying out militaristic development. Between the two world wars, the US weakened its external engagement, with little militaristic development. The country's external engagement was again stepped up from the end of World War II to the Vietnam War and then held back, with little militaristic development from the Vietnam War to the First Iraq War. According to this cycle, the period from the First Iraq War to the Second Iraq War should be the turn for strong external engagement and active militaristic development. The period starting with the First Iraq War underwent a series of events in Bosnia, Kosovo and then after 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq. This period will likely be followed by weakened external engagement with suppressed military development and could potentially last a long time.

An alliance has different functions depending on the polar structure of the international system. Under a multi-polar structure, an alliance serves as the main means to seek a balance of power. Therefore, alliances are seen as important in the international politics of Europe. Alliances serve as the basis of the international system, as participants flexibly gather and separate, thereby seeking to maintain balances of power.

However, during the Cold War, alliances failed to function as the major means to seek a global-scale balance of power. Under the two poles of the US and the Soviet Union, both countries sought a military balance through mutual nuclear deterrence, among other means, and both achieved a balance based on the resources that each procured domestically, a situation known as internal balancing. Under a bipolar system like this, alliances functioned to offer their members economic interests based on their shared values. For the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact, adjustment of interests within each alliance was an important function.

What kind of role do alliances under a single pole play? Alliances in this context include multilateral schemes of the West centering on the United States, such as NATO, and bilateral schemes, such as the US-Japan, US-South Korea and US-Australia alliances. All these are based on values such as democracy and freedom.

Within each alliance, members seek various adjustments, trying to avoid conflicts between major powers. Added to these efforts is an important function to respond to crises outside the alliance. For example, NATO has enhanced its presence as a vehicle to respond to external crises, manage crises and seek stability. In Europe, under a unipolar structure, NATO no longer needs to seek a balance with Russia, but instead focuses on activities to increase mutual military transparency. In contrast in Northeast Asia, efforts to seek a balance of power and deterrence do remain as important functions of an alliance.

In Northeast Asia, traditional security issues pose more serious problems than in other regions. Northeast Asia also faces issues of sovereignty and conflicts among nations. Despite its status as a superpower, the US does not control Northeast Asia, but instead acts as a major power in the region and plays the role of creating order there. Therefore, the US impact on the international order of the region varies between when the US employs a liberal multilateralist policy and when it seeks a realist policy.