

Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics, ch.8

Waltz argues that a bipolar system is the most peaceful distribution of power in the international system. In general, as the number of poles increases, so does uncertainty with respect to capability and allegiances. Two poles are strictly preferred by Waltz because in bipolar systems adjustment occurs internally. Internal adjustment, as opposed to external adjustment, entails less dependence on members of a given alliance for information and support and hence less scope for the miscalculation of relative power. Moreover, the fact that in a bipolar system the core powers often dwarf their coalition partners in terms of relative power means that the stability of the system is robust to the defections of minor powers. In a bipolar system, the two poles can be expected to be certain as to what their responsibilities are, to become familiar with the negotiating style of their opponent, and to have leaders who are adept at managing foreign policy.