

An Epistemological Voyage of the Impact of America's Hegemonic Power on the Sociopolitical Stability of the Global Structure.

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Abstract

This work is an attempt at digging into the origin and source of America's hegemonic influence on the international system from the post-world wars era till date. The research uncovered that the quest for globalization and development of science and technology to actualize it, are not unconnected with America's overwhelming influence on the sociopolitical and economic structures of Nations of the world. Also, the impacts of the first and second world wars necessitated the need for countries to improve on their military weaponry techno-scientific wise in order to remain relevant in the wake of global industrialization in all spheres of life. The paper concluded that, though, America's Hegemonic Power and influence is seriously threatened by various attacks on her sociopolitical, economic and geographical structures. However, America's hegemonic influence within the globe via structuralism, soft power and hard power in the 21st century, cannot be overemphasized.

Keywords: Epistemological Voyage, America's Hegemonic Power, Sociopolitical Stability, Global Structure

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of American hegemony is as old as Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the United States of America but it has its practical roots in World War II. The United States emerged from that war as the dominant economic, political and technological power. The only major combatant to avoid serious damage to its infrastructure, its housing stock or its demographic profile, the United States ended the war with the greatest naval order of battle ever seen in the history of the world. It became the post-war home of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. And, of course, the United States had the bomb. America was, in every sense of the word, a hegemon.

The term hegemony is derived from the Greek word ἡγεμονία, transliterated as *hégeomai*, meaning leader, ruler, leadership, and commander (Dutkiewicz & Gutorov 2019). It was originally used to refer to the personal leader of a military alliance, and then was later used to describe the leadership of a particular

monarch, more specifically that of 4th century Macedonia (Dutkiewicz & Gutorov 2019). It is a word used by social scientists to describe leadership within a system of competing states. It is a preponderant influence or authority over others or the social, cultural, ideological or economic influence exerted by a dominant group (Lears 1985). It also means the position of being the strongest and most powerful and therefore able to control others. The Greek historian Thucydides used the term to characterize the position of Athens in the Greek world in the middle of the fifth Century BC. Athens had the greatest fleet in the Mediterranean; it was the home of Socrates and Plato, Sophocles and Aeschylus; it crowned its central Acropolis with the solid-marble temple to Athena known to history as the Parthenon. Athens had a powerful rival in Sparta, but no one doubted that Athens was the hegemon of the time until Sparta defeated it in a bitter twenty-seven-year war.

America's only global rival in the twentieth century was the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union never

produced more than about half of America's total national output. Its nominal allies in Eastern Europe were in fact restive occupied countries, as were many of its constituent republics. Its client states overseas were at best partners of convenience, and at worst expensive drains on its limited resources. The Soviet Union had the power to resist American hegemony, but not to displace it. It had the bomb and an impressive space program, but little else. When the Soviet Union finally disintegrated in 1991, American hegemony was complete and established on a solid foundation. The United States sat at the top of the international system, facing no serious rivals for global leadership. This "unipolar moment" lasted a mere decade. September 11, 2001, signaled the emergence of a new kind of threat to global stability, and the ensuing rise of China and re-emergence of Russia put paid to the era of unchallenged American leadership. Now, America's internal politics have deadlocked and the U.S. government shrinks from playing the role of global policeman. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, American hegemony is widely perceived to be in terminal decline.

After reviewing several different definitions of hegemony, I find that the concept embodies two main ideas. The first is the notion that hegemony entails overwhelming or preponderant material power. The second is the idea that hegemony involves the exercise of some form of leadership. The two notions are in turn, carried over into the discussion of how America's exercise of hegemonic power within the comity of nations impact on the stability of the international system. For decades the United States has been the source of a large portion of global economic production, established a vast international security network, and has been at the center of the global balance of power.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In *Long Cycles in World Politics* (1987), Modeleski describes the international system in terms of a repetitive cycle of ascent and descent of a dominant power, major wars, and changes in international leadership. According to Modeleski (1987), scholars in international relations must take into account all of history in order to explain phenomena, not just recent events. Modeleski (1987) argues that international relations and power diffusion are cyclical events within what he called the "global polity."⁴ The global polity is the network of interactions that comprises the relationship between the leading power and any

contenders. The global polity encompasses two separate actions, politicking and policy. Politicking entails competition for the position of leadership within a system; policy is the agenda and goals set by the leader of the system. The most influential actors in the global polity are the global powers, whose patterns of interaction structure the global polity. According to long cycle theory, the international system goes through several phases. The first is a global war owing to global order having been replaced with global disorder. Phase two occurs when a world power has emerged from phase 1 and establishes order under its leadership. Phase three is characterized by an erosion of the demand for leadership and security, resulting in a delegitimization of the leading power's role. Phase four is described as "deconcentrating," where disorder begins to spread as the world power's leadership is no longer required, which in turn leads back to phase 1 and global war. In his explanation Modeleski (1987) states that explanations of hegemony and international relations that focus on the "aspects of supply side leadership" are conceptually flawed. He specifies that Immanuel Wallerstein's conception of hegemony as having preeminence in the production of agro-industrial and military power failed to take into account the demands of leadership that hegemons have to face in the world system.

Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) who was influenced by Marx approached the studying of international relations breaking away from the traditional view of the sovereign state as the unit of analysis, but instead looks at the "world system." The world system he argues is comprised of smaller political subsystems, economic systems, and imperial systems. The current world system as he describes it is the capitalist world economy. This system is a large geographic zone within which there is a division of labor and significant internal exchange of basic or essential goods as well as flows of capital and labor.

In world systems theory, the hegemon is an actor-state that has the capacity to create a system based on its political, economic, and security preferences. As Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) describes:

"...for a certain period they were able to establish the rules of the game in the interstate system, to dominate the world-economy (in production, commerce, and finance), to get their way politically with minimal use of military force (which however they had in goodly strength), and to formulate the cultural language with which one discussed the world" (p. 58).

According to Wallerstein (2004), only three states have ever been able to establish hegemony, these include the United Provinces of the Netherlands in the 17th century, Great Britain in the middle of the 18th century, and the United States in the 20th century. To Wallerstein (2004), hegemony means having a comparative advantage in the most profitable modes of production. The state that is able to capture a largest share of the “core” and “periphery” divisions of labor is considered to have attained hegemony. The “core” refers to actors which have a strong means of production, while the “periphery” refers to actors with a weak means of production (Tickner 2013). From its economic advantage, a hegemonic state can foster political influence and project military power. Wallerstein (2004) breaks hegemony down into three stages. First, a state experiences success in the production of profitable consumer goods, for example the monopoly enjoyed by England in textile production in the early stages of industrialization. Second is success in the mass production of what Wallerstein (2004) calls capital goods. The third stage of hegemony is success in the financial sector and in foreign investments thanks to the hegemon’s central place in the global economy and world-system (Chase-Dunn et al., 2005).

Another influential contribution to the hegemony literature came from A.F.K. Organski and his development of power transition theory (PTT), which explores the impact of changes in the distribution of actor capabilities on the global system. According to power transition theory, “Power, then, is the ability to influence the behavior of others in accordance with one’s own ends” (Organski 1968, p. 104). Organski (1968) argues that the only way to identify a state’s power relative to others is in hindsight. However, as stated earlier, he believes this does little to show us the current power hierarchy. Instead, he proposes looking at the resources of each actor relative to the others to estimate the current distribution of power. The differences in this distribution determines the structure of the international system and the way in which actors interact with one another. The global structure is a key concept in power transition theory. Like other neorealist theories, PTT suggests that the structure of the system has a great deal of influence on relations between actors. The most powerful state is considered the dominant state, and the relationship between this actor and the other members of the global system can change the latter’s structure. Structure in this case is referring to the relationships between actors and the

distribution of capabilities. Beneath the dominant power are the great powers, states which poses significant power and may be the dominant states in their regions, but which cannot yet challenge the position of the dominant state. Next come the middle powers followed by the small powers. These states are continuing to industrialize and find that they generally benefit from the status quo (Organski 1968). At the bottom of the pyramid are the dependent states which oppose the power structure, but have no way of changing it.

The way power transition theory works is that states are said to undergo a transition from pre-industrialized societies to fully industrialized ones. The said industrialization results in radical increases in state power beyond on the basic determinants of power such as territory and population. The three stages of this transformation are (1) potential power, (2) transitional growth in power, and (3) power maturity (Organski 1968). Organski argues that the world is experiencing the second stage of power transition because, while most countries have industrialized, there are many that remain pre-industrialized. Once the industrial playing field is level and the world enters the third stage, new major powers will emerge, and new theories will be required (Organski 1968). Because states have not industrialized at the same time or the same rate, power has been unevenly distributed among them. When states go through industrialization, they have a “sprint” of power growth. This sprint allows some to challenge the dominant actor in the system and seek to assume the mantle for themselves.

The current stage of the power transition cycle has been greatly impacted by two major factors. First, there have been major shifts in the distribution of power. With actors at varying stages of industrialization and populations continuing to migrate, power has shifted across the spectrum and the position of dominant power has been occupied by several different actors. These shifts in power are the primary causes of what Gilpin would describe as the hegemonic wars of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries (Tammen et al., 2000). The second major characteristic of the second stage is that of an international order. With industrialization has come closer economic and diplomatic interdependence among states. Transnational companies now access resources in foreign countries that were previously unobtainable by their state, and which accelerate faster economic growth. Military ties have also been altered owing to

the changing nature of industrialized warfare. Powerful European nations such as the United Kingdom, which had previously been the system's dominant power, have heavily relied on the United States for protection (Organski 1986). According to Organski (1986), major wars occur when the dominant power in a system is challenged by a dissatisfied great power whose relative level of power is catching up to that of the dominant state. It is again important to point out that the concept of power in power transition theory is a relative term. A state by itself cannot be considered powerful, weak, or dominant by looking at its capabilities alone. Power can only be judged when comparing it to that of another actor. With this in mind, the level of power for a rising great power to be considered a challenger to the dominant power is said by Tammen et al., (2000) to be a level relative to eighty percent of the dominant state's power. Hegemony, or the presence of a dominant state, has major consequences for the global system by facilitating the safest international environment because a single power has the capability to maintain peace and order. By using its power to reward, compel, or punish other members of a system, the hegemon prevents instability and conflict. The unipolar structure, according to power transition theory, is the most stable structural condition of the global system.

Constructivists, Neo-Gramscians, and the English School all embrace the view that hegemony is about more than just raw material power and domination. For Robert Cox (1981), one of the leading Neo-Gramscians, "dominance by a powerful state may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition of hegemony." According to Cox (1981, p. 139), the concept of hegemony "is based on a coherent conjunction or fit between a configuration of material power, the prevalent collective image of world order (including certain norms) and a set of institutions which administer the order with a certain semblance of universality". Cox (1981) combines material power, ideas, and institutions into a comprehensive theory of hegemony. Drawing directly from the work of Antonio Gramsci, Cox (1981) argues that hegemony incorporates two elements: force and consent. By conceptualizing hegemony as a fit between material power, ideas, and institutions, it is difficult to privilege one set of factors over another. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that international institutions and the process of institutionalization are key components of the neo-Gramscian conception of hegemony. While international institutions embody the material interests

of the hegemon, they also, according to Cox (1981), perform an ideological function in that they help to legitimate the norms of world order. By emphasizing the role of ideas, and recognizing that the social world is composed of both material and ideational forces, social constructivist conceptions of hegemony are not dissimilar to those put forward by Cox and neo-Gramscians. Constructivists, however, are more inclined to emphasize the ideational aspects of hegemony over the material. While most constructivists support Cox's adoption of Gramsci, one of the critiques of Cox is that, in the end, he did not sufficiently privilege the ideational component of hegemony.

According to Ted Hopf (2013), Cox's account is still too materialistic in the sense that ideas continue to be a manifestation of the dominant power's political-economic interests. Yet for Hopf (2013), the importance of Gramsci's conception of hegemony is that it helps us understand why the masses go along with and accept a given order. Thus, it is not just the ideology of elites that matter, but also how dominant ideas percolate downward and become accepted as taken for granted by the broader public. This is what Gramsci meant by 'common sense'. The degree to which there is a discursive fit between the ideas

3. THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA'S HEGEMONY

Given the diversity that exists among how the different theories comprehend the concept of hegemony, it is not surprising that there have been endless debates about the character and durability of US hegemony. From the perspective of contemporary American foreign policy, two questions about US hegemony have become fundamental today: one, does the maintenance of hegemony continue to serve American interests; and two, is American hegemony in decline? The answers to these two questions are actually interrelated. If one believes that hegemony is beneficial for the United States, as proponents of both primacy and liberalism assert, then every effort should be made to maintain it. Conversely, if one does not believe that hegemony serves American interests, which is the position of balance-of-power realists and offensive realists, then instead of pursuing policies to maintain it, the United States should begin adjusting to the reality of inevitable hegemonic decline and the rise of peer-competitors such as China.

One of the advantages of the realist conception of hegemony is its focus on the material basis of

hegemony: military and economic strength. Yet even while agreeing that material capabilities are the cornerstone of hegemony, there are a number of contending views on the relative power position of the United States today. A key point of contention in the debate about the durability of American hegemony is the degree to which the United States continues to have unrivalled capabilities. In Layne's (2006) terminology, "unipolar optimists believe that American hegemony will last for a very long time and that it is beneficial for the United States and for the international system as a whole" (p. 134). The best representatives of this view are William Wohlforth and Stephen Brooks. Brooks et al., (2012), dispute the popular view that China's rise represents a challenge to US hegemony, insisting that the United States continues to have preponderant material capabilities that are vastly greater than any other state.²³ According to Brooks et al., (2012), American hegemony is beneficial to both the United States and the world primarily because it greatly reduces security competition by rendering the balance of power inoperable and continues to confer significant benefits to the United States. For Brooks et al., (2012), it is of vital importance that the United States continues to pursue a grand strategy of primacy or "deep engagement" in order to prevent the return of balance-of-power politics, which they argue is not possible in a unipolar system.

In contrast, 'unipolar pessimists' believe that the United States' relative power position is declining and view the grand strategy of primacy to be antithetical to American interests. Most structural realists believe that global hegemony is either impossible to achieve or fleeting. Not only is it difficult to dominate the entire globe, but structural realists strongly believe in the prevalence of balance-of-power politics. Contrary to unipolar optimists, structural realists do not believe that balancing has failed to take place since the dawn of the unipolar moment. Indeed, it is for the very reason that active balancing is taking place especially on the part of China and Russia, that many structural realists argue that the United States needs to abandon the grand strategy of primacy or deep engagement and adopt a grand strategy of restraint or offshore balancing²⁵. Liberal conceptions of hegemony have much to offer on the debate about US hegemony. Instead of simply emphasizing material capabilities, proponents of liberal hegemony accentuate the leadership and institutionalized components of hegemony. However, like unipolar optimists, those adhering to liberal versions of hegemonic stability

theory argue that American hegemony is beneficial to both the United States and the world and should be maintained.

The argument is that the United States is better able to pursue a liberal grand strategy-democracy promotion, free trade, interdependence, and multilateral institutionalism-when it has unrivalled capabilities²⁶. With respect to whether the United States can maintain its unipolar position indefinitely, liberals are, in Layne's terminology, unipolar agnostics. The question about the durability of American hegemony is not just about trends in the relative distribution of power but about the character of American leadership. According to liberal conceptions of hegemonic stability theory, US power is not used to dominate others, but rather to provide the leadership that is necessary for an open, liberal international order to exist. This is the crux of Ikenberry's (2000) story of how the United States after World War II built and maintained a liberal hegemonic order that has produced peace and prosperity for the world. According to Ikenberry (2000), the United States did not use its preponderant power after World War Two to dominate the world and create an empire. Instead, American hegemonic leadership was wisely used to strike a grand bargain and establish the foundations of a liberal international order. With the rise of new powers, the growth of right-wing populism, the turn to authoritarianism, and the election of Donald Trump, the durability of the liberal international order is being called into question. Yet most liberals remain confident that the liberal international order will endure. Their basic argument is that the rules and institutions the United States helped build under Pax Americana will persist, making it difficult for revisionist states to fundamentally change the liberal international order.

The English School and Social Constructivism move the discussion of American hegemony and unipolarity away from raw material capabilities to the dynamics of legitimacy. Instead of engaging in the endless debate about China's rise and the future of US power they emphasize the role of legitimacy in maintaining any given hegemonic order. Only time will tell if future US presidents will be able to reclaim a legitimate liberal order or if China is able to provide the legitimacy necessary either to take over leadership of the liberal international order or offer an alternative vision (Schweller & Pu 2011).

4. HOW THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA' S HEGEMONY WITHIN THE COMITY OF NATIONS IMPACT STABILITY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The roots of contemporary US power lie in its military superiority over other powers. US military dominance today is both absolute and relative. In absolute sense, the US has the military capability to reach any point on the planet with its lethal weapons targeting accurately and in real time. The adversary is crippled while the US forces are sheltered from the dangers of attack to the maximum possible extent. Likewise, more interesting and amazing than the US absolute power is the fact that no other power has even the remotest ability to match US Power. The US budget on defence is more than the combined expenditure of other twelve most powerful states combined. Further, the Pentagon's budget on military research and development or technology is one of the highest in the world. The US military dominance is attributed, therefore, not only to its defence expenditure but also to its technological chasm which gives it a qualitative edge over other powers in a way that no other power can even conceive of and from this stance, stability is maintained within the comity of nations.

The US invasion of Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Afghanistan and other nations are clear demonstrations of her hegemony as a way of maintaining stability among nations at various periods of unrest. Her successes in these invasions are shows of her military and technological superiority. Imperialistic states throughout history have used military forces to accomplish four tastes: to conquer, deter, punish and police. American invasion of Iraq clearly demonstrates its formidable military superiority. Its capability to deter and punish is also clearly evident. However, it is not that US does not have vulnerabilities. The US has not been able to force Iraqi people and other upcoming strong forces like Russia and China to submit to her coalition forces. Thus US military capability has failed to police occupied territories which show a big weakness on her part. The US also plays the role of the hegemon by providing global public goods and through this enforce a high degree of stability of the international system within the comity of nations. Public goods are those goods whose availability is open to all for consumption on an open and equitable basis. Roads and fresh air are examples of such goods. On a global scale, sea-lanes of communication (SLOCs) and the sea routes used commonly by merchant ships are

examples of global public goods. Free trade in an open world economy is impossible without SLOCs. The naval power of the hegemon determines the law of sea and provides freedom of navigation in international waters. Before the Second World War, British Navy used to perform this role. After the Second World War, this role has been performed by the multi-oceanic US Navy. A more comprehensive example of global public goods is the Internet. Internet is the direct result of a US military research project which started in 1950. The Whole world trade today survives through the Internet on the World Wide Web (W.W.W.com). Most of Internet facilities at the global level operate on a network of satellites, owned by the US government. Most of the biggest internet think-tanks and social media hegemonies have their headquarters and are linked directly to the US for instance, the Facebook, the Google, the MIT et-cetra. The US controls the world predominately using the internet as a strong tool.

Here, it is important to recall that the economic predominance of the US is inextricably linked with its structural power over other nations. This link is inseparable in the shaping of global economy. The Bretton Woods system, established by the US after the Second World War, still links the basic structure of the global economy. Thus, all the international economic institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) can be regarded as products of US hegemony. This makes them wield a great deal of influence in the election of the heads of these economic institutions as evident in the election of Prof. Ngozi Okonji Iweala as the current chairperson of the World Trade Organization. A classic instance of the structural power of the US over other nations is the academic Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA). The dictum that business is a profession depending upon a professional subject which should be taught is a unique American idea. The first business school was started in USA, the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania founded in 1881. MBA courses started in 1900. Outside US the first MBA course was established only in 1950. Today, there is hardly any country in the world which does not run the prestigious MBA degree. This explains the structural hegemony of the US.

Again, the ability to create a global consent makes the US a big hegemon from the ideological and cultural perspective. Ideas rule the world and any nation that can singly influence the ideologies and the culture of the world should be a hegemon. The preponderance of US is based today not only on its military and economic

superiority, but also its cultural presence. Most of the ideas of good life, personal success, dreams of individuals and societies all over the world are dreams endured by prevailing customs and practices of the twenty-first century America. US culture is the most seductive and dominant on the earth at the moment. Over a period of time, we get used to hegemony around us just as we get used to birds, trees and rivers around us. The Jean's culture, Pepsi drink, fast and canned foods are all representatives of the US culture. During the Cold War, the US found it hard to gain victories over the USSR in the realm of hard power. It was in the realm of structural power and soft power where the US hegemonised even the Soviet Union. Though the centrally planned Soviet Socialist economy, offered an alternate model of internal economic organization, preponderant of capitalism was there even during the cold war period. It was in the realm of 'soft power' where US triumphed ultimately. The norms adopted by the US go a long way in influencing the moral rectitude of the peoples of other nations. Their promulgations of norms in the favour of abortion, same-sex marriages and even cannibalism are influencing and questioning the norms of the citizens of other nations.

Finally, the positions of the US in all the international organizations give them the alibi to dominate and influence other nations thereby establishing a stability that suits their interests within the comity of nations. In the UN, her position as one of the founding members and permanent members of the UN Security Council make her ready to wield influence over other nations but countries like Russia and China form her militating police and tend to hijack the affairs of most of the agencies of the UN against the interest of the US and other nations. This has made the immediate past president of the US withdrawing the nation from their affiliation to some of the UN agencies and was moving withdrawing the US entirely from the UN in June, 2020 due to some controversies resulting from the Corona Virus Pandemic.

5. CONCLUSION

From the forgoing, it is obvious that the US is still the hegemon despite the attacks and puncturing of their hegemony by some other world powers notwithstanding. The US through many means wield influence and power above other nations within the comity of nations using their hard power, soft power and structuralism.

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