

BETWEEN PAX AMERICANA AND MULTILATERAL UNCERTAINTY: THE PLACE OF POWER IN THE REAL WORLD

THE WANING OF AN EPOCH

We are witnessing a paradigm shift in international geopolitics. The US-led post-World War II order, which was euphemistically known as the Pax Americana, worked over the course of almost eight decades as the supreme organization principle dictating international relations. However, today, there are clear symptoms of structural atrophy of this noble architecture of American primacy. The modern international system has dissonant geopolitical interests, is spreading centres of power, and is beginning to delegitimize the liberal institutional scaffolding on which American hegemony has historically rested. This unipolarity to what academics more and more refer to as Pax Multipolaris: a fragmented world order, devoid of a single hegemon is not something of cyclic power oscillation, but instead the essential re-organization of the mechanisms of global stability functioning. The path towards multilateral uncertainty throws some light upon an individual paradox: it is the same machine by means of which American power tried to keep itself alive that has become the tool of its own

PAX AMERICANA: ZIMMERNBAU VON HEGEMONISCHER EINVEREINIGUNG.

The nominal name of a period of supposed relative international peace and economic prosperity is Pax Americana, named after Pax Romana and Pax Britannica, which is said to be based on American military and economic supremacy.

Amall Sharma, 3rd year

Deshbandhu College University of Delhi

amallsharma2005@gmail.com

Nonetheless, this superficial definition conceals the more profound structural and ideological foundations that made American hegemony an institutionalized, legitimate type of global rule. It is possible to say that American expansionism was in place long before the post-1945 formation. The Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny gave expression to hemispheric desires, but the apotheosis of American hegemonic consolidation would only come after the cataclysmic destruction of World War II. The international system that was created after 1945 was essentially typified by the solitary imbalance: the European and Asian continent was in civilizational shatters, the Soviet Union had forces striking enough yet economically crippled, and the United States was the only country that preserved industrial productive power and accumulated capital never seen before or after. This unipolar moment gave sufficient exigencies to American primacy. Instead of classical imperial coercion, the United States created what has been called hegemony by consent a system in which subordinate powers were supposed to be contented with American primacy by participating in institutions and gaining material rewards.

The monetary-financial component of this new order was the Bretton Woods system, which came into existence in 1944 and was represented by the representatives of 44 Allied countries. The anchoring of the major currencies on the dollar and pegging it to 35 gold coins per ounce made the monetary hegemony of the American economic architects unparalleled. The Marshall Plan, which sent Western European resources of \$13.3 billion (which would be \$173 billion today in money) to reconstruct Europe, institutionalized American economic hegemony to create long-term political loyalties and markets in American commodities and capital investment. The United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World bank and general agreement on tariffs and trade were institutional inventions that established a normative framework that allegedly controlled international behavior. These institutions had a substantive character even though they were operating under a multilateral veneer capability to institutionalize American preferences. This hegemonic architecture was codified in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that was formed in 1949 and made the military aspect of the design. At the core of such arrangements was liberal internationalism that is an ideological framework that was based on the assumption that American leadership is the necessary element in the continued existence of democratic control and market-driven prosperity all over the world. American policymakers had created hegemonic consent by presenting American hegemony as benevolent stewardship of the world, rather than self-serving domination, as a means to development and security of the world.



THE HEGEMONIC DOMINANCE WITH HEGEMONIC INSTRUMENTS

The American hegemony was operationalized with three major mechanisms, namely, economic preponderance, military supremacy, and soft power. The status of the dollar as world reserve currency together with the American military dominance and its appeal to the capital market made America able to impose extraordinary financial leverage. The American corporations controlled important sectors of the global economy that included petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, advanced manufacturing and later on information technology that developed networks that were basically oriented towards the American interest. This economic hegemony enabled the ability to wield structural power to influence parameters in which other actors can act without necessarily requiring them to act in a particular manner.

The United States created an environment where capital, technology and access to markets had to be controlled by them such that they would emerge as countries that could only allow the Americans to have their way.

In addition to material coercion, American hegemony was also supported by the ability to influence international preferences with the help of cultural, technological, and ideological appeal. American universities were transformed into centers of intellectual authority; American cinema became archetypes of aesthetics, American technological innovation developed relations of dependency and admiration. This soft power was especially instrumental in justifying the system itself elites of the world wanted to follow the American form of governance and economic structure.

PARADOXES LEADING TO FALL

Nevertheless, processes of American hegemony reproducing itself carried inside themselves contradictions that led to a progressive disintegration. Hegemonic maintenance involves an extraordinary spending of military expenses, economic support, transfer of technology and provision of public services like free flow of shipping. During the cold war such costs were necessary by the American society to counter any Soviet expansion. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet in 1991, justificatory narratives dampened at the very time that American economic status started to suffer an extended decline as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China, and India were rapidly industrializing and rising in technology. War in Vietnam provoked massive faults in the consensus of hegemony.

The 2008 financial crisis that started in deregulated American financial markets revealed deep structural weaknesses in the economic system model that America had exported to the world and undermined all American claims to excellence in organization. The rise of China as a large creditor country and enormous accumulation of foreign reserves offered the substitute sources of capital making countries less reliant on American funding.

Moreover, liberal international organizations by which the American hegemony was instrumentalized the United Nations, IMF, World Bank, and WTO also limited the American unilateral capacities. When the non-aligned and developing countries gained more representation, they gained the ability to frustrate American agendas. In 2003, the United States invaded Iraq unilaterally without requiring the approval of the UN Security Council, and this action assaulted the institutional system upon which the American could have based its legitimacy and this act triggered a series of the delegitimation of American statements about being the leader of globally good principles.

THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF FALLENNESS

The world after the Cold War saw the rise of centers of power that can challenge American hegemony. The conversion of China into the second-largest economy in the world, combined with the booming development of the Chinese military and its technical equipment, resulted in the appearance of a peer competitor who acted

based on the ideological and strategic tenets that were fundamentally different. With declining economic statuses, Russia still remained a powerful opponent with strong military resources and strategic locations in Eurasia. India became the potential huge power that could exert significant influence in Asian geopolitics. Hegemonic decline across various domains is a fact that is supported by empirical evidence. The Afghanistan and Iraq military interventions between 2001- 2021 can be viewed as examples of hegemonic overstretch. By 2008, more than \$650 billion had been spent on Iraq alone with American losses of more than 4000 and the death of Iraqi citizens reported to be in the hundreds of thousands. These setbacks triggered a crashing of American credibility among adversaries of American credibility that, even with technological superiority, the United States would fail to succeed in counterinsurgency operations that took many years.

The American soft power fell drastically. Prejudice ratings of the United States were significantly dropping during the 2000s and 2010s, especially in those areas where America took military action. The American withdrawal of agreements with other countries Paris Climate Accord, Iranian nuclear agreement, Trans-Pacific Partnership was an indication of American rejection of multilateral institutions that perpetuated liberal hegemony. Inconsistencies among American rhetorical ideals of democracy and human rights, as opposed to objective support of authoritarian politics Egyptian coup, Palestinian policy, Saudi interventions invalidated American ideals of principled international leadership.

The geopolitical relations of today are characterized by the clear appearance of the multipolarity. China, which is the largest trading partner of more than 100 nations in the world today, has already placed itself as an alternative development model. The Belt and Road Initiative is a form of counter-hegemonic architecture of creating economic reliance within Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Crimea annexation, Syrian intervention, and Ukrainian invasion exhibited by Russia showed assertive potential that means that American military preponderance is no longer the certainty of major power conflicts in strategically significant areas.



THE UNCERTAIN MULTIPOLARITY: UNCLEAR TRAJECTORY

In the event that American hegemony has been proven to fall, the path to its replacement is severally unpredictable. Instead of converging towards the establishment of stable multipolar equilibrium, the modern system displays some traits of chaotic multipolarity many competing centres without strict hierarchical structuring, weakened conflict management regimes, and high likelihood of disastrous great-power war. In contrast to the past, where the shift of hegemony had rising powers who were able and willing to create new orders, the present does not have a clear successor. China has such capabilities but is limited by such factors as demographic factors, dependence on technology, debts and ideological constraints to universal appeal. Russia does not have economic and technological prerequisites to protracted hegemonic rivalry. Whilst it is clearly weakened, the United States still enjoys substantial military capacity, technological superiority, and network effects due to the institutional ties.

The resultant effect is unstable order in which one power is not dominant enough to institute a hierarchical order but there are several powers that are capable of thwarting the ability of any power to dominate. This unipolar break-up with multipolar instability creates endless tension where there must be continuous negotiation between competing centres.

Weirdly enough, liberal international organizations remain formally in their existence as the legitimacy is withering away.

The UN Security Council is being frozen; IMF and World Bank are getting challenged by other institutions; WTO is not able to resolve a dispute; the premises of liberal order are under increasing challenge. This produces reports of bifurcated international system whereby Western institutional forms exist in form which are challenged by rising powers who form other forms of architecture China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, New Development Bank in BRICS, non-Western security architecture. Institutional pluralism causes friction and uncertainty instead of stable cooperation.

Nevertheless, the Cold War also existed in the relatively well-defined framework of bipolarism that brought superpowers to the awareness of the disastrous nuclear threats and preserved tacit alliances that did not imply direct engagement. The new multipolarity lacks any of the stabilizing bipolarity. This danger of Russian military aggression with American response and allied forces can be seen in the conflict in Ukraine in acute form which led to direct confrontation between nuclear-armed states without restraining cold war systems. Taiwan Strait cases also imply the flash-mobs when the great power struggle can quickly escalate with disastrous outcomes.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The path between Pax Americana and multilateral uncertainty is the symbol of cardinal change in the world politics as the final destination of which is still truly obscure.

The American military fact, economic influence and soft power are the foundation of the hegemonic order which has been clearly weathered on several registers. The processes that sustain US dominance institutional regimes, alliance formations, economic entrapments and ideological appeal intensives remain operational at the formal levels but their validity and effectiveness have significantly faded away.

The formation of multipolar alternatives is not full and unopposed, however. There is no fixed balance that is crystallized, there is a multiplicity of places of power which seek dominance; institutional frameworks through which global order could be brokered shows are infantile or legitimized. This in-between the space between hegemonic orders is one of unprecedented uncertainty in which catastrophic great-power conflict resides alongside the possibility of establishing more inclusive, veritable multilateral systems of governance.

The vital question is not whether Pax Americana has been proved to be terminally degraded by the fact that empirical evidence has nothing serious to contradict it. However, the more relevant question is what global power structure the global system will assume because of its disaggregation and whether there are collaborative mechanisms adequate to deal with great power competition that will be institutionalized before it becomes crystallized where destructive conflict prevails. The solution will either be that the multipolar future is managed competition or it will degenerate into anarchy and disaster that is a consistent historical accompaniment of hegemonic change.

