

Withering Hegemony of US and Evolving De-centered Globalism: A Theoretical account

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Abstract

In this essay theoretical description has been applied to explicate that the days of American Unilateralism are gone and now the other potential actors are catching up with American supremacy. American hegemony declared by advocates of hegemonic stability theory as indispensable for stable and prosperous world doesn't hold water anymore. Balance of power theory explains the balancing behavior triggered off by other rising powers when their interests are threatened by a single superpower. Power transition theory sounds out that now power is gradually shifting from West to East.

Key Words: Hegemonic decline, hegemonic stability theory, balance of power theory, power transition theory, global power shift

Introduction

In academia the decline of US hegemony is equally debated to China's rise. History is the witness that even the vast and mighty Empires like Persian Empire, Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire, British Empire and Soviet Empire ultimately shattered to a number of independent states and couldn't stay forever as the most powerful actor in World politics. United States rose to the status of 'Superpower' in the aftermath of World War II and 'Hyper power' after the demise of Soviet Union. The era of Post Cold War is replete with 'American Unilateralism' and poor role played by international regimes who failed to check upon American unrestrained misadventure ranging from Vietnam, Afghan war (2002) and Iraq war (2003). These overextended commitments not only damaged US interests to the great extent but ignited Anti-Americanism all over the world. Rising Anti-Americanism across globe paved way for another powerful actor in international arena equivalent to United States. Another significant reason of rising powers to come up is logical balance of power against a unrestrained hyper-power to bring international order in a situation where major stake holder of international system can involve in global decision making to make world better and peaceful place to live in. Recent studies have proved America's relative decline and dwindling down American popularity even in Western Europe

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and rise of China may change the global order. It means that the power is gradually shifting from West to East which will ultimately change global order if not fully but partially.

A Flawed Logic of Hegemonic Stability Theory

A.F K Organski coined the idea of “Hegemonic Stability Theory” in his famous work *World Politics* (1958). He explains that when a nation achieves hegemonic power and becomes dominant enough to practice its hegemonic policies on the other less powerful or weaker states then its hegemony is challenged by some other great or rising power. This situation may lead to a war or conflict between rising power and declining hegemon. Advocates of hegemonic stability theory support the idea of American predominance in world affairs and declare American hegemony an indispensable element for a better, peaceful and prosperous world.

In the mid 1970s Charles Kindleberger, Robert Gilpin and Stephen Krasner put forward similar descriptions for the patterns of international economic relations since nineteenth century. They viewed Britain as a hegemon in the late nineteenth century that provided stability and promoted liberalization in international economy. They found that the United States has been carrying out the similar policies after the first decade of World War II. All these scholars pinpointed the instability and stagnation of international economic relations during inter-war period as an absence of a hegemon who could maintain stability in the system. Britain lost its hegemonic status after the World War II and United States assumed the world leadership as a hegemon but these authors had already made a prediction about withering hegemony of United States in mid 1970s would cause greater instability and unrest in international politics (Web and Krasner, 1989:183). But United States retained the status of Hegemon till September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on American soil which targeted American heartland (New York and Washington D.C) and posed a serious threat to American hegemonic ideals that America itself is not safer than how it could claim to protect the rest of the world from threatening states and non-state actors. American invasion of Afghanistan (2002) subsequently Iraq (2003) proved a last nail in the coffin of American hegemony. In the name of combating terrorism United States plunged into Afghan war and a year later imposed war on Iraq on the suspicion of developing nukes which proved a false reason later on. No weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq later on. As a consequence of prompt and irrational misadventure in Afghanistan and Iraq America lost its popularity in Western Europe and other developed nations because of heinous violations of human rights. The war has prolonged more than a decade but America failed to implant truly democratically elected governments and control law and order situation in these turbulent countries. American prestige as a paramount power shunned its leaders to admit failure in Afghanistan and Iraq. Critiques are articulating that America has lost the valor to bring peace

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and order in troubled areas. Under these circumstances hegemonic stability theory fails to explain American role as a hegemon in contemporary times. Pleaders of hegemonic stability theory who wish American supremacy in world affairs as a hegemon describe future era without American hegemony as intensive conflict and commotion between rising powers and declining hegemon. To answer those who propounded that without the presence of hegemon the world would be leading to more unsafe and dangerously conflictual state, Robert O, Keohane contributed with his laudable work *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. He anticipated with meticulous arguments that the cooperation among states can persist or even increase if there is no hegemon. The mainstream scholars of international Politics extolled Keohane's intellectual feat and recognized the scenario presented by him as more valid.

"Kindleberger, reviewing Keohane's *After Hegemony*, writes: "I prefer to think of the hegemon's role as responsibility. If leadership is thought of in such and such terms, it remains a positive idea. Keohane in criticizing the theory is right in writing his own book rather than one I should like to read." A number of proponents of the theory acknowledged its intuitive, rather than scientific, status. Robert Gilpin writes: "This book presumes.... There is of course no way to prove or demonstrate that political leadership is in fact required." As for Keohane, his attitude toward the theory is extremely ambivalent. Although he apparently rejects its overall validity by stating for example in *After Hegemony* that "the empirical evidence for the general validity of the hegemonic stability theory is weak and even its chief adherents have doubts about it"(Grunberg,1990:432-33).

Hegemonic stability theory served the idea very well in post world war II scenario when United States had assumed insurmountable might in economic and military affairs and designed liberal economic policies, established international regimes e.g. World Bank and IMF to reconstruct war-torn Europe and regulated world economy. Despite cold war obstruction United States had been playing the role of a Hegemon for liberal economies till the end of cold war. After the demise of Soviet Union United States rose to the status of a hyperpower. That was the time when no other actors were sufficiently powerful to balance or challenge American might. Europe was making headway but being American ally had no designs of balancing American power. China received miraculous up-thrust and rose to the status of great power but with no clear aspiration of ruling the world. Russia started recovering and returning to mainstream international politics once again as the upcoming era is described by Barry Buzan as De-centered Globalism with no Superpowers but great powers (Buzan, 2011).

The nature of power is so strange that in international system it cannot be monopolized , states rise to the status of super power in international system and then after the decay sets in or the other mighty actors rise so fast that the existing powers are superseded by some other rising powerful actors.

This struggle for supremacy is both perennial and universal in international politics. United States proclaimed as a supreme power after the demise of Soviet Union. Unipolar World all revolved around American ideals and hegemonic policies to spread the notion of free market and democracy across globe. United States' unilateralism got debilitated after Afghan war (2001) and Iraq invasion (2003). United States with active support of NATO allies failed to accomplish desired goals in these troubled areas. Failure to bring peace and order in these countries put a big question mark on the validity of 'Hegemonic Stability Theory' on one hand and American might to rule the world unilaterally on the other hand. According to Niall Ferguson the "unipolarity' identified by some commentators following the Soviet collapse cannot last much longer, for the simple reason that history hates a 'hyper power'. Sooner or later, challengers will emerge, and back we must go to a multipolar or multi-power world" (Ferguson, 2004).

Power works according to the law of nature that vacuum is quickly filled by a powerful state or group of states. History is the witness that in world politics there has always been a hegemon or in a struggle to become. If we take stock of world hegemony in historical times we find that centuries ago Spain, France and Britain practiced their supremacy in world affairs and today United States is the Hegemon. The celebrated nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke in his work depicted modern European history as a perpetual struggle for domination, in that system the balance of power was possible only through recurrent conflict. The prognostication about American and Soviet superiority in world politics made by Yale University historian Paul Kennedy in his best-selling 1987 work, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, is that like all past empires, the U.S. and Russian superpowers would inevitably succumb to overstretch. But they could not stay longer in their supreme positions and eventually would be taken over; Kennedy argued about China and Japan that both the rising powers are still burden-free from the deadweight of imperial military commitments (Ferguson, 2004).

Why is Unilateralism Worse?

Proponents of Hegemonic stability theory support American hegemony in the world system and are sanguine the United States as the most powerful country in the world has the capacity to bring peace and order in international affairs. To address ambiguity in their minds I would like to draw an analogy between national and international politics. In national politics concentration of power in the hands of one individual (dictator) is said to be the worst form of governance, where all the key decisions are made by one powerful individual and there is no check upon his abuse of power. Similarly if the international system is dominated by one Hyper power where there is no check upon its unilateral actions and policies it results in resentment by other less powerful or weak actors. In such an environment other weaker and less powerful actors can't protect their national interest if it is contrary to

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hyperpower's interest. That's why American hegemony can not last long and soon some powerful states would rise to the status of equivalent to US and would challenge US delirious unilateralism. China, Russia and Europe have assumed sufficient power to play a vital role in world affairs and power structure of world politics is under incessant power shift.

Grave concerns are raised by Proponents of Hegemonic Stability Theory that the world with more superpowers would lead to disastrous future of commotion and conflict. Barry Buzan in his famous work "*A World Order without Superpowers: De-centered Globalism*" rejects the fierce competition among great powers to dominate the world system instead he foresees the elements of coexistence and cooperation among powerful actors which would constitute a more regionalized international society (Buzan, 2011). Some of proponents of US hegemonic stability theory have ignored the point that relative power capabilities keep on changing and United States hegemony is not constant feature of international politics. U.S. hegemony will invite power balancing when it becomes too threatening for other major states' interests and it's only a matter of time because hegemony can never stay eternally (Paul, Writz & Fortman, 2004:2).

Balance of Power Theory

The concept of balance of power is considered as one of the oldest and fundamental concept in the field of international relations. International relations theorists had been defining balance of power differently to highlight its significance and relevance in international politics, as David Hume declared balance of power as scientific law due to its significance in international politics. Glenn Snyder highlighted balance of power as a core theoretical concept in international relations. Hans Morgenthau called balance of power as "iron law of politics" and Henry Kissinger, regarded balance of power as more an art than a science (Paul, Writz & Fortman, 2004). Significance and relevance of balance of power even in contemporary times cannot be ignored where states are actively pursuing balance of power policies to check the rise of other rival states, though it was a fashionable trend among states in historical times.

"The concept of balance of power ideally ensures that power is distributed in such a way that no single state or entity is able to dominate the remaining states or entities. Objective characteristics such as relative military power and economic resources determine the distribution of capabilities and hence play a central role in establishing which states occupy the positions of major powers. Major Powers keep strategy of balancing as topmost priority in security realm because a successful balancing strategy ensures peace and it is a precondition of the preservation of the state system"(Odgaard,2007:25).

Cold war presents precise example of balance of power between United States and Soviet Union. Both the states had developed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and made alliances with other states to extend their

influence across globe. United States formed security alliance of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Soviet Union counterbalanced by concluding WARSA Pact. There was a condition of quasi balance of power between them that shunned them from engaging into any direct clash that could escalate into nuclear catastrophe. Scholars adjudge the reason of about balance between both powers as a major reason of de-escalation.

Balancing strategy is exercised by the big powers and small states alike. According to realist paradigm when leading states in the anarchic structure of international relations use their resources to pursue their security objectives, other major powers struggle to keep a check upon rising power of other states who may pose a serious threat to their interest in future. Realist's argument is that "Power is checked most effectively by counterbalancing strategy." Even major powers don't feel secure from other major or rising powers; they feel threat from other major or rising powers to their security. They think that other powers may endanger their security when they gain relatively more power. The basic axiom of balance-of-power theory is that great powers will develop and mobilize military capabilities sufficient to constrain the most powerful among them. Though the theory has been formulated in many ways over the centuries, the "key proffer" of almost all versions of the theory is that "states tend to balance against threats of hegemony over the system." Therefore, the theory posits that once a state reaches at or near the top of the international heap in resources of power, its relative enhancement of power invites more and more counterbalancing from other competitive actors.

Balance of Power Theory also propounds that states try to prevent the rise of a 'hegemon'. A handful of the scholars, who disapprove 'Balance of Power Theory', sound out that contemporary world structure is unipolar, with United States as the strongest power (economically, politically, and militarily) and there is no counterbalancing taking place to United States' hegemony. The remarkable change in alliances since the demise of the Soviet Union has been the expansion of NATO, and the other thing is Pentagon's drastic increase in defense budget to make US army insurmountable, has not invited any grand alliance from other great power and even no such an alliance is in the offing (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008:22). The scenario presented by the group of scholars seems to be vague. It's been very short time that United States started enjoying status of unipolarity but it does not mean that no power would dare to counterbalance US hegemony in the upcoming decades. Because of US declined power and popularity, rise of other great powers like China, Russia and European Union, reflects that in the coming decades US may face counterbalance by other major powers, as history is the witness that even vast and mighty empires declined and were overtaken by other rising powers.

This does not necessarily mean that the US is in systemic decline, but US is gradually losing that smart power that differentiates it from other major power players. Although the US still possesses incomparable military prowess,

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superior technology and its economy remains the world's largest but alarming for US is that the gap of asymmetric power with others is narrowing. It is therefore being anticipated that due to the global distribution of power shift there are grave chances that the peace, prosperity and liberal ideals would get a severe blow as a consequence of serious conflict. Another analysis is presented about US contemporary hegemony that over the last two decades no major power has posed any serious challenge to US hegemonic designs in world affairs rather some powerful actors most notably Canada, Western European states, India, South Korea, Australia, Singapore and Philippines have joined US that has helped minimizing the conflict among these powers. However, as the hegemonic might that motivated these powers to banwagon US withers away then this international order will be transformed into another kind of international order with more decentralized power. In that scenario with more diffused power structure United States policies and interests may face more challenges by dissident powers and in that case American interests and policies can be challenged by dissenter powers (Zhang, 2011).

China's rise is not seen as favorable by United States and its European allies. According to a senior Bush Administration official over the decades the US policy towards China had been shaped by those who consider China as strategic partner of United States. Those policymakers who view China as strategic competitor demand containment of China. They urge United States should make possible efforts to isolate China politically, contain its rise and should keep China down and out from playing a parallel role to United States (Marquardt, 2011:137-38). In contemporary times United States is chalking out various strategies to contain Chinese rise. To upset balance of power in South Asia and enable India to act as a counter-balancer to China, United States had concluded Indo-US nuclear deal (2005). United States if could not derail China's rise it would impede China's smooth rise only by empowering India as China's counter-weight. India is a developing country with 8 to 10% economic growth rate per annum but soaring energy needs. At present nuclear energy contribution to India is only 3% after engaging into Indo-US nuclear cooperation India's nuclear energy generation capacity would rise to 20,000 MWe by 2020 and would be doubled of it by 2030. India is currently undergoing couple of challenges internally and externally. India can only compete with China if its energy security is ensured couple with permanent membership in United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Analysts are of the view that China is neighbor with three declared nuclear powers (Russia, India and Pakistan) and two undeclared (North Korea, Iran) nuclear states so the disturbance in the regional balance of power can seriously shake China's rise.

China being the biggest stakeholder in South Asian and immediate neighbor of nuclear rivals (India, Pakistan) desires peace in the region which is conducive for China's peaceful rise and beneficial for regional prosperity. Balance of power between India and Pakistan could ensure relative peace in

the region as was witnessed after reaching strategic parity in 1998. Indo-US civil nuclear deal is set to upset regional balance of power which poses a direct threat to regional peace and stability and may impede China's peaceful rise. To reconstitute regional Balance of power between India and Pakistan caused by Indo-US civil nuclear deal, China offered Pakistan with similar civil nuclear deal. Sino-Pakistan civil nuclear deal caused unrest in Washington and New Delhi alike. Under the terms of Sino-Pakistan civil nuclear deal, China would construct two nuclear reactors in Pakistan. United States opposed such a civil nuclear deal outright.

Power transition and Rise of China

Celebrated author Joseph S Nye who pioneered the theory of soft power talks about the power transition. He describes power transition as shift of power among states which means power is changing from West to East. He calls this phenomenon of power transition as return of Asia. Especially after the 2008 world financial crisis peoples started thinking that perhaps this is the end of the American era. President Medvedev of Russia in 2008 stated that this is the beginning of the end of United States power (Nye, 2010).

There are many indicators which reflect that a new world order is emerging in which China would be playing the role of leadership with other powerful states. China is astonishingly rapid in economic boom and militarily. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that China's share of world GDP (15 percent) will be nearing with the U.S. share (18 percent) by 2014. Historically if we take stock of United States share at the end of World War II it was nearly 50 percent whereas China's share of world GDP was only 2 percent in 1980 and 6 percent as in 1995 which has miraculously boomed now. There are good chances that China would overtake the United States as the World's largest economy (measured by market exchange rates) probably this decade or so. Famous economist Arvind Subramanian states the United States was the world's leading manufacturing power in 1960s. Today, it has become essentially a rentier economy, while China is the world's leading manufacturing nation. A recently reported study in the *Financial Times* informs that 58% of total income in America now comes from dividends and interest payments about China that as among the rising powers China becomes wealthier and the defense spending in China will further expand. The *Economist* recently projected that China's defense spending is going to be equal of the United States by 2025. In the upcoming era Beijing will play an active role as "responsible stakeholder" in an international order built by the United States (Layne, 2010).

Fareed Zakaria the author of *Post American World* 2008, in his recent article published in *Washington Post* made it clear upon Mitt Romney the Republican presidential Candidate that "This book is not about the decline of America but rather about the rise of everyone else," He said that I am optimistic about American prosperity and power that even in the forthcoming

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era it would enjoy the status of powerful country in the world but the days of American Unipolarity which America lived after demise of Soviet Union are gone. In post cold war era, about a quarter century United States dominated the world without any powerful economic and political competitors. American ideas, models and Washington consensus received wisdom everywhere but the time has drastically changed.

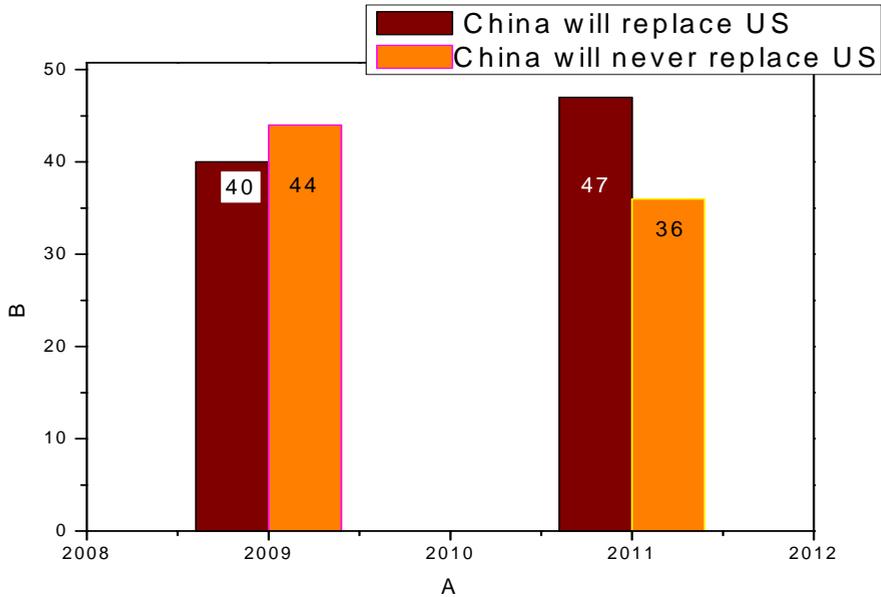
In 1990, China represented 2 percent of global gross domestic product which has quadrupled to 8 percent and is continuously rising. Estimates show that China's economy will become the world's largest between 2016 and 2018. China is making headway not economically but militarily too. China's defense spending may be surpassing America's by 2025. China's 4,300 naval ships have escorted through the Gulf of Aden since 2008. A glistening headquarter of African union was inaugurated in Addis Ababa in January 2012. The \$200 million complex was financed by China and during inauguration the member of Politburo delivered a an amount of \$94 million. Now this world is going to be very different from America-centric world where nothing could happen without the consent of United States. President Obama has been successful in preserving the United States influence in the world by recognizing new forces in international arena. He has recognized the role of new rising powers by replacing old Western club with G20 (group of 20) which is now central decision making forum regarding world economic affairs. His vision of multilateral Organizations, alliance structure and international legitimacy is getting bearing positive results. It was China and Russia's cooperation that clamped tougher sanction against Iran over nuclear issue otherwise America alone couldn't do this legitimately (Zakaria, 2012). President Obama in his April speech at Strasbourg admitted that "we're not always going to be right . . . other people may have good ideas . . . in order for us to work collectively, all parties have to compromise, and that includes us." Or, as *Time* puts it, "America is one of many nations" (Drenzer, 2009).

Jacques Martin the author of "*When China Rules the World*" appreciates smart rise of China and argues persuasively that China would take over as the world's dominant power and then China would play a gumptious role to enhance its power and Beijing would make the rules on its own terms. China's tremendous growth rate is the indicator that the economy is likely to grow without bumps. China having long history of a nation refuses to follow Western electoral style. China's restrictive currency rules have made it World's leading creditor on the contrary US sinks deeper into debt. United States as a result of War on terror has sacrificed the thousands of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Chinese are making money in both countries without losing a single drop of blood (Faison, 2009). Misadventure in Afghanistan and Iraq without a rational policy to handle it America has lost all its image and prestige in these prolonged wars. As a result American popularity in allied states and other has sustained a severe blow. Recent research by Pew Research Centre shows dwindling down American

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popularity couple with anti-Americanism which is the primary cause of declined US hegemony in contemporary times.

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The above graph shows the study by 'Pew research centre' (<http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2011/09/Post-9-11-US-image-final.pdf>) which shows a survey across 18 countries which view increasingly replacing US. Brown line shows that China has already or eventually will replace US as a global leader, whereas yellow line shows that China will never replace United States (Wike, 2011). In the light of above argument it can be easily deducted that United States hegemony is in gradual and constant decline and other great powers are on the rise and within and decade or two the world would undergo a power transformation in which china would be a dominant actor equivalent to US . Power is slowly shifting from West to East and a new world order is impending with the characteristics of de-centered globalism.

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