

The decline of the us hegemony politics essay



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Transport revolution and the industrialization of war in the second half of the nineteenth century turned the United States into a powerful agricultural-industrial-military complex with decisive competitive and strategic advantages vis-à-vis European states. (Arrighi, 2005) At this time the process of shifting the world center started. Since 1920 the United States started dominating in terms of naval share and by the year of 1945 this number of naval capability share became 50%. (Levy, Thompson, 2010) After the sunset of British Empire as a leading state the United States became the world hegemony who now was setting the agenda on the global level. After this shift of the world center a long age of American dominance started. The United States became one of the most, if not the most, prosperous nations in the world.

Even though many people agree that the US remains the only state exercising the world hegemony and the only who has tremendous power to influence and shape the world politics and on which decision is the course of the history is dependent. Decisions that are made by the US government still affect every state and every society. However, already after the Vietnam War there came some hesitations about whether the US is still so powerful as it was thought to be and what is the future of the United States and, particularly, of its status of the world hegemony. Can the United States maintain its world dominance on the global level or cannot? What is the future of the US hegemony? Is it in decline or it will remain as it is? Who will shape the agenda in the global affairs? Will it be the United States or it will be dismissed by some new emerging powers? The questions like these became extremely relevant in the light of the recent global crisis of 2008.

Many scholars have written plenty of articles in which they were engaged in the hard battle of opinions. The main discourse proposed in their numerous works can be summarized in several questions. Whether the US hegemony is really in decline? What are the forces behind this decline? What is the future of the world order? And others like these.

In this essay is will look at such opinions that argue that the US hegemony is really in decline now. Since the concept of “ hegemony” implies diffused aspects of dominance in different spheres like economy, military, politics, and societal, it is needed to define this concept itself. For most political theorists who focus on the state as the fundamental unit of analysis, hegemony represents political and military dominance and thus, is regarded as being a close equivalent to “ superpower”. (Arrighi, 2005) For systemic theorists, “ hegemony” constitutes the ability to lead and shape the system more or less legitimately. (Arrighi, 2005) Here, the focus is less on raw power, and more on the economic and cultural underpinnings of that power. By observing these definitions of the hegemony it can be seen that there are different features of the concept itself. In this essay three separate aspects, which together constitute the American hegemony, will be examined.

First one is the United States’ dominance in the military sphere and its leading position in modern warfare. As Giovanni Arrighi states in his article Hegemony Unravelling (II), already “ the Vietnam War demonstrated that US protection was not as reliable as the United States claimed and its clients expected”. (Arrighi, 2005) “ As a result of this combination of circumstances, US military might lose credibility”, he says. Now less and less states are willing to pay for the US military campaigns. Moreover, the United Kingdom,
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the most faithful partner of the US in Europe, will cut its military spending by up to 20% over the next four years. (IISS, 2010) That could lead to the situation where Britain plays less important role in security operations led by the US abroad. (Bandow, 2010)

In this part I will argue that even though the United States is still, in the words of Altman, the most powerful nation on the earth, particularly, due to its military strength (Altman, 2009), Beijing now plays stronger and stronger leadership role in the region of South East Asia, hence undermining the hegemonic control of and hegemonic leadership in each region of the world practiced for a long time exclusively by the United States. Chinese military fleet now is increasingly active in the region of the South China Sea and South East Asia region as a whole. That leads to some consequences for the United States, particularly, to the loss of its acquired image of the strongest military power that can not be challenged.

The second one is the United States' dominance in the area of economy. The global financial crisis undoubtedly undermined the notion which exposes the US as the world leading economic power. The US became the biggest borrower. (Altman, Haas, 2010) This fact affects the United States in a negative way. Moreover, Washington faced with some domestic economic problems as well. The unemployment rate is growing. Along with it the retirement age could be prolonged and the military may face budget cuts as well. These domestic problems will lead to the situation where the position of the United States, both economic and military, will weaken due to its domestic problems in the economic sphere.

Finally, I will look at the soft power of the United States. Although the American culture, language, beliefs, and values are widespread in a huge number of states today, some sort of decline can be seen in this sphere as well. This decline concerns mainly the decreasing attitudes towards the United States in some Asian and Middle East countries as a result of its military tactic of using drone strikes. As it is noticed in IISS Strategic Comments “ most Pakistanis view the programme as a demeaning infringement of sovereignty that is responsible for heavy casualties. It has increased anti-US sentiments...” (IISS, 2010, 16)

Since these three separate aspects, which taken together constitute the concept of the “ hegemony”, lie in the basis of the American global dominance, it is reasonable to argue that a simultaneous decline in these three areas, or even in only some of them, inevitably leads to the fact that premises the decline of the United States’ status as the world leading power. Thus, this essay is to show the decline of the United States dominance through the decline in the three major fields: military, economy, and soft power.

Military Power

After WWII the USA, as the leading military and economic power, took the responsibility of building and maintaining the security structure in the world. European defense system was based on the principle called collective security, though led by the US. It means that states placing themselves under this security umbrella would resist a possible aggressor all together. In Asia instead it was the bilateral treaties of South East Asian countries and Japan with the United States that created the basis for security architecture

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in the region. Such a structure of the world security is still working today. By signing the security treaties with Asian countries the United States placed itself to the position of the security guarantor in the region who provides stability and security there. It is possible due to the American blue navy that makes it possible to deploy the US's troops in any part of the world and remain there continuously. It means that American fleet is always located in the Pacific Ocean playing its role of the peace guarantor for the SEA states.

People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has in 2010 taken part in numerous exercises, experimented with long-range force projection. (IISS, 2010) On March, 18 flotilla consisting of six military vessels was observed near Miyako strait, near Okinawa Island. (IISS, 2010) After this, on April, 10, ten more ships passed through the same strait once more. (IISS, 2010) All these, anti-pirates campaigns and military trainings in the Pacific Ocean, have shown the significant progress of Chinese navy and its maneuverability. As was mentioned, all trainings of PLAN were focused on the long-range projection of its vessels. (IISS, 2010)

Thus, Beijing demonstrated the progress of its fleet which has shown good results. But that is not all. Increasing numbers of PLAN's trainings is the clear signal of the fact that China is seeking to increase its influence in the region. Some countries consider the military trainings of Chinese army as an effort to increase its control over Pacific preceding the establishment of a long-lasting presence of Chinese navy here. (IISS, 2010) In addition the deputy commander of the North Sea Fleet said that " China needed to protect its maritime territorial integrity through long-distance naval projection". (IISS, 2010)

Hence, the USA was challenged of being removed from its place in the Pacific. In August of current year Admiral Robert Willard, commander of American forces in the Pacific Ocean, stated to journalists that China now is as close as it was never before to the development of the world's first anti-ships ballistic missiles (ASBM). Their range is around 1500-2000 km while a usual long-range missile could flight at the 1000 km maximum. Such a long distance of reach would allow these rockets to hit and destroy the US' aircraft carriers located in the blue waters near the Chinese coast. " Indeed, American power-projection capabilities in East Asia are more vulnerable now than at any time since the end of cold war. We can no longer guarantee the security of a carrier", says Robert S. Ross, Professor of Political Science at Boston College.

For today American military forces has neither alternative to such missiles nor facilities to protect from them. Moreover, they do not have them even in the development. (Cropsey, 2010) All these could change the military equation in Asia-Pacific. (Rajagopalan, 2010)

The significance of such missile system is that it will give opportunity to paralyze American aircraft carriers located in the region. In addition it will create no-go zones for the US naval forces decreasing their presence in the Region. (Rajagopalan, 2010) Thus, in the long-term, it might be possible that the United States would no more able to guarantee security of its Asian allies. And although it is not immediate problem for the USA, American fleet is as vulnerable as never before.

All these, development of a new missile system by Beijing and worsening of capabilities of the US navy, potentially lead to the limited arms race in Asia. (Rajagopalan, 2010) And this concerns not only the willingness of the United States to create defense technology that could rebuild destroyed balance in Asia. This, to a broader extent, concerns the countries of South East Asian region and Japan which could doubt the abilities of the United States to protect them. For example, Vietnam, distrusting the USA, already in 2009 bought 6 Russian made submarines. (IISS, 2010)

Although full dominance of PLAN over US navy in the South East Asia is unlikely in the very near future, the attempt to challenge the American hegemony in the region was definitely successful. That forced US' allies to rethink their attitude to previously trusted partner. Thus, in the long-run, this fact will undoubtedly be of huge importance for organizing security structure in Asia and in the rest of the world as well.

Economic Power

The United States became the strongest economy after the British Empire has moved from that position. Domestic prosperity within the US borders was achieved. Then, the economic power was widely used by the United States to reach the leading position in the international economy. The IMF and the World Bank, two main international organizations dealing within the economic field, were created. It is known that the decisions of these organizations are based on the principle of proportionality. Since the US is a major contributor to the budgets of these organizations, it has a tremendous power to shape and direct the main course of the international economy. However, the financial crisis of 2008 has undermined this position held by

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the US before. Today the fear is rising about US losing this influential position within these organizations. In the words of Stewart Patrick, “ A major strategic challenge for the United States in the coming decades will be integrating emerging powers into international institutions.” (Patrick, 2010) Today many people speak about increasing influence of the BRIC, for example. And this seems to be a reasonable argument if consider at least the fact that, according to Altman and Haass approximately 50 percent of U. S. Treasury debt is now held abroad - 22 percent of it by China, one of the BRIC states, alone. (2010)

Moreover, as it is stated in the article “ American Profligacy and American Power” by Altman and Haass “ the United States is the biggest borrower, and developing nations are its biggest lenders” now. (2010) This fact, definitely, would lead to the situation where the United States loses its economic power and, hence it’s right to dominate and shape the world economy as well. What is happening now is exactly the change of roles between the United States and strong developing countries, in the sense of reversing dependence. As Altman and Haass rightly noticed, “ During a crisis over Taiwan, for example, Chinese central bankers could prove more dangerous than Chinese admirals.” (2010)

However, the United States now have even more important problems at home than they have abroad. For example, as Altman and Haass say in their article, “ The Congressional Budget Office forecasts \$9. 5 trillion of cumulative deficits through 2020—in other words, roughly \$1 trillion per year”. (2010) That surely will lead to some negative outcomes such as increases in health care costs, decreasing family incomes, and decline in

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budgets for research, education, and infrastructure. (Altman, Haass, 2010)
All this would make American people's lives more difficult, undermining the position of US government which is already in trouble now.

On the first of December the "Washington Post" reported on a final report released by the The leaders of President Obama's fiscal commission. The author of the article calls this report as being "full of political dynamite". (Montgomery, Brady, 2010). Among other recommendations there are "sharp cuts in military spending, a higher retirement age and reforms that could cost the average taxpayer an extra \$1, 700 a year", Lori Montgomery and Brady Dennis writes. (Montgomery, Brady, 2010) Among the most painful of those decisions, Bowles, White House chief of staff in the Clinton administration, said, is a recommendation to reduce the federal workforce by 10 percent by the end of the decade, eliminating 200, 000 jobs. This is a really painful decision if consider that the unemployment rate already rose to 9. 8 percent, according to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics quoted by the "Washington Post" on December, 3. (Whoriskey, 2010)

Thus, it can be seen that the United States has faced with some very difficult challenges to solve. It is fair as for the international economy so it is for the domestic one. That, of course will result in a huge dropdown of the American positions in the world, were they economical, military or geopolitical.

Soft Power

Although a great emphasis is made on the military and economic power of a state when speaking about its hegemony, one of the most important pillars of the global dominance is undoubtedly the soft power. Soft power, to be

said, is very difficult to be obtained, but once achieved it is long lasting and influential. Once obtained the soft power starts working in the favor of those who possess it and can incredibly strengthen his power position. In the words of

Joseph S. Nye, “ soft power is more difficult”, comparing with military and economic ones, “ because many of its crucial resources are outside the control of governments, and their effects depend heavily on acceptance by the receiving audiences”. (Nye, 2004) Moreover, the soft power resources often work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, and sometimes take years to produce the desired outcomes, he states. (Nye, 2004)

Taking the example of the war in Iraq where the United States were able to destroy the regime of Saddam, but had difficulties in the projection of the soft power. As one former military officer has observed, the mark of a great campaign is not what it destroys, but what it creates, and on that question the jury will remain out for a number of years on the Iraq War. (Nye, 2004) Therefore, it is clear that “ generally, soft-power resources are slower, more diffuse, and more cumbersome to wield than hard-power resources”. (Nye, 2004)

The incredible importance of the soft power in spreading one state’s influence over the others was understood a long time ago. One of the first nations who actively have been using soft power in its own interests was France. As Joseph S. Nye says, “ In the 17th and 18th centuries, France promoted its culture throughout Europe. French not only became the

language of diplomacy, but was even used at some foreign courts such as Prussia and Russia". (Nye, 2004)

In contrast, The United States was a relative latecomer to the idea of using information and culture for the purposes of diplomacy. (Nye, 2004).

However, although the United States' accumulation and creation of soft power was, as previously stated by Joseph S. Nye, a slowly process, it has achieved impressive results. And, as was noted before, once achieved the soft power starts working in a great advantage of its possessor. The collapse of the Soviet Union became the greatest example of the invincibility of the American liberal model of " life". It was recognized, by the majority of population, that the American political system, educational system, and life style in general is the best one, taking into consideration the absence of its real competitors.

The main pillars of the American soft power are English language, which today dominates such spheres as politics and education; universal values, such as human rights, freedom of speech and other freedoms, which originally came and elaborated in the West, particularly in the United States. Another, and the most important component of the American soft power in my opinion, is the dominance in the sphere of higher education exercised by the United States over other countries. There is no doubt that the United States' educational system is one of the best, if not the best, system in the world. Nye showed the statistics that says that the London based Times Higher Educations 2009 list of the top ten universities includes six in the United States. (Nye, 2010) " Americans win more Nobel Prizes and published more scientific papers in peer-reviewed journals that do the citizens of any

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other country” (Nye, 2010). Hence, the scientific field, especially one of social sciences, has become dominated by the US-led researchers. The United States spends twice as much on higher education as a percentage of GDP as do France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom. (Nye, 2010) In addition, in the United States there is no obstacle to the development of the social sciences expressed in the form of government who wants to keep population under control by prohibiting any critics of ruling regime and thus, restricting freedom of speech and freedom of press, what undoubtedly leads to the slowdown in the scientific progress. In comparison with the former Soviet states and China, the United States has a tremendous advantage when speaking about higher education, and about dominance in the scientific sphere.

However, the perception of the United States by also common people, outside the scientific sphere, constitutes a great part of the American soft power. This is especially vital in such states as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran. Using exclusively military power, in the form of troops, and economic power, in the form of economic sanctions against other states (i. e. Iran) the United States will not be able to achieve the willing results, while ignoring the use of soft power and public opinion in these states. The United States has created a huge gap between American troops and people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and especially Iran either by using intensive drone strikes which are common source of so called “ collateral damage”, what simply means the killing of civilians. As Alex J. Bellamy in his article published in “ International Relations” journal said “ the US military relied heavily on unverified intelligence provided by Afghans for the identification

and targeting of mobile targets or so-called ' targets of opportunity', rather than placing American troops on the ground to search for and verify military targets. (Bellamy, 2005) As a result of the flawed and unverified intelligence provided by Afghans, the US launched a number of attacks against civilian targets. Most famously, this included the bombing of a wedding party." (Bellamy, 2005) That fact has damaged the possibility of exercising the soft power by the US. We can see that the burning of American flag became a widely spread practice in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Therefore, though the United States was able to create great soft power, it seems as losing this power as a result of their military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, even though America still dominates some fields constituting the soft power, the decline of the people's perception of the United States is here. However, this perception still can be changed by changing the means of waging the wars: for example by reducing the number of drone strikes and then replacing them with boots on the ground. Thus, although the soft power of the United States is in the decline, it can be rehabilitated yet.

Conclusion

In this essay we saw the decline of the American hegemony on the example of its three main constitutes. The following conclusions can be drawn from the facts considered above.

First of all, it is clear that the United States has faced huge problems in the economic sphere. It will hurt the United States' positions both in the international realm and, even more importantly, the internal one. It is

axiomatic that a state which is unable to overcome its domestic problems can not dominate and lead the world. It is incredibly difficult at least, if not completely impossible. Correspondingly, the United States is less and less able to sustain its global dominance, considering its economic difficulties.

The same, however less visible, decline we can see in the area of armed forces. Even though the United States still dominates the world in the military sphere and still constitutes the basis for the security structure globally, there are very clear attempts undertaken by some states, especially China, which put the current US status of the only global power in terms of military strength under serious hesitations.

The soft power of the United States seems to be the least of all damaged hitherto. However, although English language still holds the leading position in the area of international, diplomatic, educational, and scientific affairs, and American values are still shared by the majority of people, today the image of American eagle arouse more and more negative feelings among increasing number of people all over the world. And among all these three factors it is the soft power which depends solely on activities of the US government and the US representatives and, hence can be reanimated by their only efforts, though not easily.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a clear decline of the United States hegemony now. The situation is, nevertheless, improvable. It is not a dead-end for American eagle. However, in order to reestablish its dominance the United States' government should elaborate more efficient policies in economic sphere and should review its military strategy thoroughly. It was

always so that it is American people, and only them, who are responsible for the future of their country. Nothing has changed; this fact is still fair today.