

Us hegemony



Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, the United States enjoyed a privileged geopolitical position. Its military and economic resources allowed establishing and sustaining its hegemony over Europe that was lying in ruins after WWII. The Second World War weakened those, who could potentially present an economic and political threat to the U. S. The Cold War as an ongoing political conflict between the United States and the Communist bloc facilitated the U. S.'s transition to a new level of hegemonic performance. However, nothing comes easy. Nothing is eternal. The U. S.'s present political position suggests that its hegemony underwent serious changes since the end of WWII. The geopolitical, economic, and military mistakes made by the U. S., coupled with the rise of new superpowers, the collapse of the USSR, and the emergence of the multi-polar reality, became the essential drivers of the U. S.'s decline as hegemony.

United States: The Prosperity of the Political Hegemony and Its Decline

The history of the American hegemony covers several decades, since the beginning of WWII until present. The rise of the United States as an international superpower was a logical product of multiple factors and forces. After the end of WWII, the United States was in a privileged economic and military position. " Its basic economic forces had been growing steadily stronger in terms of technology, competitiveness, and quantitative share of world production for 100 years." In the meantime, Europe and Asia were left in ruins after the destructive military fight against their fascist enemies. Those, who could potentially become U. S.'s economic rivals, were focused

on self-restoration after WWII. As a result, America had enough freedom to grow itself into a superpower.

The United States' privileged position immediately after WWII rested on four essential pillars. The order, which the U. S. also managed to establish, was described by scholars as "pax americana". First, after the Second World War, the world's major industrial powers were facing the period of economic and industrial reconstruction. The war had weakened their economic and industrial position, The U. S. had everything needed to build a new network of allies, which would need its economic and political support. It started to promote the idea of "freedom through democracy", which greatly contributed to its hegemonic position and created an atmosphere of opposition against the communist countries.

The second pillar of U. S.'s expanding hegemony was the ideological arrangement between the United States and the Soviet Union to avoid any open military actions against one another. The arrangement was not extraordinary and did not require any considerable effort, because the USSR was extremely interested in having a reserved zone for the development of its communist bloc. Third, at the end of the Second World War, the U. S. found itself in the state of remarkable internal unity, which justified its assuming responsibility for promoting peace in the world system. The U. S. became the main source of anti-communist messages, and the end of racial discrimination put America in a position of the social and political role model other states would have to follow. Fourth, and final, the power and liberation of the third world countries and their modest efforts to reestablish themselves in the new international order gave an impetus for the US.'s

efforts to keep those countries under control. Under the influence of those changes, the U. S. was able to create a unipolar international reality, in which all major geopolitical actions would take place with the permission and under the supervision of the United States.

However, nothing is eternal, and the 1960s witnessed a profound shift in the U. S.'s political position. The period of U. S.'s undeniable hegemony lasted only twenty-five years. Between 1967 and 1973, under the influence of numerous economic and military forces, the country faced a serious decline in its geopolitical power. Different scholars refer to different aspects of the U. S.'s hegemonic decline. Wallerstein speaks about three major difficulties affecting the U. S. at that time: the economic crisis, the numerous revolutions of 1968, and the emergence of new communist powers, which did not agree with the outcomes of the Yalta conference and chose to join the communist bloc, e. g. China. None of those aspects could be considered as a serious strategic mistake on the side of the U. S. However, in addition, at the end of the 1960s-the beginning of the 1970s, the country had to go through other problems, including the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War undermined the U. S.'s peaceful position and the image of prestige. The Vietnam War also broke the status quo brought by the Yalta conference – the status quo that benefited the United States. Failure to win the Vietnam War became a serious blemish on the U. S.'s image as a military and economic superpower, because the country invested huge resources in its fight against the Vietnamese and still lost. That was one of the major mistakes made by America – a mistake that eventually cost it its hegemonic geopolitical image.

Changes in U. S. hegemony were also influenced by the dramatic shifts in Eastern Europe, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the tragic events of 9/11. The elimination of the Soviet Empire had far-reaching impacts on the United States as political hegemony. For years, the USSR had served as a convenient justification of U. S.'s efforts to protect itself and its allies from the ostensible political opponent. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the vision of hegemony maintained by the United States was no longer legitimate. America had to rethink its policies and decisions and switch its attention to the areas that could help it preserve its privileged geopolitical position. In the years following the demise of the USSR and September 11, 2001, the country was actively involved in the military efforts in the Balkans and the Middle East. The Iraq invasion became a convenient way to reestablish the vision of military and economic superiority of America in the changing world. The events of 9/11 confirmed the U. S.'s vulnerability to external threats and attacks. The U. S. lost its hegemonic position with few chances to have it restored. Being in the state of military opposition against at least one non-democratic state became part of the American political realities. To a large extent, instead of being truly powerful and consistent, the U. S. was trying to prove that being in war was the essence of international politics.

The rise of the political and economic power in the European Union and China should not be ignored. Those factors had great impacts on the U. S.'s place in the geopolitical landscape. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the EU and China continued to transform the international relations system. Between the beginning of the 1980s and the end of the 1990s, China

enjoyed a 10-percent annual increase in its GDP. The country's leaders quickly realised the value of economic growth for their geopolitical weight: the former worked for the benefit of the latter, and China quickly surpassed the United States as the world's most prosperous economy. By 2020, China is likely to become a new global power. In addition, the EU is regaining its position as a powerful economic and military bloc. Despite the financial difficulties experienced by many EU states, its position in the international relations order can hardly be underestimated. As a political union, the EU had been working for more than five decades, and it has good chances to come up as a new collective force against the background of the changing political realities in the U. S.

U. S. Hegemony: The Current State

After so many political hits and military failures, the only question is what position the U. S. is currently taking and whether at all it can be regarded as being in the state of hegemony. The answer is obvious: in a multi-polar world, the U. S. is no longer hegemonic, and the chances to restore its privileged position are minor. The decline of U. S. hegemony was a complex product of multiple internal and external forces, from the loss in the Vietnam War to the rise of new superpowers. At present, the U. S. has only economic sanctions and military intervention threats left in its arsenal. The United States no longer possesses any superiority in its economic resources, about which Posen (2003) writes. On the contrary, the growing burden of the international financial debt hinders U. S.'s attempts to look powerful. The power of the U. S. dollar is no longer unchallenged. Meantime, new powers are emerging; among others are Russia and India. These new powers will

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profoundly alter the current system of international relations. Most probably, international institutions will lose their decision-making power, and the nonhegemonic U. S. will not be able to revive them. In any case, it is clear that the American hegemony will not be back, due to the economic, military, and political constraints imposed on the U. S. over the past 30 years.

Conclusion

At the end of WWII, the geopolitical and economic conditions favoured the rapid expansion of the U. S. hegemony. The so-called "pax americana" rested on several essential pillars, the most important being the country's economic prosperity and its remarkable internal unity. However, the age of privileges lasted only twenty-five years. At the beginning of the 1970s, the U. S. hegemony started to decline. As a result of its strategic mistakes and under the influence of external forces, the United States could no longer retain its powerful political position. The Vietnam War was, probably, the biggest mistake that undermined the U. S.'s solid strategic position in the international order. The emergence of China as a new superpower, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the events of 9/11 confirmed the country's military and political vulnerability. The multipolarity in the new international relations system leaves little room for hegemonies, and the U. S. will have to reconcile with the loss of its super-power in the long run