

Revisiting international relations legacy on hegemony

Decline of
American
hegemony

The decline of American hegemony from comparative perspectives

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the decline of American hegemony as one of the most prominent crises of the modern world order, from a broader perspective that transcends narrow traditional interpretations. The paper assumes that the September 11 events in 2001 have launched the actual decline in American hegemony. Tracing the evolution of US global strategy over the past two decades, the study seeks to analyze the main causes and repercussions of the decline of US hegemony, which would provide a bird's eye view of what the current global system is going through.

Design/methodology/approach – The study investigates the decline in American hegemony through a longitudinal within-case analysis which focuses on the causal path of decline in hegemony in the case of the USA, since the events of September 11, 2001, and tries to identify the causal mechanisms behind this decline. Following George and Bennet (2005), the study uses process tracing to examine its research question. Process-tracing method seeks to identify the intervening causal process – causal chain or causal mechanisms or the steps in a causal process – that leads to the outcome of a particular case in a specific historical context (Mahoney, 2000; Bennet and Elman, 2006). The study chose this method, as it offers more potential for identifying causal mechanisms and theory testing (George and Bennet, 2005); it opted for a specific procedure, among the variety of process-tracing procedures listed by George and Bennet, which is the detailed narrative presented as a chronicle, accompanied by explicit causal hypotheses. Using this process tracing procedure, the study assumes that American hegemony has witnessed dramatic changes in the aftermath of critical junctures, particularly the events of September 11, 2001, and the financial crises, 2008, which contributed significantly to this decline. Consequently, it traces the impact of these events on the state of American hegemony, in light of the review of contributions of different theories on hegemony in the field of international relations, both traditional and critical. Consequently, introducing the theoretical framework used in the study (the four-dimensional model of hegemony), which transcends criticisms of previous theories.

Findings – The crises of the modern world order and the decline of American hegemony – being the main manifestation of such crises – revealed the inability of the traditional and critical approaches reviewed in the study to interpret this decline and those crises. The reason behind that was the inability of these interpretations to reflect the various dimensions of American hegemony and its decline since the September 11 events. This highlights the importance of using the four-dimensional model, which combines different factors in the analysis and has proved to be an appropriate model for studying the case of American hegemony and its decline after the events of September 11, as it deals with the phenomenon of hegemony as a social relationship based on specific social networks.

Originality/value – Despite the currency and relevance of the decline of US hegemony for both the academic and political world, the topic needed to be analyzed systemically and addressed in a thorough



scientific way. Through the application of theoretical concepts into the analysis of empirical data, this study contributes to a field where too often the discourse about decline of American hegemony is led without the required theoretical or conceptual considerations.

Keywords Hegemony, American decline, Gramsci, US global hegemony

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In the past two decades, the world order has witnessed a series of major crises, perhaps the most important of which is the decline of American hegemony or the so-called crisis of US leadership of the global system. Despite the fact that American decline has started in periods prior to the events of September 11, 2001, it is said that the real decline of the American hegemony was triggered by those events.

Considering the decline of American hegemony, questions such as whether the world order will undergo a transformational structural change versus the possibility of its survival and management of its crises, arise. There is a need for deeper analysis and understanding of the decline of American hegemony and its different dimensions which would provide a bird's eye view of what this global system is going through.

Despite the currency and relevance of the decline of US hegemony for both the academic and political world, the topic needed to be analyzed systemically and addressed in a thorough scientific way. Through the application of theoretical concepts into the analysis of empirical data, this study contributes to a field where too often the discourse about decline of American hegemony is led without the required theoretical or conceptual considerations.

In this context, the study examines the decline of American hegemony over the world order following 9/11, as it reviews the contributions of different theories on hegemony in the field of international relations, both traditional and critical. The theoretical framework used in the study (the four-dimensional model of hegemony), transcends criticisms of previous theories.

The study goes on to review the experience of the decline of American hegemony after the events of September 11, the main dimensions of this decline, and review the key features of the US global strategy following these events. Finally, the study assesses the contribution of theoretical perspectives and framework reviewed in the study, and how they explained the experience of the decline of American hegemony over the past two decades.

Hegemony in international relations theories

The study examines the theoretical literature on the subject of hegemony in world system from different perspectives (traditional and critical) in the field of international relations. Realism and liberalism dominated traditional approaches on the subject of hegemony. Meanwhile, Gramscian perspective expressed the contributions of the critical approaches. The theoretical framework used in the study will be further outlined and explained.

First: traditional perspectives of global hegemony

Traditionally, the concept of global hegemony has been analyzed through two major perspectives in the field of international relations: realist and liberal perspectives. In general, traditional perspectives share a central assumption about the importance of the continuity of the international system. Although they differ in how it continues and the role of the hegemonic state in it. In contrast, the critical approaches highlight the need of transformation of the core structure of the international system to overcome the current crisis.

The realist perspective of hegemony

The concept of hegemony in classical realism assumes a status of power imbalance in the international system. One country, defined by its possession of material power, has the advantage over the rest of states, enabling it to exercise leadership or domination over this international system (Giplin, 1981, War and change in world politics). This inherently grants the hegemonic state a great capacity for coercion, influence and control over the international system structure and, consequently, the international behavior of its constituent units (Goldstone, 1987). Thus, the unipolar international order defines the system of hegemony for the realists.

Hegemonic stability is considered one of the most important realist contributions to hegemony analysis. The theory assumes that the international system is likely to remain stable with the existence of one hegemonic state. Furthermore, the fall of this hegemonic state or the decline in its hegemony reduces the chances of stability in the international system (Kindelberger, 1973).

The theory of hegemonic stability assumed that, the decline of hegemonic power would be accompanied by the rise of a new competitor, the prospect of war will increase, and the emergence of a new regime will result from the outbreak of a world war or a hegemonic war between the previous hegemonic state and the rising competitor, creating a new system of hegemony (Giplin, 1988, The theory of hegemonic war).

The realist analysis of hegemony explained how a state rises to the hegemonic position in the international system, and clarified the mechanisms and relationship between the rising and declining hegemonic powers. However, realism was heavily criticized for being limited by defining a hegemonic state primarily on a materialistic dimension of power, being the sole indicator for a state's survival as a leader of the international system or its decline. This alienates non-material dimensions of hegemony, such as cultural dimensions, in favor of material ones – particularly military and economic dimensions.

In addition, the realistic interpretation of hegemony was criticized for focusing on State – specifically superpowers – as the only actor capable of establishing a hegemonic system. Therefore, neglecting the role of other actors in influencing and building global hegemony.

In an attempt to analyze the relationship between system structure and states strategies, Strategic hedging theory (Tessman and Wolfe, 2011; Tessman, 2012; Wolfe, 2013) offered an explanation to the behavior of second tier states -like China and Russia- against the system leader, in cases where the international system witnesses a change in its structure; when the previously unipolar system is going through a process of power de-concentration and the hegemonic power is declining (Tessman, 2012). The theory aims at finding a balance between soft and hard balancing by examining the strategies followed by second tier states (the hedging states, which adopt a specific behavior against the system leader where they attempt to improve their competitive ability [military and economic] while avoiding direct confrontation with the system leader, to achieve their own security) (Salman and Geeraerts, 2015).

The liberal perspective of hegemony

A decade later, when the theory of hegemonic stability emerged, neo-liberalism criticized that theory and its assumptions. Neoliberalists, contrary to the theory of hegemonic stability, concluded that the founding rules of the system created by the hegemonic state may continue even after the decline of that state.

Focusing on institutional robustness and the power of rule-based pluralism, Robert Keohane developed the idea that international system can continue to operate through its international institutions even after the collapse or decline of its founding hegemonic power. He stressed that:

Hegemony and international systems may be complementary, or even to a certain extent, an alternative to each other: both work to make agreements possible and help facilitate compliance with rules (Keohane, 1984).

In this context, John Ikenberry emphasized this idea of institutionalism, which was based on the liberal and constitutional nature of American hegemony. The global system governed by American-led liberal hegemony, depends on a cooperative and diplomatic solution to conflict through institutions governed by international rules and regulations (Ikenberry, 1998).

The end of the Cold War, marked the emergence of the concept of “global governance” to reflect this international liberal understanding of “good hegemony” coordinated by major powers with the help of supra-national organizations and transnational civil society (Ikenberry, 1999).

Therefore, neo-liberalism has succeeded in shifting the analysis on hegemony from focusing on the subject of hegemony to analyzing the conditions of hegemony and its mechanisms of action, where global hegemony from a liberal perspective relates to international leadership coordinated through multilateral norms, and institutions. In this context, direct military and diplomatic coercion can be employed by the hegemonic power, not as a general rule but as an exception.

Second: critical perspectives of global hegemony

For the critical approaches, the study focuses on the contributions of the Gramscian perspective. Critical perspectives included important factors in the analysis of hegemony – they primarily highlighted the important role of values and culture in building global hegemony, not confined to a hegemonic state. Instead, it is based on an alliance of a group of forces led by a hegemonic state.

The Gramscian perspective of hegemony

For Gramsci, hegemony is defined as a class alliance system in which a “dominant class” exercises political leadership over “sub-classes” by “winning their convictions” (Grundy, 2012).

The primary focus of Gramsci is how hegemony works through a combination of coercion and consent. Hegemony in this context means the process by which the ruling class – or the leading group in society – transforms its interests and values into common values for all members of this society. It permeates a whole system of values, attitudes, beliefs and ethics of the ruling class within civil society, including its structures and activities such as unions, schools, churches and families. This system of beliefs and values, etc., transcends to the dependent classes, which initially represents a supporter of the existing system, and the class interests that control it (Gramsci, 1971).

Based on that concept, a group of scholars who were later called *the new Gramscians*, led by Robert Cox and Stephen Gill, applied Gramsci’s ideas of hegemony to the global system. Robert Cox envisions the analysis of global hegemony as a pattern of class forces, state structures and international organizations that maintain the control of capitalism not only by relying on hard power, but by recruiting and appeasing states, and social movements that oppose the current global distribution of political and economic power (Cox, 1983).

The new Gramscian School has developed analysis about origins and developments and possible transformations of global hegemony. It has provided explanations for how hegemony continues through close cooperation between powerful elites within and outside the regions of the Center in the world order and also through a vast network of economic institutions and international politics, known as global governance. It also addressed the concept of socialization within the global capitalist structure and how pressure is exerted on

national governments to apply the rules and mechanisms of capitalism to serve the dominant power. According to this approach, hegemony declines when those who are subject to hegemony stop believing in its principles and values. This leads to the rise of resistance to the hegemonic state.

Resisting hegemony

Gramsci's theories about resistance to hegemony were developed by the new Gramscians to become applicable to the global system level under the label of the War of Position and the War of the Movement. *The war of the movement* is the direct opposition to and confrontation with the system of hegemony. Such opposition is expressed through various means. Applied to the contemporary global system, this term could include anti-globalization measures or global justice movements, such as those aimed at countering the flaws of neo-liberal globalization through mass demonstrations.

The war of the position reflects the discussion of hegemonic ideas and attempts to overcome and replace them. This platform spreads the culture of anti-hegemony using the same methods of building hegemony through civil society, to build a historical block that represents the corner stone of resistance and the challenge of hegemony. According to this Gramscian vision, only through the war of position, in the long term, structural changes can be made.

Hence, the war of position is the time consuming process, during which ideas are discussed, disputed, challenged, defended and replaced. For example, Gramsci cited the forms of boycotts, nonviolent demonstrations or confrontations that occur at all levels of civil society (Gramsci, 1971). In summary, War of position can be seen as the way of contesting the main assumptions of the hegemonic system, through areas of media, popular culture and religion.

It can be argued that the contributions of traditional and critical perspectives to the explanation of the concept of hegemony have greatly influenced the evolution of the concept by including different factors in the analysis. Traditional theoretical approaches have contributed to the analysis of hegemony by focusing – *in the realist perspective* – primarily, on the hegemonic power, which is confined to a nation-state that is superior to other states in material capabilities.

Meanwhile, *the liberal perspective* analysis has focused on the cooperation between States and the durability of institutional procedures as a condition of maintaining the international system – even with the absence of the hegemonic State, the institutionalization of the system is the focus.

In contrast, the critical perspective – due to its interest in root cause change rather than Band-Aid reform or preservation – has focused on expanding the dimensions of hegemony. It highlighted the importance of non-material factors and their impact on the origins, continuity and influence of the hegemonic power.

In this context, the *Gramscian approach* paid attention to how hegemony was created through a mixture of coercion and consent, emphasizing the need to build consent. Hegemony predominates when the consensual aspects of power are at the forefront. The approach focuses on the role of informal actors and the role of ideology in building successful hegemonic relations, intertwined with the structural possibility of creating successful resistance when the need arises. Hence, this approach does not limit the subject of hegemony to one superior state, but assumes that hegemony is determined by transnational social forces, dominating a particular pattern of production.

In brief, each of the previous approaches dealt with the concept of hegemony by focusing on certain dimensions and neglecting others (superiority in material power, stability of

institutional procedures, the dissemination of values and the formation of identity). The contemporary experience of American hegemony proved that a uni-dimensional approach does not reflect the reality of hegemony. Hence, understanding the theoretical framework of the study is of vital importance, in light of these criticisms.

Hegemony as a movement of power: the four-dimensional approach to hegemony

The study draws upon the so-called “four-dimensional approach to hegemony” to contribute to the interpretation of global hegemony and how it functions (Antoniades, 2008). This approach was derived from the critique of previous approaches to the study of global hegemony. They provided suggestions and insights on how global hegemony worked. Ultimately, they failed to provide a holistic theory to study hegemony because they focused on specific factors of analysis and neglected other important ones, without which global hegemony and the post-Cold War transformations could not be understood.

This model is based on understanding *hegemony as a movement of power*, and focusing on the nature of relationship between power and those who exercise it, resist it or empower it. It divides hegemony into four models based on two main questions:

First, to what extent power can be classified as an external characteristic of the subject of the hegemony (for example, military power) as opposed to something related to its internal configuration (e.g. identity). The *second* relates to the purpose of power and the extent it seeks to change the external behavior of the actor subject to hegemony, as opposed to affecting its internal structure.

In the first case, power targets the external behavior of the actor subject to hegemony”, while in the latter case, it targets its internal composition.

On this basis, this approach assumes that there are four models of hegemony as follows:

Coercion-based hegemony (outside/out model). This model refers to the effective use of power capabilities by an actor toward another actor or group of actors. In this context, power is not related to self-beliefs or identity formation, but is treated as an external ownership of the hegemonic power, and to actors subject to hegemony. In this model, there is a clear hegemonic power (mostly a state) that possesses the superpower and a clear object which are the rest of states or actors in the international system.

Accordingly, according to this approach, there is only one dimension to power: hegemony based on coercion and the use of material force from the top down. The presence and reproduction of hegemony depends on the ability of the hegemonic power to maintain its advantage and superiority in power and material resources.

In this context, the concepts of hegemony and hegemonic power overlap, where hegemony is the period in which hegemonic power is governing and the infrastructure established by this governance. The period and infrastructure end with the decline and collapse of the hegemonic power.

Consent-based hegemony (outside/in model). This model also assumes that there are two clear sides of hegemony (the hegemonic power, the actors subject to it) and depends on the effective use of force from the top down. However, the goal of power is different from the previous model, where power is aimed at influencing the self-understanding and self-perception of the actors subject to hegemony. In this context, power is primarily related to consent, values, preferences, beliefs or identity. Thus, the reproduction of hegemony does not depend on the superiority in terms of material resources, but on the ability of the hegemonic power to maintain the confidence of the various actors within the system of hegemony in a set of beliefs, tendencies, values and ideas imposed by that hegemonic power.

Attraction- based hegemony (inside/out model). This model is similar to the previous model in terms of its emphasis on consent, values and personal beliefs. However, there is a

fundamental difference between the two models, where the attraction based hegemony model is based on the existence of two clear parties to hegemony and the effective use of power by one party over another. By contrast, there are no clear sides of hegemony under the attraction-based hegemony.

According to this model, hegemony can be conceived as a society that tries to export its values to the external environment and calls on different actors to join or imitate its own way of existence, but it does not target a specific audience. Hence, hegemony tries to attract and seduce, but by its very nature is able to coexist with multiple and varied models of consent-based hegemony. In their efforts to influence global policy structures, they employ a restorative strategy with their potential competitors. The European Union is the most prominent example of this type of hegemony.

The life-based hegemony (inside-in model). This model presents a different understanding of hegemony compared to previous models. Here, hegemony is conceived as a decentralized tool of power that governs human life from within. It is a group of forces that are propagated and re-produced at the subject level. Thus, hegemony reflects the movement of power from the bottom down. Hegemony is not about imposing restrictions or providing incentives for those subordinate to it, but about influencing their values and preferences.

It is similar to what Foucault referred to as the transition from the hegemony of discipline to control. This indicates a shift in the pattern of production of hegemony itself. In societies of discipline, the power tool that regenerates hegemony has relied on intermediary institutions, such as the army, prison and school to impose hegemony. In “hegemony of control, it is replaced by a lifelong system of skills, jobs, and ever-changing trends so that the self is permanently rediscovered.

According to this aforementioned quadrilateral division, hegemony can be thought of in four different ways: hegemony as a product of: coercion, consent, attraction, and life.

This approach emphasizes the interdependence of the four dimensions of hegemony. In which, the four dimensions (coercion, consent, attraction, life) cannot be treated in isolation from each other, but must be considered in constant interaction with one another. Any change in one aspect affects the rest and affects the nature of hegemony. For example, any significant increase in coercion-based hegemony leads to an imbalance between coercion and consent, as occurred in the case of the USA following the events of September 11.

This approach is important in answering the main question of the study, as it focuses on the different dimensions of hegemony and how they are exercised. This corresponds to the case of American hegemony since the September 11 events, and the multifaceted manifestations, forms and tools of hegemony, that is not limited to one dimension (coercion, approval, attraction, life), despite the fact that hegemony may rely excessively on certain dimensions – for example, coercion – at certain periods of time.

American hegemony after September 11: beginning of an end?

The events of 9/11 represented a pivotal shift in the American strategy of hegemony in the world system.

On the one hand, the weight of the military dimensions of hegemony has significantly increased after the USA has globalized security threats and defined terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as the most dangerous threats to international peace and security. In this context, American hegemony has adopted several strategies such as the preemptive wars to provide defensive protection for its land and bases abroad. Various regions of the world have witnessed escalating levels of American unilateral military intervention. In addition to the deployment of US forces in different parts of the world.

The political dimensions of American hegemony focused on the American division of international axes of friendship and hostility based on the position on the war on terrorism. The identification of specific areas and their linkage to the threat of terrorism, specifically the Muslim world, which has become the focus of the USA as a major source of this threats in the American official perception, and launching global projects such as the Greater Middle East project in 2002, which experience has proven to promote American hegemony in the region. It also witnessed the strengthening of European and American relations and their unification under the banner of the war on terrorism.

Thus, the USA used the events of 9/11 to tighten the American hegemony over the world in terms of the centrality of American military power, control of the global economy and support for the dissemination of Western cultural value systems (Mostafa, 2015, Global change from critical islamic cvilizational perspective).

After a period of implementing the American global strategy and attempts to tighten American hegemony in the world order, several studies have started analyzing the repercussions of the events of 9/11, their negative impact on the American power globally, and its position as the leader of the world order. Some affirmed that these events sat the first block toward the end of American hegemony era, and thus the rise of new international forces to compete with American influence in many parts of the world (Barber, 2011). As Andy Hoffman states, "September 11 marked the beginning of the end of American hegemony, or the end of its role as a superpower, not because of the damage caused by what the United States called Islamic terrorists, but because of the damage done to the United States itself by its administration. Ever since, the attacks of September 11 accelerated the forces that pushed the United States down the slope of the chain of world powers" (Hoffman, 2009).

The US global strategy adopted in the post-9/11 period has marked the beginning of a new phase of the American leadership of the world order, in which the essential elements of the American soft power has been undermined significantly, following the excessive use of military force in Iraq and Afghanistan invasions. Both wars have not yielded the desired results. The cost of the war on terrorism has far surpassed its achievements – Congress estimated direct costs in 2009 at \$900bn. (Belasco, 2009).

In this context, it can be said that the US war on terrorism has yielded the following results,

On the one hand, the global credibility of the USA has declined significantly, especially after the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Attempts by the USA to use its military force, in both the war on al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and the occupation of Iraq, has failed. The American forces could not keep up with the "street war" adopted by the armed militias which targeted US forces. Thus, the American "show of power" attempt turned into new evidence of the weakness of the USA and thus its inability to lead the global system on its own (Hashood, 2013).

In this regard, Jeremy Suri confirmed that:

Our military actions, from Afghanistan and Iraq to Libya and Syria, reflected the increased investment in military power, the decline in interest in political change, economic development and institution-building in the countries we have intervened in, even though these are the basic requirements of democratic freedoms. The fear of terrorism has justified the excessive suspension of good governance, ultimately creating a more fertile base for terrorists (Suri, 2017).

On the other hand, these wars have affected the American economy significantly, as it was one of the most important reasons behind the financial crisis that hit the USA in 2008. The administration devoted millions of dollars to wars that did not bear fruit in the end. The number of American deaths is nearly three thousand and those with those with disabilities

about twenty thousand, not to mention of the number of casualties among Iraqis (Kemberly, 2019).

Third, anti-American sentiment has grown. As the Bush administration shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq, and as US counter-terrorism efforts expanded, many parts of the world turned against the USA. The Guantanamo prison scandal and the Scorpio scandal have further eroded the image of the USA and its moral status. Thus, anti-Americanism on a large scale has been a major feature of world public opinion throughout Bush's era (Wike, 2011).

In summary, the USA – in the context of its war on what it called international terrorism – has been involved in a series of costly wars. Over time, it has become a tool of attrition of its military and economic capabilities and its position in the world order, as well as its reputation abroad for the abuses committed by US forces and Scandals against the prisoners and the peoples of the region (Alghanooshi, 2011). The legitimacy of the political and cultural power of the USA has also eroded after the USA has used its position as the hegemonic state to pursue narrow national goals by using military force unilaterally (Mark Beeson, 2004).

World economic crisis 2008: deepening the world system crisis

American hegemony has witnessed a major shift in 2008 with the beginning of the global financial crisis. The crisis warned the US Administration of the dangers of the military burden of foreign interventions and wars. This has happened after eight years of the American administration's perception – under the Bush administrations with their prevailing neoconservative ideology – that military power is the cornerstone of the US strategy to maintain hegemony. Thus, the financial crisis, which reached its peak in the late months of 2008, attested the credibility of these warnings and revealed the shortcomings of the economic policies of the neoconservatives at the same time (Mostafa, 2009, Super powers and big powers).

The key indicators of the crisis were the US trade deficit with China, the huge accumulation of foreign exchange reserves in Beijing, and the migration of industrialization and investment to China. Such developments have been linked to what could be called major structural weaknesses of the US economy, highlighted by the crisis, which include very low levels of domestic savings, weakening of the dollar, and structural debt in the private and public sectors. According to the US Department of Labor, 8.7 million jobs (about 7 per cent) were abandoned from February 2008 to February 2010, and real GDP shrank by 4.2 per cent between the fourth quarter of 2007 and the second quarter of 2009, causing an economic recession considered the largest since the Great Depression (Marht).

The most significant impact of the financial crisis was the change in geopolitical balance as a result of the change in wealth and power balance between East and West. The rising role of China and its challenge to US power has gained considerable attention in the context of the so-called "Asian Century" whether before the 2008 financial crisis, or after it.

The significance of the financial crisis of 2008 is that the repercussions of that crisis were not confined to exposing the shortcomings of American foreign policy or its strategy of global hegemony. The global financial and economic crisis revealed a deeper crisis related to the global order, in terms of its capitalist structure and the leadership position of the United States, in addition to its value system. Questions arose as to the extent to which this crisis will cause a shift in the global capitalist system versus the continuation of this system and the possibility of its success in managing its crises (Mostafa, 2011, Global democracy from Western perspectives: toward an islamic civilizational perspective in international relations).

The three-dimensional crisis of the world system (leadership, capital structure and values)

The financial crisis of 2008 has revealed the dimensions of world system crises, which represent the main features of the contemporary world system. Many scholars have addressed the various dimensions of the problems inherent in the structure of the global system, which have continued to worsen until they reached their peak and expressed themselves in the financial crisis of 2008; the most severe crisis in the post-Cold War era.

The global crisis of 2008 in particular has revealed three main crises in the contemporary world order: A crisis of leadership of the international system, a structural crisis in the global capitalist system, and a crisis of the values of representative liberal democracy versus values of social justice (Mostafa, 1999, external political challenge to islamic world).

First: the crisis of the American leadership of the global system

Several studies analyzed the crisis of the American leadership of the global system as the most prominent features of the crisis of the modern world order. The reasons cited by these studies have been varied and analyzed widely. *On the one hand*, some studies have focused on erosion of the American sources of power as the main reason for the decline of US power. It was assumed that the elements of economic, political and military power, in addition to ideological power, which contributed to the building of American hegemony, are the same factors that led to its decline (Wallerstein, 2003).

It was also assumed that the way US administration dealt with sources of power has led to that result. In other words, it was the US Government expenditure policies after 9/11 that led to the military and economic decline of the USA, as the significant financial constraints, has made increased spending on defense and maintaining military hegemony impossible, in the long term. In addition, the American policy to preserve hegemony and defend the current political arrangements has become a source of conflict with other major powers in the world order (Michael and Mazarr, 2016). This has affected the alliance between the USA and some states that represented the foundations of American policy during the Cold War, as a result of the lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the American leadership and the credibility of its orientations (Awni, 2018).

On the contrary, some studies have focused on the growing power of other international actors –China – contributing to the decline of US power and deepening crisis of the US leadership of the world order. As David Lake expected, China will overtake the USA – in the long term – in aggregate measures of the international power. If the current American approach to counter this challenge on its own continues, it will gradually lose its supremacy over China. On the other hand, the ability of the USA to rebuild its power in the world order will enable it to confront the future Chinese superpower with the help of powerful subordinates who benefit from its leadership. This will keep China locked in a world order successfully dominated by the USA. (Lake, 2006).

In addition, Lake asserted that the world order witnesses a widespread of power, with the strenuous pursuit of many revisionist forces or actors – lacking confidence in the American leadership – of possessing the capabilities of power that enable them to protect their security and interests away from US policy. While this does not represent real competition for the USA, it raises the drain of any heavy use of US military power across the world.

Thirdly, some scholars explain the American leadership crisis as being due to the decline of the status and image of the USA worldwide, as a result of the shortcomings of the American global strategy, which was revealed significantly by the events of September.

Many studies have combined different reasons for the decline of American power. As Christopher Layne points out, the unipolar era is already coming to an end, due to three main factors. The first concerns the rise of new superpowers – particularly China – which is expected to transform the international system from unipolar to multi-polar. The second is that the USA has become the only address for excessive strategic expansion, or as Paul Kennedy called it, imperial expansion. The third factor concerns the decline of relative economic strength of the USA, along with the mounting financial problems of the reserve currency of the international financial system – the dollar – which consequently undermines US hegemony (Layne, 2011).

In summary, scholars overwhelmingly agree, that the crisis of American global leadership is one of the most prominent features of the world order crises, while studies vary in their focus on the causes of the crisis and solutions they offer, as well as the impact it has on the global system.

In this context, some studies have stressed that the most important question is not whether the USA will decline as a hegemonic power in the world order – that is inevitable – but how can it do so in a way that does not undermine the foundations of the world system as a whole (Wallerstein, 2003).

Overall, the decline of American hegemony is highly controversial, with the multiplicity of views among those who offer solutions through which the USA can slow down or manage that decline successfully and extend its hegemony in the world order through one strategy or another. On the other hand, few studies have suggested that the USA should remain at the top of the balance of power indefinitely (Huygens, 2017). Meanwhile, others have confirmed that at the end, the US will be bypassed either by the rapid rise of another state, or by the absolute fall of American capabilities (Joffe, 2009).

Second: the crisis of the structure of the global capitalist system

In addition to the crisis of USA's decline in global power and its attempt to prevent the continuation of this decline on the one hand, global capitalism has also entered the stage of unprecedented structural crisis.

Global capitalist system – based on transnational capital and transnational capitalist class seeking to exercise global political authority – is accused of bringing unprecedented global inequality and instability.

The occupy Wall Street movement in the USA drew attention to this inequality with its cry of the 99 per cent versus 1 per cent. In 2015, the top 1 per cent of humanity had more wealth than the remaining 99 per cent. Moreover, the top 20 per cent of humanity controlled 95 per cent of the world wealth. This extreme global inequality has resulted in the erosion of social cohesion and fueled unrest and instability (Robinson, June 2017).

As 2008 global crisis demonstrated, the neoliberal approach to crisis management – privatizing the bankers' profits and socializing their losses – in turn revealed and intensified a long-standing trend toward growing socio-economic inequality. In this context, some scholars claim that the international financial economy is inherently unstable (Chris Chase-Dunn, 2012). Jerome E. Roos criticized the economic theory on which global capitalism is based, saying that:

[. . .] the global firestorm unleashed by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, has by no means subsided. Not only are the consequences of the financial crash still present today, in the form of widening inequality, rising debt and crippling political instability; the crisis of capitalism itself also persists and continues to wreak havoc across the globe, constantly changing shape as it makes its way from one disturbance to another (Roos, 2018).

Third: the crisis of the system of values in the global system

With the end of the first decade of the third millennium, the crises of the modern world order became apparent. It is clear that the crisis of global leadership and the global capitalist crisis are linked to a third crisis, the crisis of the system of values in the global system.

This crisis has been revealed by the controversies which have emerged since the events of September 11, 2001 in both the academic and political circles, in light of the escalating internal and regional conflicts with religious, ethnic and nationalist dimensions. These controversies illustrated the rise of religious and cultural dimensions in international relations.

This has become apparent even within the framework of the American strategy of hegemony, which seems to have been largely driven by Western military and diplomatic power since the events of September 11. The cultural dimensions have been called to justify and implement the counterterrorism strategy. Cultural and identity issues have exploded on the agenda of global policy issues. This has given rise to controversies about opposing or conflicting cultural values. In this context, the demand for pluralism in cultural and civilizational perspectives has emerged as a way to resolve the current crisis of world civilization and to achieve a more secure and just world (Mostafa, 2017, Global change from the perspective of international political economy).

An important trend of academic and political studies has asserted that Western hegemony is the main cause of the civilizational crisis of the current world order. It believes that the dominance of the Western model which is represented by imposing a specific vision of the history of humankind from a Western perspective and ignoring other civilizational contributions leads to the end of pluralism and the marginalization of other non-Western cultures, posing a great threat to the coexistence of authentic civilizations. It claims that the world order is undergoing a cognitive transformation and needs a cognitive model which offers an alternative to Western modernity, and solutions to the problems of the global system that suffers from Western hegemony, through respect for pluralism and emphasis on the role of values (Ghanem I. B., 2006).

The global system: crises of present, prospects of future

In line with the global financial and economic crisis of 2008, the questions arise on whether the global capitalist system will undergo a transformation after the most serious crisis since the end of the Cold War. Is it one of the crises that the world system can manage? Would the world system witness a transformation in the structure of power in which the USA loses its ability to lead alone? Would the global capitalist system, in turn, undergo a radical transformation?

The political and academic writings on this subject have been divided into two main opinions. One speaks of reforming the current world order through the management of the global financial crisis and the crisis of the American leadership to the world, to get out of it and adapt to its results (this vision is adopted by the realistic and liberal perspectives). The other approach emphasizes the transformation of the global system in the light of its crises (this view is adopted by critical perspectives on international relations).

American global strategy in light of declining hegemony

After the events of September 11, the American hegemony has been imposed by military force, unilateralism and preemptive wars. It has used tools of political and economic pressure with other countries to follow the US path to combat what it called terrorism and extremism. However, the strategy did not bring the desired results. Instead, it has led to a significant decline in the strength and status of American power at the global level.

As a result of these negative repercussions of the American global strategy, the US administration found itself in need of using soft power to justify its wars on terrorism after the decline of the American image in the world following these wars, and the escalating statements that linked the origins of global conflicts to cultures and religions.

In this context, the American strategy varied toward the Muslim world, the most important area of concern to the American administration in the post-9/11 period, and the source of greatest threat to international security and stability, as the administration claimed. On the one hand, the American administration adopted a consensual strategy through its public diplomacy during this period, to impose its value model, and to improve its image after the repercussions of its war on terrorism as well.

On the other hand, the US administration has pursued a coercive strategy in the framework of US power politics. The two facets of US policy have been linked and shared throughout the years following September 11 and the 2008 financial crisis, more specifically between 2001 and 2008. The US policy has combined soft and hard power in the implementation of its strategy toward an important factor in the Islamic world, the Islamic movements with all its diversifications (Ghanem, 2014).

The continued failure to achieve American goals, which has revealed the inability of US military power to fight complex asymmetric conflicts such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, has led to a decline in American hegemony based on domination and the emergence of hegemony through a new strategy of chaos. The US Secretary of State under the Bush administration, Condoleezza Rice, has promoted a new ideology, which aims to abandon the burdens of control of the world order, especially in regions of increasing instability, such as the Middle East (Awni, 2018).

As a result of the decline in the image of the USA and its policies in the post-9/11 era, the Obama administration has considered the use of various mechanisms and tools to ensure the continuation of American hegemony in the global system and the stability of its rules, values and institutions established decades ago. In this context, the concept of “smart power” was introduced.

This term, simply, means combining the hard power of the military and economic forces with the soft power of converting the state’s prestige and its global appeal into influence. This is based on the belief that one kind power – soft or hard – would not be able to achieve the goals of US foreign policy and the hegemony of the world order on its own, especially after the significant decline in the image of the USA in the two terms of the Bush administration from 2001 to 2009. This image was shattered due to the enormous financial and human losses caused by the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the lack of achievement of the objectives for which these two wars were carried out, namely the spread of democracy in the Middle East and the elimination of terrorist organizations (Joseph S. Nye, 2012).

In addition, several international transformations have prompted the USA to be more dependent on the smart power of its foreign policy:

First, many countries have moved from industrial economies to post-industrial economies, which depend on the power of knowledge and information. Therefore, technological superiority has outweighed the influence – at times – of having superior military power. Technological power has also strengthened the prevalence of military and nonmilitary influence of States.

Second, the relative role of military power has changed significantly, with non-state actors – such as terrorist organizations – having become smarter, relying on technology to spread their ideas and enhance their security.

Third, people – even in the so-called third world – have easy access to information, especially with the proliferation of nontraditional media, and are thus less affected by the influence of hard and soft powers, which necessitated adopting different foreign policies than prior times (AbdelAti, 2018).

The concept resonated widely in American media and was used by Barack Obama in his 2008 presidential campaign. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also defined it as one of the key concepts governing US foreign policy.

In fact, despite the administration's emphasis on the importance of using smart power as one of the most influential foreign policy tools, and the attention paid to American soft power after years of intense reliance on hard power in foreign policy. The practice has revealed a significant expansion of Obama administration in using military force, through the increased use of drone attacks in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen. This led to the spread of civilian casualties, angered the world public opinion against US policies, and undermined the effectiveness of smart power.

Conclusion

The indicators of the decline of American hegemony have deteriorated significantly after 9/11 and culminated in the global financial crisis of 2008. The crises of the modern world system and the decline of American hegemony – as the most important landmarks of these crises – revealed the inability of the theoretical and critical approaches reviewed in the study to interpret this decline and those crises.

On the one hand, the decline in the indicators of material capabilities, military and economic power of the USA was not the only reason for the American hegemonic decline, as claimed by realism. The depletion of US military and economic capabilities following the war on terrorism – along with the rise of other international powers such as China – is considered one of the main reasons for the American leadership's crisis in the world order.

Where the abundantly obvious negative impact of the erosion of the American cultural and ideological powers, and the decline of the American image globally, have prompted the US administration to use the cultural dimensions to justify the strategy of counter-terrorism and its implementation, and adopt public diplomacy strategies and smart power tools to impose the American value and cultural model. This, in addition to improving the American image globally, in contrast to the realist assumption that hegemony depends in its existence and continuation on the superiority of the dominant state in terms of material capabilities.

On the other hand, the institutional arrangements established by the USA in the world system have not prevented the emergence of a major crisis in the structure of this system, which encompasses the crisis of the American decline, to include the capitalist structure and value system. Many scholars have questioned the possibility of a shift in the structure of the international system. Others questioned the ability of the system to succeed in managing those crises without undermining its foundations. This is contrary to liberal claims stating that the international system established by the hegemonic state can persist even in the case of decline or disappearance of the hegemonic state because of the durability of institutional procedures created by the world hegemon.

The crisis of values, which represented one of the most important features of the international system crises, and the use of soft power tools by the USA to justify its war on terrorism, improve its image and disseminate its culture worldwide reveals the validity of the analysis of the Gramscian perspective. It emphasized the importance of combining coercion and consent in strategies of hegemony and to win the minds and hearts of the actors subject to hegemony. The confirmation of this perspective that hegemonic power is not confined to a single nation state, as it may include the formation of groups of forces,

global capitalist classes and non-state actors through which hegemony is empowered, applies very much to the case of American hegemony.

However, the interpretation of each of those perspectives on its own does not reflect the diverse dimensions of American hegemony and its decline since the events of September 11. As it neglects important dimensions of hegemony in its analysis. This highlights the importance of using the four-dimensional model, which combines different factors in the analysis.

The model is based on the idea that hegemony involves different dimensions simultaneously interacting with one another. Analysis of US hegemony after 9/11 proved that American hegemony has multiple dimensions, despite the fact that it has excessively depended on a certain model at certain periods of time.

For example, the post-9/11 period witnessed the increasing dependence on hegemony based on coercion. However, the accumulation of indicators of American decline, which reached its peak with the 2008 global financial crisis, and its continuing repercussions so far, revealed the need to rely on different models of hegemony. This led the USA to use the approval- or attraction-based model of hegemony through the strategies of public diplomacy and the use of soft power tools.

Thus, the four-dimensional model of hegemony has proved to be an appropriate model for studying the case of American hegemony and its decline after the events of September 11. Due to several reasons.

First, it shifts the focus in the analysis of hegemony from the limited and isolated boundaries of the theories of international relations to the phenomenon of hegemony itself. Thus, the starting point and focus of the analysis is how the hegemony works and how it is produced and preserved. *Second*, it allows to calculate the variance in the different hegemonic goals (e.g. control versus attraction), which enables researchers to understand the different dimensions of hegemony.

Finally, the proposed approach deals with the phenomenon of hegemony as a social relationship based on specific social networks, not as a contextual phenomenon which refers to the unilateral use of power.

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