

The Diminishing Pax-Americana: Can The US Escape Declinism From Hegemonic Triumphalism

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the probability of diminishing Pax-Americana. The debate pivots around the prospects of continuity of the American global dominance and the likelihood of its hegemonic decline. Usually the existing global hegemon ambitiously strives to maintain status-quo by ensuring order and stability in the international system but the rest of the rising powers try to challenge and transform the world order. The theoretical lens of the neo realism is applicable to the study of world order. Qualitative research approach of data analysis is employed in examining the dynamics and evolutionary phases of the overall world order. The study found that in the early days of the unipolar system, the United States got a unique opportunity of establishing its uncontested hegemony world over. Potentially none of the great powers or even their alliance could counterweight the American global dominance and majority of them undeniably hailed the American worldwide supremacy with a relishing freehand in taking critical decisions of global implications. Washington hardly ever hesitated in engaging any other player, anytime, anywhere and at any cost. However, since the dawn of the 21st century; the self-imposed hegemonic obligations seems to have shrunk the American capability and commitment of maintaining its worldwide supremacy. On the contrary, the rapidly rising China and the resurging Russia have wedged severe challenges to the American global dominance along with further complicating the overall edifice of the world order. The study concluded that ostensibly, the US-led world order is transforming to a new and yet un-elucidated construction in coming decades of the 21st century.

Introduction

The rise and fall of the great powers and a continuous chain of transition in the overall world system can be acknowledged as most perpetual phenomena in international politics is the, which is also a driving force of transition. The United States relished its global hegemony, during the second half of the 20th century due to its political, economic, and geostrategic dominance. Obviously the climax of the US hegemony was evident ever since the early 1990s unipolar world order, where American global supremacy was not

only confessed but also hailed by majority of the international actors including its traditional rivals. However, since the dawn of the 21st century, owing to its over ambitious undertakings, Washington has to confront massive economic, political, and strategic challenges at the domestic and international levels. Contrary to superpower's overstretched commitments, the emerging great power China has launched an enterprise for realigning the future global political system.

Since the commencement of the unipolar system in early 1990s, some extraordinary developments like; the First Gulf War, the nuclear proliferation, the civil war in Afghanistan, the 9/11 terrible incident and the subsequent US-led global “War on terror” have been desperately challenging the entire international system. the overall geopolitical construction of the world. Moreover, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the emergence of non-state actors (terrorist groups) and the newly rising power centers in various regions of the world have also shaken the overall global system. Simultaneously, owing to the American self-imposed hegemonic commitments, scholars like Christopher Layne (2018) started the discussion of the fraying Pax-Americana. They started questioning the capability of the United States for maintaining its position of the sole super power and eventually the overall edifice of the unipolar world order. Concurrently, the rapid rise of China and the rigorous resurgence of Russia, along with a growing strategic alignment amid Beijing and Moscow in the past few decades, are equally acrimonious challenges to the American unipolar global dominance that may ostensibly indicate that the US-led hegemonic world order is transforming into a new but yet an un-elucidated global system (Layne, 2018).

However, the end of Cold War and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union paved the way for the United States (US) to emerge as the sole super power in the unipolar world system. These critical developments intensely conveyed the American global hegemonic designs right from the early days of the era. The tone of the US president George W. H. Bush, in his 1992 State of the Union address, while stating; “By the grace of God, America won the Cold War” (Bush, 1992) openly indicates that no other player in the world could dared to hinder the sole super power from achieving its hegemonic objectives. Washington unveiled its new global political agenda by demanding almost

every other nation to align itself in the US-led hegemonic world order. President Bush categorically proclaimed the American intentions of launching the “New World Order” not only to dictate its terms but also to introduce new norms to the entire international community (Nye, 1992). Since the early 1990s, potentially no other great power nor even an alliance of the powerful nations could defy the American sway in the international power politics. During the era of American global hegemony no momentous development could happened world over without being significant to its national interests and a dominant perception prevailed that Washington never hesitated to engage any other player anytime, anywhere at any grounds. The US freely decided about if and when it had to take any critical decision of global significance. Throughout the early years of its hegemony, the US never entreated support or approval from the international community rather it used to claim or even demanded it. Hence, the overall American supremacy in the Unipolar World system was not only unchallenged but also unquestionable (Krauthammer, 1990/91).

This study has particularly emphasized upon the American imperialist designs in the unipolar world and its repercussions. This research work also covers the highly critical issues regarding the United States having portrayed itself as hegemonic or hyper-power particularly in its global War on Terror (WoT) strategy. The ultimate consequences of the Pax-Americana for Washington and the rest of the world, the American hegemonic triumphalism and the probability of its departure to declinism and finally the fate of the unipolar system have been discussed extensively.

Theoretical Framework

In international politics, studying the dynamics of world order and power balancing mechanism mainly associates to ‘Hegemonic Stability

Theory' (HST). Being chief proponents of the theory; Kindelberger, Robert Gilpin and Robert Keohane have extensively elaborated that the presence of a dominant actor in global power politics leads to stability and order in the overall world system (Snidal, 1985). The central idea of HST expounds that stability of the global political system entails that a hegemon can better help in articulating and administering the rules of engagement among the key stakeholders world over. The hegemon ought to have the capability and commitment to the global political system, for it is mutually beneficial to majority of the key players. The hegemonic capability entails; a huge and growing economy, supremacy in leading economic and technological sectors, worldwide political influence and projective global military power. The HST upholds that global peace and stability are certain as long as the hegemon and its major allies maintain firm control over the entire world system, always in flux; so is the great power status for ever emerging variance in the national power of major actors. However, the hegemonic world system can be defied if one or more rising great powers are dissatisfied in the existing global structure and they flinch striving for a conclusive change in the overall world order.

According to HST, the American hegemonism could not last merely for few decades; since peace and harmony did not triumph world over in the unipolar system. Since, the American behest for manipulating every global situation in its own favor has piqued the already disgruntled rising power, China, which has launched an enterprise of transforming the world system. The notion spelled out by the HST a hegemon can warrant world peace seems simply refutable because of the likely emerging new multipolar world order in the 21st century. As the rise of China may divide the world into a bipolar construction demonstrating the "West" and the "Rest"; despite Beijing's repeatedly reiterated stance that its

rapid rise does not harbor any hegemonic agenda (Mahbubani, 2009). China seems to demonstrate its keenness for liberal international order, having brighter prospects of win-win situation for all, collective security, shared economic interests and free trade across the world.

However, China's proclamation for a peaceful rise and its endeavors for maximizing almost all the variables of national power and its compatibility of challenging the US on various strategic, economic and political fronts; manifest almost conflicting depictions. Predominantly, it now depends upon the US that it either reacts to the rise of China or respects her as a new great power, which has to share the burden of international responsibility. Conflict between the two great powers may prove disastrous for the entire world; so prudence entails that being a senior partner, the US ought to prefer positive engagement with China over bellicosity and the two great powers may also look for a shared global hegemony or at least a mechanism of regional hegemony in the Eastern and Western hemispheres (Prys, 2007).

Literature Review

One of the most conspicuous books on the world order is; 'The European Union in a Changing World Order' edited by Antonina Bakardjieva Engelbrekt and others (2020). It highlights that the international system is always in an upheaval that ultimately turns into global power shift. Since the dawn of the 21st century the transatlantic US-EU nexus is being seriously challenged by the rapid rise of new powers with huge economic growth and development potential in Asia. The next prominent work on the subject is 'Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order' written by Bruno Macaes (2019). The author explains that Belt and Road strategy is one of the most ambitious geopolitical initiatives of the age that symbolizes China's goals as a superpower in the 21st century world order and

the project crowns Beijing as the new center of globalization. The BRI is more than mere power projection and profit taking rather it may venture new set of worldwide political values competing with those of the West.

Amitav Acharya in 'Global governance in a multiplex world' (2017) and Robert Kagan in 'The World America Made' (2012) have tried to sketch the edifice of the 21st century global system. These scholars have emphasized that the emerging powers and the US have to play a constructive role in impending the contemporary international system; otherwise the overall world order may run into a chaos. In addition a range of publications from scholars like; Hedley Bull's, 'The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics' (2002), Henry Kissinger's, 'World Order' (2014), offer fascinating appraisals on the evolution of world order. Charles Krauthammer's 'The Unipolar Moment' (1990), Lawrence Freedman's 'The Gulf War and the New World Order' (1991), Louise Kettle's 'A New World Order: The Importance of the 1991 Gulf War' (2016), Stephen Burman's 'America in the Modern World: the Transcendence of United States Hegemony' (1991), Ashley Tellis' 'Assessing America's War on Terror: Confronting Insurgency, Cementing Primacy' (2004) elaborate the American hegemonic role in the unipolar world. John G. Ikenberry's 'Liberal Internationalism: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order' (2009) explains the unipolar system. Paul Kennedy's 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers' (1987) has expressed the rise and fall and the ultimate transition of world order.

In 'Hegemony and Decline: Reflections on Recent American Experience' (2005) David Calleo debates the American foreign policy fluxes in the past few decades. William Wohlforth in 'The Stability of a Unipolar World' (1999) advocates the unipolar system for stability in the world system. Amitav Acharya's

deliberations on the world order in his numerous works; particularly 'The End of American World Order' has broadly discussed the dynamics of American hegemonism and the futuristic construction of the world system in the coming decades of the 21st century. Fareed Zakaria in 'The Post-American World' (2008) and Robert Kagan in 'The World America Made' (2012) have sketched the edifice of the 21st century global political system. These intellectuals accentuate that the rising and existing great powers, China and the US, have to engage each other constructively else the overall world order may turn into chaos.

The American Imperialist Designs in the Unipolar World

Various analysts maintain imperialist strategies is foundational to the origins, form, and normative basis of international relations, for the usual inequalities of power among the states and their respective positions remain subject to the highly uneven and exploitative world system (Jones, 2006). Time and again it is argued that the dynamics of world order are predominantly determined by different forms of imperialism, as most of the world powers attempted to implement their imperial designs in their respective regions or even world over like the UK, France, Russia and Japan had attempted their offshore imperial designs (Saurin, 2006). For the US, it was quite natural to follow the same lines to work for the instrumentation of its own imperial agenda in the unipolar world order. However, in a critical discourse of the US imperialist designs, the primary focus needs to target the American role that it has been playing in the modern world. This critical role is not related only to the academic analysis of its foreign policy in a conventional sense; rather it needs to assert special efforts for attaining a deeper understanding of that role in practical terms. In this regard the first problem is that of delineation of the phenomena of Imperialism, since the term can be employed with

a wide range of meanings that can certainly be upsetting for the scholars of the discipline (Burman, 1991).

Historically, states have been overwhelmingly dominated by other powerful actors; where imperialism embodies complete possession and formally declared colonial status by the dominant power. Nonetheless, broadly speaking, away from formal domination of states, manipulations of free markets by the great powers may also be characterized as a new form of dominance. Hence, in the modern world imperialism can encompass wide ranging traditional and contemporary forms of exploitations. Therefore, prior to discussing the American unipolar hegemony, it is certainly imperative to realize that imperialism is a highly comprehensive term that is open to a number of interpretations. Thus, scholars of international politics need to be additionally watchful in their pronouncement to whether the US role in the global political affairs, especially in the post-cold war era, could be described as imperialist or not. Perhaps some of the scholars, like Stephan Burman (1991) believe that it does not matter a great deal that either the US is declared as an imperialist power or not. Since it is a highly critical debate and the act of labeling the sole super power in the unipolar world as an imperial power may be guided by a sense of manipulating the meaning of the term to produce the desired answer.

Imperialism in a literal sense, for its attribute of colonizing other nations, may not plainly illustrate any adequate evidence of Washington's qualification for an imperial power. The US existence itself was the result of an anti-colonial revolution that symbolized the idea of freedom as emancipation from the colonialism (Burman, 1991). Therefore, since the Post- World War II era, after acquiring a dominant role in global politics, with all its potential for transnational ascendancy that would have amounted to imperialism, factually the US did not choose to

follow the conventional imperialist enterprises. In this context, the US might have also faced some serious dilemmas, by following the expansionist and imperialist designs (Burman, 1991). However, instead of grabbing the foreign lands and formal acquisition of colonies, the US generally used the method of an informal extension by using power and influence over other countries (Williams & Gardner, 1986). On the basis of its highly dominant role, whether the US justifies to be labeled as imperialist power and the international system can be branded as imperialist. Analytical outlook demands that the issue must not be steered towards the literal meaning of the term. It ought to be observed by keeping in view the level of coercion involved in maintaining its influence in various international issues along with the internal matters of other countries all over the world. Analyzing the US through this parameter, it certainly may qualify the status of an imperial power (Aron, 1982).

On the other hand, while interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries, the sphere of influence and sway demonstrated by the US, certainly not in all but in many cases, has been maintained through a degree of consensus and legitimacy (Aron, 1982). The American policy makers and international scholars believe that in the case of absolute independence and complete equality, inter-states relations would turn to disorder that may eventually lead to international anarchy (Burman, 1991). In an international system, where the most powerful state trying to maintain stability, the US surely grabbed the title of a hegemonic power and the term 'Hegemony' is sometimes synonymously used for imperialism.

The US Role as Hegemonic or Hyper-Power

In the past few decades, the US foreign policy has been repeatedly fluctuating between the declinism and the hegemonic triumphalism (Calleo, 2005). The later phenomenon is certainly

associated with the underlying belief that owing to the ever increasing trends of integration, the world has headed towards a unipolar system. This construction entails that the global structure is oriented to and led by a single military, political, socio-cultural and economic superpower that is certainly none other than the US. In other words, the very phenomenon of triumphalism infers to the American hegemonic role in the world system (Calleo, 2005). On the contrary, there are those who look at the US with an eye of declinism. Generally, they refer to an already acknowledged fact that being the superpower of the world, the US is overstretched in military, political, economic and even moral outfits, and Washington may be simply characterized as overburdened. This opinion essentially reflects her wide ranging exertions in bidding to play the role of the world hegemonic power or even a hyper-power (Nossal, 1999).

The association of hegemony and decline has always been a subject of deeper interest for the scholars of international politics. However, the philosophy of declinist school is chiefly based on the conception of, heading from hegemony to the decline; the idea has indeed been lavishly deliberated in the contemporary world. The contemporary international politics, numerous studies have been aiming to illuminate the unavoidable linkage between the hegemony and the decline of the worldwide super powers. Paul Kennedy in 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers' (1987) has also extensively elaborated the bond amid hegemonism and declinism. Kennedy has categorically argued that surely hegemons have always been destined to dump into decline. Since, decline has been the fate of the Napoleonic France, the imperial Britain and many other super powers in the history; hence, it may be straightforwardly conceived that the US certainly has to wait for the similar fate in the coming decades (Kennedy, 1987). A broad analysis of the prominent conceptions regarding

the "rise" and "fall" of the great powers exposes that the elementary reasons are analogous in almost each case.

The hegemonic powers are obviously overburdened for their substantial military spending, due to their internal and external liabilities. Usually the hegemons neglect, distort and thereby weaken their economies and finally, the socio-political fabric. Generally, the armed forces of hegemons are fatigued by the inconclusive challenges and eventually, all these dents push their militaries to suffer from the receding tides. In these perilous situations the societies bitterly suffer from frustration and distrust upon their institutions. Finally, the great powers may even undergo disintegration, as in the case of the former USSR (Kennedy, 1987). Charles Kindleberger, in his famous work; 'The World in Depression: 1929-1939', (1986) has also expressed similar views regarding the weakening hegemons by maintaining that the declining hegemon mostly remains a victim of free-riding. The exercise of hegemony refers to the provision of public goods to the global system. Militarily, the hegemon has to ultimately hold the responsibility of being the guardian of security as well as law and order world over.

The hegemon also endeavors to maintain the world's economic stability to ensure that the public goods are proportionately shared by all actors throughout the world. However, it is inevitably believed that over the passage of time, due to the free-riding of hegemon, the beneficiaries of the system grow relatively stronger. In the meanwhile, the overburdened hegemon shrink itself to a relatively weaker position. Sooner or later the hegemon, in comparison to the other rising powers, remains no longer powerful enough to maintain its long-standing supremacy. In due course of time, the beneficiaries of hegemonic structure ultimately challenge the system, thereby further increasing the burden of hegemony, and eventually

hastening its decline. As soon as the hegemony of the super power reaches to the brink of collapse, an era of intermission follows, that is very often a time of troubles and disorder for the whole world (Calleo, 2005). The massive troubles of the 20th century; like the two World Wars and the era of the Great Depression, may perhaps be viewed in the same modus. During the 19th century world order, owing to its Imperial immensity and strong economic position, the Great Britain had established the worldwide British hegemonic Empire or the Pax-Britannica. However, in quest of its power maximization and superfluous military engagements in Europe and across the world, eventually Britain had to face the universal phenomena of declinism from hegemonic triumphalism.

At the dawn of the 20th century Germany emerged as the new great power; however it had been by far benefiting from the fruits of Pax-Britannica. By the time, Berlin had grabbed the position of being capable to challenge the British hegemony; the global super power no longer had lost the power and resources to firmly suppress the new challenges. Eventually, Pax-Britannica had to undergo the declinism. The WW-I left Great Britain as seriously debilitated and the /conflicting European powers had terribly incapacitated each other. On the other hand, the US was ready to occupy the position of a natural beneficiary of the international political environment. President, Woodrow Wilson sought to pledge a new era of the US hegemony. However, in the pursuit of its isolationist disposition instead of exclusively welcoming the new dynamics, Washington displayed its resistance for holding the hegemonic status. The period of interregnum, as mentioned above, continued for a few decades, particularly till the end of WW-II. The eras of great depression and WW-II were the natural outcomes of declining process of the hegemon. However, after playing a key role in the World War II, the US resumed

its natural and benevolent position in the global political system. Finally, the Pax-Americana flourished to replace the shattering Pax-Britannica that lasted for about a century (Calleo, 2005).

Consequences of the Pax-Americana

Basically the authors of the American declinist school have attempted to conscientiously analyze the overridden costs of America's role in the post-World War II era, targeting to lift the war trodden Western Europe for promoting the Capitalist agenda world over. The ultimate goal of these efforts aimed to overthrow the Communist ideology. A number of strategic and political absurdities can be explored in Washington's Cold War military arrangements, like the extended American engagements for both nuclear and conventional deterrence, particularly in reference to the Western Europe (Calleo, 2005). From early 1950's, the US lifted the encumbrances of a huge transatlantic military alliance, the NATO, to address the unusual political, economic and strategic vicissitudes in Europe. For instance in mid 1980s, the US military spending for the NATO commitment were roughly half of its total defense budget and the devolution of the American hegemonic responsibilities to the Europeans, particularly in Europe, became an urgent and unavoidable necessity (Calleo, 2005). While the deep-rooted nationalist identities and wide ranging divergences among various nations ultimately hindered the European integration.

Hence, the exclusive military engagements in the region were relatively inefficient rather outrageous for Washington. Eventually, the two superpowers in the bipolar world were not only overstretched in almost all the dynamics of power and they faced stark economic corrosion. As a result of this competitive decadence between the US and USSR, even well before the end of the Cold War, evidently Moscow ceased to be a great economic power; while the economic growth and

productivity of the US lagged well behind those of Europe and Japan (Calleo, 2005). Such inferences evidently sign posted that the American economy was shrinking that also indicated its weakening global hegemony. The fiscal deficit of the US rapidly expanded and its debts graph also worsened. During Cold War the gross American national debts surged from around US\$ 1 trillion to roughly about US\$ 4 trillion with further escalation at the rate of US\$ 1 trillion every four years and no other variable better reflects the state's economic incompetence than its ever soaring debts (Calleo, 2005). The American public was also unwilling to pay more taxes, because they were essentially getting smaller benefits from the US public sector services as compared to the other developed economies. Apart from lower tax returns the comparatively large defense budget also overburdened the American economy, which can be labeled as the nasty link between geopolitics and fiscal debility.

The act of reorganizing the US role in NATO, or devolution of responsibilities to the Europeans would have conserved Washington's remittances along with pushing the European nations toward further integration. This strategy would have equally benefited both the Europeans and the US (Higgs, 1988). One of the main reasons of the American fiscal deficit is the nature of its constitutional incoherence that allows kind of Imperial Presidency, whose strength has generally been tied to external role of the US. For the sake of such royal position the US authorities essentially have to look for external threats, and hence its global role. The combination of international engagements and Imperial Presidency necessarily bid for an extensive external role and ultimately the "overstretched" US obligations (Rudalevige, 2005).

Another possible reason for the enormous expenditure and trade deficits that ultimately added to the US decline was its hegemonic role

throughout the world. Washington has work out various plans of manipulating the US Dollar that helps to ease the burden of its overall fiscal deficits, but this practice proved to be helpful as a short-term remedy instead of long-term strategy. Rather this plan toiled as a further twist in the connection amid hegemony and decline. Consequently, instead of using the American political and economic muscles to sustain the overall global system, Washington capitalized the world system to strengthen the US that earned the title of an exploitative hegemon in decline (Calleo, 2005).

The American Hegemonic Triumphalism

Certainly the US faced unembellished economic challenges in the bipolar world system, for its proxy wars world over; particularly in the Communism bullied countries. However, during the early 1990s, the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the former Soviet Union paved for the American declinist arguments to be overtaken by the debate of its triumphalism. One of the most trembling episodes of the global political drama, the collapse of Soviet Union, unveiled the US as the prodigious winner of the Cold War and the sole super power of the unipolar world. Washington grabbed the title of the world's largest military power with an opportunity of enjoying the delights of extraordinary turn around in its off-colored economy. It is quite understandable that in such unprecedented circumstances of the 1990's, the American triumphalism was fairly natural, which allowed its foreign policy elites to start articulating their unipolar vision for the 21st century world order. The key to this vision was the presence of an all-out integrated capitalist system at the global level, ready to support the US as being the sole hegemonic power of the world.

The American charged post-Soviet unipolar enterprises surfaced from the early 1990's in two distinct types of models. The first model was

related to the US designs of being an economic superpower, as forwarded by the Bill Clinton administration. The second model was that of being the world's military superpower, as promoted by the two Bush regimes (Calleo, 2005). Despite the apparent strength of Washington, each model rooted stark vulnerabilities for its global hegemony. President Clinton envisioned the US as the global economic champion of advanced industries with best social services. However, Clinton could actually manage to balance the federal budget primarily by radical cuts in the defense expenditure that was possible mainly because of the end of Cold War; however, figures reveal that cuts in American defense budget were actually initiated by George H. W. Bush (Henderson, 2015). Instead of securing appreciation, Bill Clinton's economic boom was still marked by traditional attributes of degradation from an exploiting hegemon that was already in decline. Hence, despite the end of Cold War and a huge drop in defense budget, the US continued its customary practices of absorbing the global economy or in other words consuming more than it was actually producing. Therefore, the oversized current account deficit of the US had to look for massive infusions from offshore credit financing means.

At the dawn of the 21st century, the US sailed through another substantial turn in its domestic and foreign policies paradigm. The Bush administration (2001-2008) taxation and budgetary policies pushed the US back to the acquainted declinist track and the overall volume of current account deficit turned out to be greater than ever before (Calleo, 2005). A general perception prevailed that in effect, the Chinese and the Japanese, started to manipulate the fate of US Dollar instead of Washington itself. This was perhaps a strong sense of apprehension for a unipolar superpower due to its fragile economic foundation. However, by this time the traditional declinist warnings, as in the era of the Cold War,

had to face some new challenges, since the Euro started posing tough rivalry to the Dollar. Among all these declinist and triumphalist debates in the post 9/11 world system, President Bush, in a highly aggressive mode, redefined the American worldwide military assignments. He demonstrated to be a typical wartime president, setting his goals and also expressed the American resilience to the "global war on terror". The key motives behind war on terror strategy seems to license the US to engage anyone, anytime and anywhere in the world.

This vigorous scheme was further bolstered by an even more aggressive doctrine of preemptive strikes or the preventive war against any actor world over (Tellis, 2004). The preventive strike doctrine also aimed to seek warrant against those who intended to build the so called weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Such strikes were meant to overawe those who would potentially intimidate the American or its allies' interests; in addition to challenge Washington's internal and external security or its global political agenda of hegemonism (Tellis, 2004). The notion of redefining security challenges was highly expensive and inexplicit for the US and also its allies. The American agenda of global WOT in its hegemonic mode, seemed all right till it was directed to the punishment of terrorist organizations like Al-Qaida and its sponsors, the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, the American closer NATO allies, France and Germany, expressed their weariness of the American inconclusive agenda of global dominance, particularly the decision from the US and UK to invade and punish Iraq in 2003 on the plea of WMDs (Gordon, 2003).

Responding to the indifference of the American traditional partners whom, according to Washington, instead of supporting the US worldwide manifesto hindered its enterprises; therefore the Bush administration assuredly proclaimed that such partners had to be ignored

in exceedingly critical decisions of global implications. Hence, the US flouted the resentment of its NATO allies while attacking Iraq in its quest for forcefully de-seating the so called tyrant regime in Baghdad (Gordon, 2003). The American obsession for unipolar fantasy and the European grand vision congruently crowded out the interests of the two major powers, while the US hardly ever appreciated the progress of Europe and the unusual prospects it has always offered to the overall advancement of the West. The US-EU variance of interests could be disturbing for both and even the overall world system for their dreams may sometimes in future end-up in a struggle for competing and/or defeating each other's interests.

The 2003 attack on Iraq is sometimes linked with American belief of establishing its worldwide military supremacy while such ambitions hardly ever could textured in the bipolar world due to the Soviet military deterrence. The Iraqi defeat and eliminating its regime was not a substantial challenge to American hegemonic muscle, still the dispute abetted as an eye opener for the political thinkers and the US. From mid-2000s, the dynamics of global politics turned so extensively that all the key players including the US had to realize that things had evolved in different attire. Perhaps the most important lesson from Iraq war could be the realization that Washington needed allies and the consent of the world community. The bullish US learnt an expensive lesson on the complexities of the 21st century world system as for the first time it had to tacit the new dynamics of real world with buds of plurality than unipolarity (Calleo, 2005). In the post Iraq War period, Washington had to deal with a number of resentments from new actors particularly in the Muslim societies, facing number of decades-long unresolved political disputes like; Palestine, Kashmir and others. The people in various regions expected from the US to play a constructive and crucial role in resolving

long standing critical issues that would ultimately mitigate the enormous miseries of the people of these regions. Unfortunately, the US could not escape the alleged perception of being more a part of the problems rather than the solutions.

The US has also faced the challenge of rapidly rising economic and military powers worldwide. Finally, the illusion of US-led unipolar hegemonic world nurtured to be increasingly implausible and relatively dysfunctional that kick-started the apprehensions of shattering unipolar consensus in the world (Ryan, 2018). Hence, the attack on Iraq fetched the US and Europe to a kind of competing if not conflicting situation, heralding for the ideals of hegemony and the pursuit for balance of power from both sides respectively.

Since long the voices have been very frequently hovering that the imbalance nature of the unipolar world order categorically demands the rebalancing act of the global system. The rapidly rising players vocally demand their due share in the dynamics of international power politics; at the same time the actors meant for the balance of power, particularly the friendly balancer like EU, are also undeniably desirable. Their presence is not only anticipated to check and redefine the exercise of power by the hegemonic player in the world; but also to protect the international system from total disorder. Such a catastrophic disorder may result from a terrible conflict between the existing and the emerging super powers, especially the US and China. Perhaps such kind of awareness regarding the American limits could be the essence of declinism.

The Unipolar System on the Go?

As already mentioned in this research that the term, unipolar moment was introduced by the media soon after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. However, it gained substantial popularity in the aftermath of decisive victory of the US lead

coalition forces, over the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and the expulsion of his occupying forces from Kuwait in early 1991. Subsequently, the US President George H. W. Bush toned up the American supremacy in the entire world and further announced the beginning of an era of “New World Order”.

It was categorically proclaimed that the upcoming era of NWO would be based on multilateralism along with social, political and economic cooperation to yield prosperity and harmony at the international level. However, the sanctity of these high sounding pledges remained questionable during the years to come. Some of the scholars, in the post-Cold war era, had initially anticipated that the upcoming world would be multipolar. Even some impartial American analysts, like Krauthammer (1990), were careful not to take unipolarity for granted.

There was another prominent assessment regarding the unipolarity, which declared it as an “illusion.” As in international politics it is generally acknowledged that the quest for balance of power, or in other words the propensity of states to band together for the sake of challenging the supremacy of a hegemon, is quite natural as well as inevitable. It is therefore, argued that, unipolarity is proving to be rather short lived; though, one may not precisely assess that when it might end. However, the definition of unipolarity from William Wohlforth (2009) is highly significant; since he described it as a decisive superiority in all the underlying components of power particularly that of geopolitical, economic, military and technological (Ikenberry, Mastanduno & Wohlforth, 2009).

It is pertinent to mention that the most crucial word in the Wohlforth’s definition has to be “decisive.” Amitav Acharya (2018) also maintains that the US is likely to remain as the most powerful military player in the world for

quite some time. However, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the kind of resistance to the US from its NATO allies, have categorically illustrated that the superior military power does not necessarily translate to absolute geopolitical influence. Besides, superior military power is considered as one of the most significant requirements for unipolar stability in the world. On the other hand, the picture of the US economy is stated to be even less rosy than its geopolitical influence in the world.

Various analysts have categorically expressed their stance that unipolarity would not face the most severe challenge from the competing actors like China, Russia and others. Rather the American unipolar fantasy would be marred by the old-fashioned isolationism of traditional conservatives in the US. During the reign of George W. Bush administration they were the neo-cons who dominated the foreign policy in quest of their intentions for pushing towards an aggressive agenda of Pax-Americana. Some of the well-known analysts maintained that paradoxically their unilateralist approach has hastened the course of American actions and eventually the international politics towards a situation where the unipolar moment seems to be on the go (Krauthammer, 2002). It is also stated that as a result of the George W. Bush articulated policies, predominantly comprising of the lethal combination between the hegemonic unipolarity and nonstop unilateralism, which have played a key role in hustling the end of highly cherished unipolar moment of the US (Acharya, 2018).

It is also believed that the fear regarding the perception that the real challenge to unipolarity might be America’s failure to do enough, hardly remained visionary. The real threat to the American lead unipolar world order has not been categorically erupting from the notion of doing too little for the world by the hegemon, but doing too much, and that too unilaterally across the globe. Therefore, it can be stated that the main

reason for the end of unipolarity would not be resulted just from the upsurge of other rising powers like; China, Russia and EU.

On the contrary, the real threats to the American unipolar triumph have equally emerged from within as it has from without. Hence, towards the end of the second decade of the present century, the US found itself confronting with; not just a relative decline, but to an absolute decline. This hegemonic declinism was fueled not only by the American global designs like; war on terror and invasion of Iraq in 2003; but also by its domestic weaknesses and mismanagement in social sector, political atmosphere and economic performance (Acharya, 2018).

In the discussion on the contemporary international politics; unsurprisingly two very significant perspectives transpire for further debate. One is the “unipolar illusion” and the other is “unipolar stability.” Although, both are fairly different from each other, even then at least three things in common may be identified in them. First, both these viewpoints seem to have a consent that the dynamics of the international power politics at the global level are shaped primarily by structural factors. Therefore, it can be argued that whatever mechanism of power distribution exists in the international politics (the unipolar, bipolar or multipolar); ultimately the key to understanding the prospects for global peace and stability rests in the phenomena of polarity (Waltz, 1979).

However, it is worth mention that most of the times the structuralists are labeled to overlook the nature and role of domestic politics; particularly those of the key international players. In this regard the mechanism, role and task of international institutions, and the normative forces; along with their engagement with the powerful actors is also equally vital in shaping out the world order - peace and stability. Therefore, the rise of other great powers does not

always necessarily change the fortune of the unipolar moment and hence the change in balance of power at the global level.

Rather, the transformation of world order also depends upon a number of other associated forces. Unipolarity, in some cases, may confront resistance on the basis of international norms, like what we have witnessed in the case of America’s attack on Iraq in 2003. This unilateral act from a super power in the unipolar world was bitterly responded by majority of the international community. Worldwide anti-American demonstrations with hundreds of thousands of protesters holding placards against the war were broadcasted as live by dozens of news channels around the world (Kaplan, Kristol & Whitfield, 2003).

Second, it is argued that the structuralists in their viewpoints usually narrow down the interpretation of international stability. In this regard, one of the most conspicuous structural theorists, Kenneth Waltz, is often quoted for his argument regarding the deep rooted connection between bipolarity and international stability, particularly during the cold war period. Waltz is also mentioned for his viewpoint regarding multipolarity with instability and conflict; like what we can refer to the era of pre-World War II international political systems (Acharya, 2018).

Scholars of international relation can observe that Waltz believed in the conception that the bipolar world order was able to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding and misperception between the US and the former Soviet Union. Ultimately the two superpowers were capable of comparatively reducing the level of uncertainty among themselves and also among their respective blocks. They also had the candid opportunity to rightly calculate each other’s strength and to estimate the after-effects of direct encounter against each other.

Moreover, John Lewis Gaddis (1986) has also elaborated his concept of bipolar stability in detail. He has pointed out the tendency of a kind self-regulation in the bipolar system of international politics. He has also underlined the aptitude and inclination of the two superpowers towards peaceful accomplishment of a number of major international issues during the cold war period. In this regard the argument of Gaddis, in his famous article "The Long Peace," is highly thought-provoking when he says that the most convincing petition for 'stability' in the bipolar world is that another World War i.e. the Third World War has not happened so far on the planet (Gaddis, 1986).

However, it is interesting to mention that the views of Waltz and Gaddis regarding the cold war stability as a phenomenon of "long peace" were primarily applicable only to the Western Europe. Otherwise, throughout the third world, several bilateral as well as regional conflicts erupted mainly because of the interventionism as well as proxies of the superpowers. It can also be argued that in the third world such type of regional conflicts were not only more "permissible," rather they might have served as a necessary "safety valves" to ease out the tension between the two superpowers. Since these local encounters were meant to keep the bipolar giants away from their direct belligerence against each other (Ayoob, 1986).

Moreover, it is also believed that across the third world, instead of decreasing the projections of conflicts, the rivalry of the superpowers actually contributed to the escalation of such regional issues. Ultimately, these local or regional clashes, especially between the client nations, led to the internationalization of civil wars and internalization of superpower competition (Acharya, 2018). The debates about the post-cold war stability are predominantly highlighting the overall serenity of the international political system; where peace is equated exclusively with

the absence of major wars among the global powers. Hence, the two perspectives overlook the regional and internal conflicts, along with the devastations of the WoT.

Therefore, it can be argued that by equating unipolarity with peace, the hypothesis of unipolar stability leads the students of international politics to a relatively narrow view of the phenomena of global stability. Well reputed researcher, Amitav Acharya (2018) believes that the so called unipolar stability theory has ignored the horrendous regional conflicts that ravaged a number of regions and countries like; the Balkans region, the Great Lakes region of Africa, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, and the War on Terror around the world (Acharya, 2018).

By projecting the idea hegemonic stability; all of these devastating regional as well as domestic conflicts and their immeasurable social, political and economic losses, in addition to the collateral damages across the world, were predominantly ignored. They were taken to be too meager to get labeled as threats to global peace. By embracing the realist viewpoint of international relations; both these perspectives – the unipolar stability and the unipolar illusion – endorse that the culmination of unipolar global political system would ultimately for an intensified instability, injustice and eventually an overall worldwide disorder (Acharya, 2018).

On the other hand, it can be observed more interestingly that the liberal school of thought also maintains a similar kind of equation between peace and the uncontested unipolar superiority of the US. Some of the well reputed American liberal theorists are found to claim that the American-led hegemonic order has been largely the chief source of prompting global peace. However, they acknowledged the fact that the nexus has got reinforcement from the multifaceted transnational institutions, though

they continued to be American-inspired. These liberal scholars also believe that the end of this US dominated unipolar world order would definitely mean the outburst of instability and disorder in the international political system (Wohlforth, 1999).

The third prominent viewpoint on world order is related to the structuralists' perspectives that are often based on Eurocentric evidences. The main substance for "unipolar illusion," that lies on perceptions of the brevity of unipolarity due to the rise of challengers, also has its roots in the European political history. This phenomenon is primarily based on the response to the rise of powerful players like France and the Great Britain in the late 17th and 18th eighteenth centuries respectively.

While analyzing the prospects of unipolar stability, some of the arguments are characterized to describe that how the current unipolar derive under the US hegemony is distinct from those of the past. Some of the prominent commentators maintain that the contemporary unipolarity is much more genuine and hence this time around the prospects of durable peace and stability are more likely than ever before (Wohlforth, Ikenberry & Mastanduno, 2009).

Conclusion

It is explicable that the American over stretched global hegemonic commitments along with the fast growth of various developing economies, particularly the rapid rise of China have started putting questions on the US-led hegemon world order. However, the decline of US itself and that of the US-led hegemonic world order are two distinct phenomena. Certainly the dynamics of international power politics give strong signals of the fact that the US-led unipolar world system is ostensibly transforming to a new multipolar or multilateral world order in the coming decades of the 21st century. Nevertheless, it needs to be

scrupulously evaluated through a number of studies that whether the US itself is declining in near future or not, which this study could neither fathomed. Indeed, the Pax-Americana has been heavily relying on its hegemonic magnanimity, capable of extending global public goods to all the actors; since they primarily seek benevolence of the world system in the form of trade, security, and multilateral cooperation. This engagement is sustained horizontally among the technologically and economically advanced countries and vertically between the global hegemonic player and the developing world.

It is correspondingly anticipated that the waning US-led global system may trigger-out multipolar rivalry among the future great powers that can route fragmentation of the contemporary world system into a number of contending regional blocs. These apprehensions are also refutable, for no one can perfectly envisage the future and the decline of the US-led world order can be equally benevolent for the rest of the world; the US, as the retiring hegemon and China, as a rising great power. Since, China has yet not expressed her desires or designs of global domination. The foreshadowing of the US-led hegemonic World Order is actually pointing to the very significant phenomenon that the prospects of global dominance for a too long period by a single powerful actor are grim. As the 19th century Pax-Britannica could not last the two World Wars and the Pax-Americana may also face similar providence in the coming decades of the 21st century.

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