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Articles

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Challenges to American Hegemony: Realizing and Responding

Abstract

This article analyzes the challenges to American hegemony in the contemporary world order. It will demonstrate that the rise of the rest including China and India, the possibilities of a massive military attack and an economic collapse on American soil are merely exaggerated challenges to American hegemonic position. The challenges that have great potential to cut into American hegemony are very internal including American domestic and psychologic problems. Looking at the future of American hegemony, the article highlights that the United States still has overwhelming power to sustain its hegemony in the foreseeable time. Yet it is crucially important for American leaders to realize and effectively deal with the imminent challenges to its power. Also, six policy recommendations are made for the United States to endure its hegemony in the contemporary world order.

Keywords: *American hegemony, domestic problems, psychologic problems, emerging powers, power diffusion.*

INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly changing and unpredictable world, some may question how long American pre-eminence in military, economic, political, cultural and technological endures. Some even hold the old Paul Kennedy line that the United States has been declining.[1] The chief argument of this article is that American hegemony has been and remains one of the greatest realities of our time, but how long this last remaining superpower since the speedy disintegration of the Soviet Union can sustain its hegemonic position in the international system depends on whether its government is able to realize and respond to the real challenges to its supremacy. The rise of the rest of the globe, including China and India, the possibilities of a massive military attack on American soil, and a collapse of American economy are argued not to be threatening to American hegemony, as they are seemingly exaggerated challenges. The real challenges to American hegemony come from within the United States itself, including its domestic and psychological problems (overreaction and neo-isolation).

To this end, the paper will first begin with examining the ideas of American hegemony and hegemonic cycles, and will follow to analyze both exaggerated and real challenges to American power. This aims to demonstrate on what the United States needs to focus its resources if it wants to prolong its hegemony. The article goes on to draw on the future of American hegemony. It highlights that the United States has overwhelming power to sustain its hegemony in the foreseeable future. Yet it is crucially important for American leaders to realize and respond to the imminent challenges to its power. The conclusion sets out six policy recommendations for the United States to prolong its hegemony in the contemporary world order.

[1] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers-Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, (New York: Random House, 1987).

AMERICAN HEGEMONY AND HEGEMONIC CYCLES

The term "Hegemony" stemming from Greek, *hegemonikos*, means having capacity to command. Oxford dictionary explains "Hegemony" as a word used to refer to "leadership, or dominance, especially by one state, or social group over others."[2] Politically, this term was first used by Thucydides, a renowned Greek historian to describe the status of Athens in the mid-fifth century BC. With the largest fleet in the Mediterranean and a prosperous economy, Athens was the hegemon during that early time in human history. However, Athens' hegemonic position was overthrown by its powerful rival, Sparta after fighting twenty-seven years bitterly. Thucydides hoped that his analysis of the great hegemonic war between the Athenians and the Spartans would provide "an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it."[3] He added "In fine, I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time."[4]

His work on hegemonic war has been the analytical foundation for many generations of scholars to develop their own research on the durability of hegemony. George Modelski is one of such scholars. His 1978 article entitled: "**The Long Cycle of Global Politics and the Nation-State"** examined the lifespan of great powers in the international system **and pointed out that the cycles of hegemony begins to end when the hegemon's legitimate control over the international system absolutely declines. According to Modelski, Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain and the United State are the hegemons since the establishment of the modern world system** by the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.[5]

[2] Anguss Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 814.
[3] Thucydides, Translated by Richard Crawley, *The History of The Peloponnesian War,* (New York: Modern Library, 1951), 14.
[4] Thucydides, Translated by Richard Crawley 1951, 15.
[5] George Modelski, "The Long Cycle of Global Politics and the Nation-State," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.20, no.2 (1978): 214-235.
[6] Modelski 1978, 233.

Modelski observed that: "The average duration of known historical cycles has been something over a hundred years. Moreover, for some reason not now evident the cycles have coincided quite closely with historical centuries, so that to each recent century (e.g. the nineteenth) roughly corresponds a distinct cycle (e.g. the British Empire)."[6] He added that there are about three generations in a century, and it might be said that one generation builds, the second generation reinforces and the third generation loses control. This means that a hegemonic cycle normally includes two phases: the ascending and the descending. Based on the analysis of the hegemonic cycles of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British; and the United States as the current hegemon in the modern world system, Modelski underlined that:

> The ascending phase has its sources in the disorder and disintegration from which a global war originates... The ascending phase continues for a time, on past record for a generation, only to experience a gradual exhaustion of energy. Global problems arise that remain unattended to or are taken up by rising new leaders and competitors; conflicts are generated that do not seem to yield to solutions. At some point the curve turns and begins to descend until such time as the disintegration of authority and the unrestrained assertion of narrow interests lead to a new global conflagration. The destructive aspects of this process mark the lowest point of a long descending phase.[7]

Modelskin's long cycles have been echoed by Gilpin's (1981) hegemonic transition theory, Thompson's (1988) leadership long cycle theory, and Doran's (1989a) theory of relative power cycles.[8] These theories are mutually

[7] Modelski 1978, 233.
[8] See, Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers-Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, (New York: Random House, 1987); William Thompson, *On Global War: Historical-Structural Approaches to World Politics*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); and Charles Doran, "Systemic Disequilibrium, Foreign Policy Role, and the Power Cycle," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 33 (1989a):371-401.
[9] George Modelski. 2012. Long Cycles and International Regimes. *E-international Relations*, http://www.e-ir.info/2012/10/15/long-cycles-and-international-regimes/, (accessed August 29, 2015).

complementary and supportive, and this complementarities and mutual reinforcement offer historical patterns of analysis of the global authority structures of the world system, and the way that the hegemony in such structures begins and ends. The past patterns underlined that the international system evolution is an increasingly complicated global political process. An international system is created when a global hegemon comes and that system collapses with the end of the global hegemon. What should be highlighted in these scholars' works is that: "For the past half-millennium, that pattern, or rhythm has been driven by a succession of globally-oriented nation-states."[9]

The most recent "globally-oriented nation-state" is the United States which has taken a leading role in establishing the crucial elements of the contemporary world order by providing public goods, enhancing multilateral cooperation and at the same time engaging in confrontations with perceived challengers. To put it differently, in contrast to much of conventional wisdom on international system, the contemporary world order has not been in anarchy in the sense that it lacked a global hegemon. The twentieth century witnessed the impressive completion of American hegemony in 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated and the Cold War ended. At the top of the international system, the United States had no serious challengers for its global leadership. This international system was described by Charles Krauthammer as unipolarity, the most prominent feature of the post-Cold War world. He put forth that: "No doubt, multipolarity will come in time...But we are not there yet, nor will we be for decades. Now is the unipolar moment."[10] This raises the question about the duration of American hegemony.

The twenty-first century opened with terrorist attacks on American soil, global financial crisis and the rising of new powers. Terrorist threats, economic depression and challenges posed by emerging powers have been warned as forces which have great potential to undermine American hegemony and

[10] Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*, vo. 70, no.1 (1990): 23-33, 24.
[11] Krauthammer 1990, 24.

destabilize the international system. If this is true, it means that the "unipolar moment" lasted merely one decade. It did not take one generation or so to see the unipolar world order being replaced by a multipolar one. This implies that Charles Krauthammer's prediction: "In perhaps another generation or so there will be great powers coequal with the United States, and the world will, in structure, resemble the pre-World War I era"[11] needs to be reconsidered.

Ultimately, it is inevitable that American hegemony will be challenged. But how long has been the long cycle of American hegemony? In the second decade of the twenty-first century, there are few facts indicating that America has begun declining, or that it will begin in the foreseeable time, and the world order will be similar to the pre-World War I era. The United States still enjoys unrivaled capacities in military, economic, technological and geographical terms. Especially, the international institutions, namely the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the Word Bank and the World Trade Organization inspired and led by the United States have been firmly embedded in the international system and have been providing global goods for a long time. On the whole, the United States has been the single most significant actor in global affairs, a powerful economy, a superior military and influential diplomatic factor, a source of advanced research and development. Stephen Sestanovich reflected this in his well-researched book, "Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama," by whatever measure, the United States "has been a power like no other."[12]

This underlines that American hegemony remains a prominent reality in the contemporary international system and American leading role in the world is vital. Short-term, or relative decline should not be interpreted into long-term trends. It is no doubt that American leadership has waxed and waned since 1991, but its hegemonic control over the international system has never been eclipsed. Yet, it should be noted that the world is not a static place. Changes

[12] Stephen Sestanovich, *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 325.

take place in the daily life as well as the in international politics. These changes may directly, or indirectly impact American power. In this changing world, the long run of American hegemony will be disrupted if American government is unable to classify the sources of challenges to its hegemonic position and coordinate responses to them. When scoping out the imminent challenges to American hegemony, it is crucially important for the United States to distinguish exaggerated challenges and real challenges to American hegemony.

EXAGGERATED CHALLENGES

Many scholars argue convincingly that the United States would begin to lose its legitimate hegemonic control over the international system because of the emergence of new powers, the possibilities of a massive attack on U.S. soil and an overall collapse of U.S. economy. It is true that some new nations are taking a bigger role in the global economy, their emergence needs to be examined more closely, and when such an examination is conducted it shows that the rise of the rest of the globe, including China and India, will not constitute a big threat to U.S. hegemony as these nations' emergence is still hemmed by several hurdles.

Let us take China and India as examples: both of them are estimated to become economic powerhouses in a foreseeable time, and seem to be equipped to translate their economic achievements into social, political and military influence that will allow them to exercise greater power in the world affairs. Indeed, China and India enjoy advantages in terms of geography, size, population, and potential for economic growth. Yet, one can be deeply skeptical that either China, or India is able to reach the hegemonic status. *First*, unlike the United States, which is surrounded by a favorable regional environment with friendly neighbors and vast oceans, China and India are located in the Asia-Pacific region where regional actors are greatly ambitious

and wary about Chinese and Indian intentions. Many nations of the Asia-Pacific region have welcomed U.S. increasing economic, political, military, diplomatic and cultural engagement in the region as a counterbalance to the emergence of China and India.[13] This means that neither China nor India simply can emerge as a regional hegemon they aspire to become. *Second*, both China and India are extraordinarily ill-equipped in military terms. From the realist approach, the military might enable a nation to maintain its hegemony. U.S. defense budget is still far bigger than that of China and India combined[14]. In terms of nuclear capability, the United States possesses 7,100 warheads while China has 250 warheads and India 100[15]. Military strength is also reflected by a state's ability to dominate oceans and skies. The latest statistics shows that the U.S. naval and air power are much greater than China's and India's. For example, the United States possesses up to 20 aircraft carriers while China has one aircraft carrier and India has two. The United States possesses 920 attack helicopters while China has 169 attack helicopters and India has 20.[16] Indeed, U.S. military power remains obviously far more advanced than China's and India's that it is not possible yet for those emerging powers to challenge the U.S. and thus depose it from hegemonic status. *Third*, China, India, and other emerging powers are depending economically on the international financial and economic system which has been led by the United States. With these continued structural advantages, the United States is able to exert great influence on Chinese and Indian economic growth. *Last*, China and India have certain national problems. Their socio-political cultures and traditions, ethnic divisions, and demographic diversity tend to limit their freedom of action, and thus reduce their influence in the world politics.

[13] Jacob Zenn. 2012. *US Presence Evolves in Southeast Asia*, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/ND04Ae01.html, accessed August 1, 2015.
[14] Staff Writer. 2015. *Defense Budget by Country*, http://www.globalfirepower.com/defense-spending-budget.asp, accessed July 21, 2015.
[15] Daryl Kimball, 2015. *2015 Estimated Nuclear Warheads*, Arms Control Association, http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat, accessed August 12, 2015.
[16] *Global Firepower*, http://www.globalfirepower.com/, accessed July 14, 2015.

It might be an exaggeration to say that a massive attack on U.S. soil is likely to shake the U.S. hegemony. If this was made possible, e the current international system would crumble and with it the United States would crumble. This line of argument seems to have stronger hold after the 9/11 attacks and the global financial crisis. Yet, the truth is that there had been terrorist attacks on the U.S. soil before September 11, 2011. Terrorist attacks are certainly shocking and frightening, but they do not constitute a kind of massive attack that could knock the United States down. The 9/11 rhetoric has lost the ground as Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011 and the United States has gained wide supports for its efforts to counter revisionist states and violent extremist organizations (Al-Qaeda, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) that are challenging the regional and global security[17].

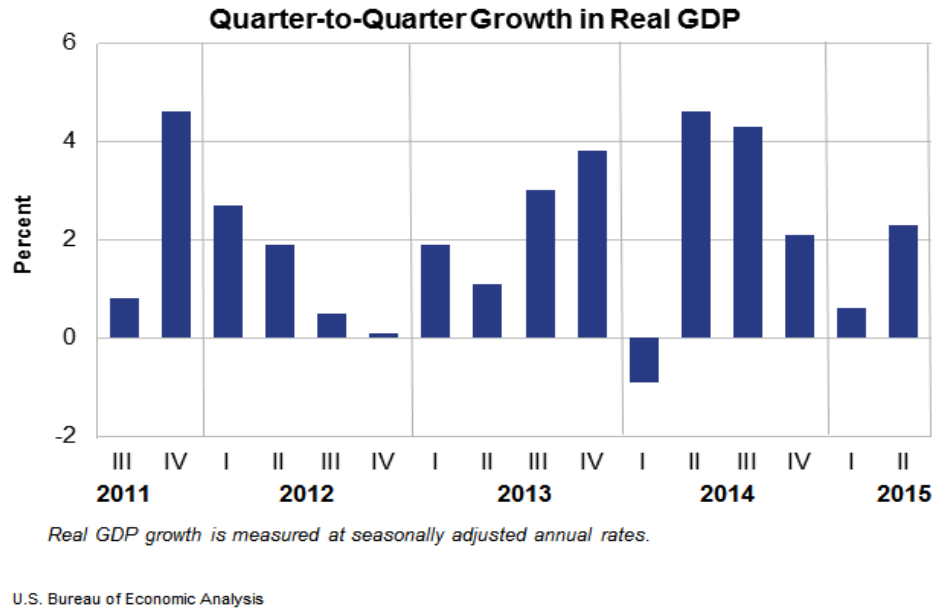
Similarly, the argument that there can be an overall collapse of U.S. economy resulting in the demise of American hegemony seems unconvincing. Even people with little knowledge of economics and history can see that it is almost impossible for the U.S. economy to be knocked down. It is too big to fall. With a per capital GDP of 54,800, the U.S. economy is the most technologically powerful economy on earth. Many U.S. companies are at the forefront of technological advances, particularly in IT technology, medicine, aerospace engineering, and military technologies.[18] The ultimate sources of U.S. economic power are comprised of its economic dynamism, the pro-trade approach of its political system, its rich natural resources, the remarkable stability of its constitution, and its control of the major trade and financial institutions in the world economy.

Many may take the global financial crisis of 2007-2009 as an example to argue in support of the likelihood of U.S. economic falling. Yet, the facts speak

[17] Tina Kaidanow. 2015. *Expanding Counterterrorism Partnership: U.S. Efforts to Tackle the Evolving Terrorist Threat*, http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/rm/236305.htm, accessed July 12, 2015.
[18] The World Book Fact, *CIA*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html, (accessed July 11, 2015).

for themselves. The global financial crisis of 2007-2009 merely indicated how resilient and strong the U.S. economy is. It has been six years since the United States began recovering from its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.[19] Despite the economic comeback is slow, it began much earlier than expected. The steady recovery of the U.S. economy can be seen in the acceleration in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. As the United States is in the recovering process, its quarter-to-quarter growth has been uneven, but the trend is very positive (Figure 1).

Figure 1. US Quarter-to Quarter Growth in Real GDP

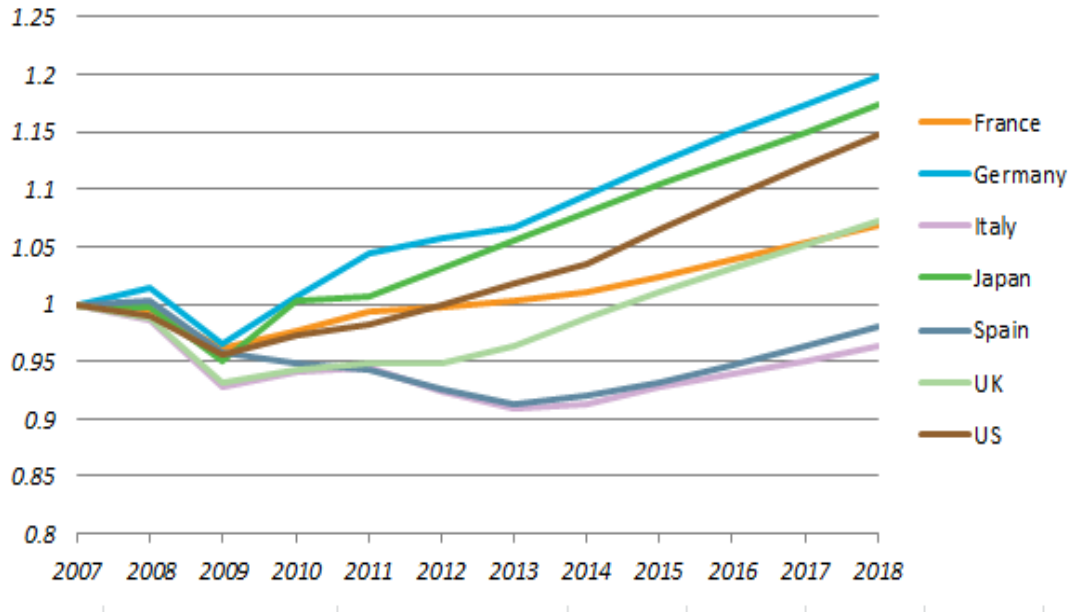


Source: http://bea.gov/newsreleases/glance.htm, viewed on June 23, 2015.

Also, according to *Euromonitor, the GDP per working age person in the United States has been on the rise since 2009 and is projected to be upward. Similar trends can also be seen in other advanced economies which are U.S allies and friends. The U.S. economy has performed well to gradually overcome the crisis.*

[19] Peter Ryan, 2015. *Slow Start to the Year Stalls United States' Economic Recovery Six Years after Global Financial Crisis*, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-30/slow-start-to-year-stalls-united-states-economy/6433894, (accessed July 30, 2015).

Figure 2. GDP per Working Age Person in Advanced Economies since 2007



Source: http://blog.euromonitor.com/2014/11/the-recovery-from-the-global-financial-crisis-of-2008-missing-in-action.html, viewed on June 27, 2015.

Indeed, this together has shown the gap between the perception and the facts. The U.S. economy has continued to recover and grow. And it is said that "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Applying this to the United States, it just means that the global financial crisis just reinforced the U.S. economic strength. Undoubtedly, the United States has many economic problems; however, it remains very powerful and especially very resilient. It is somewhat bizarre to predict that a comprehensive economic fall can happen to the United States and thus shake its hegemony.

THE REAL CHALLENGES

Successive U.S. administrations have been committed to the perpetuation of U.S. hegemony. The rise of the rest, the possibility of massive attacks on U.S. soil and the likelihood of U.S. comprehensive economic collapse have

been on the radar screens of U.S. policy makers. Yet, these do not represent real threats to U.S. preponderance as they seem to be exaggerated. The United States has retained formidable economic, military, political, technological and institutional assets. Indeed, U.S. policy makers need to take into account the rising of the rest, U.S. economic absolute fall and massive military attacks on the U.S. However, they should know that the real and immediate threats to U.S. hegemony are psychological and domestic. These internal problems once ignored, or inadequately dealt with are likely to undermine American hegemony.

Psychological Problems

The highlighted psychological problems facing the United States include overreaction and neo-isolationism. The transition from bipolarity to unipolarity resulted in the dramatic shifting of power in U.S. favor. The current unipolar system has persisted longer than many anticipated since the end of the cold war.[20] The stability of the current unipolar international system has depended considerably on whether the major powers are happy with the status quo. With the psychological tendency to worry about the perpetuation of its preponderance, the United States has sought to resist any forces that it perceived as threatening U.S. hegemony. The United States fears that China, India, or the rest of the globe in general increase their relative capabilities to the extent that they can transform the current international system. In parallel, the United States has been concerned about its own capabilities and even believed that it is in steep decline. In 1970, seeing the signal of U.S. relative decline, President Nixon even envisaged and encouraged the development of a multi-polar word in which the main pillars (the European Community, the United States, Japan, the Soviet Union and China) represented equal forces and

[20] See, Christopher Layne. "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Arise," *International Security*, vol. 17, no.14 (1993): 5-51; Kenneth Waltz. "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, vo.18, no.2 (1993): 44-79, and Christopher Layne. "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited," *International Security*, vol.31, no.2 (2006): 7-41.

power to sustain the structure of peace in the international politics.[21] He called for a transformation from predominance to partnership and affirmed the importance of enhancing economic and political cooperation in international relations. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States went to war with Afghanistan and then Iraq, which turned out to be the most costly wars in U.S. history.[22]

Take one more example, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (the AIIB). The Obama administration initially attempted to block AIIB's creation. This reaction was deeply rooted in U.S. policy since the end of the Cold War: ensuring that no state would emerge to the extent that can challenge U.S. global preponderance. Yet, the reality is that on June 29, 2015 China and 49 nations comprising most of closest American friends and allies signed the Articles of Agreement of the AIIB. The successful establishment of the bank shows that: "The initial U.S. response had no possible upside but did promise - and delivered - a great deal of downside."[23]

Indeed, U.S. overreaction in attempting to preserve its hegemony may be counterproductive. President Nixon's vision of a multi-polar international system would naturally lead to the emergence of new powers as they are invited to take a bigger role in the world affairs. The costs, materially and mentally, of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the war on terror launched by President Bush, have led many to question U.S. capacity either to take the lead in the world, or to obtain support for its polices at home and abroad. President Obama's concern about China's phenomenal growth resulted in U.S. objection to the AIIB's establishment. This reaction did not prevent many nations including U.S. allies and friends becoming the AIIB's founding members.

[21] Richard Nixon. 1970. *U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s. A New Strategy for Peace: A Report to the Congress*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2835, accessed April 1, 2015.
[22] Mark Thompson. 2015. *The True Cost of the Afghanistan War May Surprise You*, http://time.com/3651697/afghanistan-war-cost/, accessed August 1, 2015.
[23] Robert Keatley. 2015. "China's AIIB Challenge: How Should America Respond," *The National Interest*, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/americas-big-strategic-blunder-not-joining-chinas-aiib-12666, accessed August 1, 2015.

Again, the question about U.S. ability to lead and to gain support can be raised. Overreaction does no good to the United States. It even undermines U.S. credibility and threatens U.S. predominance. The foundation of the U.S. hegemony is firm as it is far ahead other nations in both hard and soft power. As a very powerful nation in the international system, the United States can employ various means to preserve its preponderance. Clearly, changes are normal in our human life and so are in world affairs. The United States has to adapt to changes to sustain its hegemonic status. It should be noted that wrong ways of adapting will certainly put the United States in unfavorable position. Overreaction means choosing an inappropriate way to adapt to changes. The history record has always proved that overreaction surely causes unfixable consequences. Thus, U.S. practices in the international affairs have to be very carefully calculated to avoid cutting into American hegemony. It is underlined that: "The structural and contingent features of contemporary unipolarity point plausibly in the direction of a revisionist unipole, one simultaneously powerful, fearful, and opportunistic."[24] If the United States is too fearful of changes in the world affairs, it will fall prey to its own overreaction.

Another psychological problem that really threatens U.S. preponderance is the tendency of neo-isolationism. Isolationism was deeply established in the history of U.S. foreign policy. This extreme thinking says that the United States should "be isolated from all external forces and lives its own solitary life."[25] This means that the United States would not entangle itself in any international issues. In the post-Cold War world, neo-isolationism stems from isolationism but it is somehow modified to be less extreme. Neo-isolationism holds that the United States should selectively, or passively participate in international politics. In other words, the United States should not be isolated from ***all*** external forces. It still needs to engage with the wider world, and intervene in

[24] John IKenberry; Michael Mastanduno, and William Wohforth. *International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2011), 14.
[25] John Foster Dulles, *War or Peace*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1950), 18.
[26] Carrie Dann. 2014. Obama Rules Out 'Military Excursion' in Ukraine, *NBC News*, http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/ukraine-crisis/obama-rules-out-military-excursion-ukraine-n57081, accessed June 1, 2015.

international affairs; however, the extent to which its engagement and intervention are allowed should be limited. One example can be found in U.S. decision to lead from behind in the Libyan war. Another example is U.S. strategy in Ukraine. President Obama made it clear that the United States is not being dragged into a military excursion in Ukraine. What the United States is going to do is to use all of its diplomatic resources to build a strong international coalition that would send a clear message, which is that Ukraine should choose its own destiny.[26]

By playing a supporting role, the United States hoped not to be directly entangled in a foreign conflict. *U.S. strategies in the Libya war and in Ukraine* are a manifestation of neo-isolationism which would certainly diminish U.S. influence and lessen its ability to shape the global affairs to U.S. benefits.[27] To accept the idea of neo-isolationism is to invite decline and defeat. Nothing that would make decline, and defeat more certain for the United States than the Americans to see what is going on around them with indifference and to sit idly by while other states proactively act. The United States may choose to go on living their own lives in peaceful isolation, but that kind of peace may not last long and it may finish U.S. hegemony. The neo-isolation approach seems not a smart choice in the modern world politics as it may not help to protect U.S. national interest. It, by contrast, may weaken the United States and eventually strangle the United States.

Domestic Problems

Though the United States is a great power in the international system, it still has many serious domestic issues. For instance, according to a report released by Oxfam International, the gap between the rich and the poor in the United States has grown at a faster rate than any other developed country, the

[27] Charles Krauthammer. 2011. "The Obama Doctrine: Leading from Behind," *The Washington Post*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-obama-doctrine-leading-from-behind/2011/04/28/AFBCy18E_story.html, accessed on July 15, 2015.

richest one percent of Americans have possessed 95% of the wealth produced since 2009 while the bottom 90% of Americans have been poorer and poorer.[28] Dealing with widening inequality is vital to promote a nation's strong and sustained growth. The substantial disparities in the income growth and net worth reported in the Federal Reserve System's survey of consumer finances present a very serious problem for the United States.[29]

It is also highlighted that average income increased since 2010 for the following social gropus: house owners, non-Hispanic white household and families headed by a person with a college degree. Average income dropped for renters, nonwhite and Hispanic households and families headed by someone without a high-school diploma.[30] In other words, education is the key to tackle the problem of the rich and poor gap. Ironically, the Americans voice serious doubts about college affordability. Washington Post Miller Center shows that around three-quarters (77%) of respondents in a September 2013 survey said it has become more difficult for people like them to pay for a college education.[31] In a November 2013 Alstate/National Journal poll, 47 percent of Americans said that it would be "not very", or "not at all" realistic for them to pay for college.[32] The U.S. government clearly sees the appalling consequences of these problems. President Obama even warned that fragile

[28] Marc Morial. 2014. "The Great Divide of Income Inequality: A Domestic Crisis on the World's Stage," *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marc-h-morial/income-inequality_b_4688614.html?ir=Australia, accessed July 25, 2015.
[29] Ben Leubsdorf. 2014. Fed: Gap Between Rich, Poor Americans Widened During Recovery. *The Wall Street Journal*,http://www.wsj.com/articles/fed-gap-between-rich-poor-americans-widened-during-recovery-1409853628, accessed August 12, 2015.
[30] Leubsdorf 2014.
[31] Drew Delsiver. 2014. State of the Union 2014: Where Americans Stand on Key Issues, Pew Research Center, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/27/state-of-the-union-2014-where-americans-stand-on-key-issues/#comments, accessed July 30, 2015.
[32] Alstate/National Journal poll. 2013. http://heartlandmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Heartland-XIX-Topline.pdf, accessed August 20, 2015.
[33] Obama Barack. 2013. "Remarks by the President on Economic Mobility," *The White House*, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/04/remarks-president-economic-mobility, accessed June 18, 2015.
[34] Obama Barack. 2014. "Immigration, the White House," https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/immigration, accessed August 1, 2015.

growth and frequent recessions are taking place in nations with greater inequality.[33]

Furthermore, illegal immigration has become such a serious problem that President Obama has to admit that America's immigration system is not working effectively. It is being broken when too many undocumented migrants are being hired, and about 11 million people are "living in the shadows."[34] This is detrimental to U.S. economy in particular and the United States in general. Illegal immigration has caused numerous and severe problems for the United States. It hurts American economy and strains American welfare system. It also weakens the United States' legal and national security environment as pointed in the Heritage Foundation's report: "The fact that three out of every 100 people in the United States are undocumented, or documented with faked papers represents a serious security problem. These people might not pose a direct threat to U.S. security, but the presence of millions of undocumented workers led to distortion of the law, distraction of resources, and effective creation of a cover for terrorists and criminals".[35]

Political representation, racial problems, social security, and unemployment can also be added to this list of U.S. domestic problems. All of these domestic problems are interconnected and have a domino effect. In order to handle the widening rich and poor gap, it is crucial for the American government to develop an educational system which is affordable for everyone. An unaffordable education is closely associated with other social problems such as inequality, social security, and unemployment which have been worsened by illegal immigration. Indeed, U.S. domestic problems, from socio-economics to politics, could potentially impact its hegemonic position in the world.

It is miserable not to realize the problems to deal with. It is even more miserable to realize the problems facing us but fail to deal with them. Although

[35] Tim Kane and Kird Johnson. 2006. "The Real Problem with Immigration… and the Real Solution," *The Heritage Foundation*, http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/03/the-real-problem-with-immigration-and-the-real-solution, accessed June 29, 2015.

it is important to take into account the rise of the rest of the globe, the possibilities of a massive military attacks on American soil and a collapse of American economy, the United States is unable to achieve anything without a strong domestic base, and currently that base has been shaken by U.S. domestic problems. Apparently, the United States should spend more time and energy to solve these problems.

The Future of American Hegemony

The existing reality of American dominance in the international system has undoubtedly reflected successive American administrations' efforts to scope out challenges to American power and handle them. Yet, the twenty-first century has already proved different. The Bush administration and Obama administration have struggled with the war on terrorism, economic crisis, global anti-Americanism and military adventures "that the United States found easy to start, impossible to win, and extremely difficult to end."[36] Especially, in the current information age technological advances have empowered a broader range of actors. This means that state actors, or national governments are no longer the only players in the world affairs. Non-state actors ranging from individuals, private organizations, corporations, non-governmental organizations to criminal, or terrorist groups have had the instruments and power to directly influence the world affairs. That non-state actors have been empowered to have a direct role in the world affairs is defined by Joseph Nye as the diffusion of power.[37] This global trend certainly undermines American ability as a state actor and a superpower to shape the world events to American advantages.

[36] Stephen Sestanovich, *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama*, (New York: Knopf, 2014), 4.
[37] Joseph Nye. 2011. *Two Power Shifts Occurring This Century: Power Transition and Power Diffusion*, http://www.praguepost.cz/opinion/7539-two-power-shifts-occurring-this-century:-power-transition-and-power-diffusion.html, accessed August 15, 2015.
[38] William Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

The duration of American hegemony depends on how able American governments are to manage the challenges to its power and its legitimate control over the world system. It is suggested in Martel's 2015 book entitled "Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy" that over the course of 200 years, American power has been built on three major principles: The first one is to establish American domestic power (political, military and economic), the second one is to restrain the sources of disorder and disruption in the international system, and the third one is to build alliances and partnerships. Among these principles, the very first one, building a formidable domestic power is arguably crucial to prolonging American hegemony.[38] The fundamental logic is that only with unrivalled political, military and economic power can the United States forge alliances and partnerships as well as prevent the sources of disruption in the world order. No nation, with weak domestic power which means lack of political, military and economic resources, can obtain regional and global influence. If American hegemony does wither it is be due to American failure to maintain its strong domestic foundations.

The United States still has much more power than any other state in the international system, at present and for the foreseeable future. Yet, the world is not entirely static. Thus, the United States needs to see clearly the threats to its global preponderance. To "know your enemy" has always proven sound advice. The United States should not only focus its formidable resources on exaggerated threats like the rise of the rest of the globe, the possibilities of a massive military attack on American soil and a collapse of American economy. These undeniably represent challenges to American hegemony; however, they can be controlled by American economic, military and institutional power. The very real threats to American hegemony are right at home: psychological and domestic problems. In the face of such challenges and the global trend of power diffusion, hopes and confidence in its traditional narratives of liberty, human dignity and freedom seem insufficient for the United States to sustain its

hegemony. As the world entered the new millennium, the United States would have to realize the imminent challenges to its hegemony; this realization would help it avoid miscalculation and mismanagement in the world politics. It is certain that challenges to American hegemony would change from time to time and require new policy responses. Smart policy responses are really what the United States must work out to first reinforce its domestic foundations (economic, political, social, cultural and military) and then deal with the aspirations of the emerging powers as well as adjust to the diffusion of power in the current international system. At present and in the foreseeable future, the world remains rapidly changing; new global trends and global challenges will emerge. Implicitly, American global leadership would be tested. In the near future, the United States will still be a hegemon partly because of the fact that no nation will be able to surpass it in material capacity and no nation, or a group of nation is willing, or able to undertake the global responsibilities at the costs and the risks that the United States has assumed by the end of the Second World War. The answer to the question "how long will American hegemony endure?" seems to never be adequate because the question posed itself is not a right one to ask. The right question here would be what American leaders can do to manage the challenges to U.S. global leadership and statesmanship? From the foregoing analysis, some recommendations are made for the United States to sustain its pre-eminence.

Do homework. Like any other nation in the international system, the United States has its own domestic problems as analyzed above. The United States needs to identify clearly its basic internal problems and examine strategies to solve these problems. Dealing effectively with the thorny domestic problems will reinforce not only domestic base at home but also American credibility abroad.

Strengthen domestic confidence. Maintaining that the United States is declining causes psychological problems such as overreaction and retrenchment. Overreacting to, or partially isolating from what is happening around the United States are detrimental to its hegemonic status. Building self-confidence in not only the American policy making circle but also the American public is critically important to sustaining American hegemony. The Roman Empire was overthrown because of its own internal problems not because of an oversea challenger. The historical lesson from the collapse of the Roman Empire is that a superpower could be rotten from within itself when its institutions are malfunctioned, its administration is inefficient, and its public and elite confidence in government dropped. Domestic discontent and nasty politics could undermine the economic, social and political foundations of American power.

Prepare for the future. As the word is not a static place, the United States needs to assess the past and the present constantly to decide what developments it wants to see in the future. The United States must invest time and energy in the future to ensure that the future changes will be in American favor. The United States should not start a military campaign such as the Iraq war without thorough consideration into its future strategies for nation-building and regional stabilization. The United States must outline concrete scenarios of its intervention and engagement in order to achieve its desired goals and handle effectively the unintended consequences. Naturally, it is hard to predict the future as no one knows exactly what will occur tomorrow, but everyone knows that preparation for the future has always proven necessary to reduce the possibilities of failure and increase the chances of success.

Accept the burden of regional and global responsibilities. To sustain its hegemony, the hegemon has to assume certain regional and global responsibilities. This enables it to lead the world in the direction that advances

its strategic interests. Preparing itself materially and mentally to shoulder the burden of global leadership is vital to the United States. Yet, the United States has to be aware that "leadership costs sap the hegemon's power and push it into decline."[39] It, therefore, has to develop an appropriate strategy to avoid this trap. Accepting the burden of regional and global responsibility also leads the U.S. government to sometimes intervene in the other nations' internal affairs, but it does not imply that the United States will involve in the business of invasion and occupation. Joseph Nye has made it clear that:

> In an age of nationalism and socially mobilized populations, foreign occupation is bound to breed resentment. Eisenhower wisely reached that conclusions in the 1950s, but what takes its place? Using force, but with limits, is an answer, but, particularly in the Middle East where revolutions may last another generation, smart application of force will be essential. Seen in a longer perspective, a Kennan-like policy of containment may have more promise than efforts to occupy and control.[40]

Apart from that, accepting the burden of regional and global responsibilities means that the United States has an active role to play in establishing and strengthening institutions, building networks, and making policies for dealing with such new transnational issues as financial crisis, cyber security, terrorism, pandemics, climate change which cannot be solved with military power but with networks of cooperation. In the current world, no single country, a group of countries, or a coalition is able, or willing to take the risks and costs of global responsibilities. The global leadership assumed by the United States, the most powerful nation in the international system, is vital to providing global public goods. Taking the lead in the world will give the United States the power to influence the world affairs in favor of American interests.

[39] Layne Christopher. 2009. The Waning of US Hegemony, Myth or Reality?, http://www.rochelleterman.com/ir/sites/default/files/Layne2009.pdf, (accessed July 27, 2015).
[40] Joseph Nye, *Is American Century Over*, (California: Polity, 2015).

Reinforce smart power. Smart power is a combination of hard and soft power. It allows the United States to retain its credibility and legitimacy in the international system and to have a leading role in international institutional reforms. Military force continues to be of great significance to sustaining American pre-eminence. This means that it is vital for the United States to invest in military technology and maintain its cutting-edge level in this field. Yet, Nye warned that military force is "a blunt instrument", and equating leadership with unilateral military action is a mistake.[41] He added that those who stressed the significance of U.S. military presence to the polio-economic success of Europe, Japan, and South Korea ignore the fact that U.S. military are welcome because there was an apparent external threat and even then it took over 30 years for democracy to be established in Korea.[42] In the current international environment, with the emergence of new powers and new transnational issues, American leaders must not see military force as the main instrument to achieve its foreign policy goals and advance its strategic interests. Robert Zoellick, the former World Bank president, pointed out that, there are at present chances for the United States to harmonise the world with U.S. interests in way which does not require using U.S. troops.[43] This is to underline the increasing importance of soft power in American foreign policy agenda. Soft power is understood as the ability to get what you desire to have "through attraction rather than coercion, or payment."[44] It is also viewed as the ability to influence others through "the co-optive means" of agenda setting, persuasion and elicitation of positive attraction to achieve desired outcomes.[45] Arguably, soft power presents a significant component of American power. Increasing the attractiveness of American values (namely human dignity,

[41] Nye 2015, 123.
[42] Nye 2015,124.
[43] Robert Zoellick. 2014. A Presidency of Missed Opportunities. *Wall Street Journal*, http://belfercenter.hks.harvard.edu/publication/24471/presidency_of_missed_opportunities.html?breadcrumb=%2Ftopic%2F168%2Feconomics_of_national_security, accessed August 13, 2015.
[44] Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), x.
[45] Joseph Nye, *The Future of Power*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 8-9.

democracy and freedom and expanding American culture, education) continues to wield influence for the United States in the world politics. In other words, it is the overwhelming smart power that allows the United States to influence the course of events in the world politics. If the United States is unable to maintain the superiority of its hard power and the attractiveness of its soft power, its hegemonic position will certainly be shaken.

Consolidate alliances and partnerships. The duration of the U.S. pre-eminence is substantially dependent on its alliances and partnerships. It is true that the United States has performed and will perform the best when it can surround itself with friends. It is the friendly states that give the United States larger markets and improve burden-sharing. The time that the United States could live in real isolation ended long ago; what the United States has to acknowledge is that working with others to secure stability and to advance prosperity will contribute to reinforcing its hegemonic position in the world.

Martel observed that the United States must intensify alliances and partnerships, both old and new, to address global challenges "with a sense of shared responsibility among nations."[46] American leadership has to accept the reality that U.S. resources were finite and the United States is no longer able to do everything and to go everywhere all of the time for the rest of the world.[47] The United States was willing to take global responsibilities for many years from wining in the First World War, and the Cold War to enhancing security against terrorism after 9/11. However, in the context of national economic difficulty, the United States should ask for a fairer share of burden from its allies and partners.

[46] William Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 359.
[47] Martel 2015, 359.
[48] Joseph Nye, *Is American Century Over*, (California: Polity, 2015).

CONCLUSION

At the present time and in the foreseeable future, American "absolute decline[48]" is still a myth. Salvatore Babones' recently published article, "American Hegemony is Here to Stay," strongly confirms this most salient feature of the modern world system: American hegemony is "as firm as, or firmer as it has been," and will continue to be so for many years to come.[49] Yet, if American leaders, policy makers and analysts continue to focus national resources on the exaggerated threats without recognizing the very real threats to American hegemony, they could easily end up making the myth a reality. Too many scholars over the past years have talked of the rise of new powers, the possibilities of a massive attack on the United States and a comprehensive collapse of American economy while ignoring the self-evident fact that the United States has absolutely military, economic and institutional advantages over any other country in the world. These therefore are hardly the imminent threats to American hegemony. The imminent ones are internal including its psychological and domestic problems. The future of American hegemony depends on how able American leadership is to scope out the imminent challenges to its power and to formulate appropriate policy responses to such challenges.

Much attention is lavished on exaggerated threats to American hegemony, often with historical rise and fall of Rome and Britain. The smart leaders in the American government have to know that the contemporary international environment is totally different from those in the Roman and British eras, and that American hegemonic position sustained by not only its overwhelming material might, but also by its superior soft power. Especially, the international institutions that the United States have led and the international network of alliances and partnerships that the United States have

[49] Salvatore Babones. 2015. "American Hegemony is Here to Stay," *National Interests*, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/american-hegemony-here-stay-13089?page=2, accessed July 22, 2015.

maintained have underpinned the world's relative stability and prosperity. This gives the United States the advantages over the other states in the world system. Henceforth, the rise of the rest of the globe, including China and India, the possibilities of a massive military attack on American soil and a collapse of American economy are not the real threats to American hegemony. In a world in which power is diffusing and interference is increasing, American leadership has to focus on dealing with its domestic problems and psychological problems (overreaction and neo-isolation). The combination of suggested policy responses, (do homework, strengthen domestic confidence, prepare for the future, accept the burden of regional and global responsibilities, reinforce smart power and consolidating alliances and partnerships), should be taken into consideration to deal with the challenges to American power and ultimately to endure American hegemony.

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