

The Declining American Hegemony

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A nation with special features in order to drive the world politics face to the declining of its hegemony. The American society, according to many intellectuals has enough abilities to rule the world but political failures or failed policies by the ruling elite diminished this possibility. Therefore; there is a strong possibility for the world history to experience a new system and a new ruling branch.

According to Perry Anderson, the ruling branch of the world order should contain force and consent together in its basis. However, as we experience in current policies of the world's superpower, the balance of force and consent was destroyed for the benefit of power. According to another approach, the American power declines in political, economic, military, and ideological bases. In that sense, the new world system, which is characterized by globalization makes it difficult for a particular nation or state to control the all political and economic matters with only enforcing your own power on the publics of world.

By following the approach about the declining ability of the American hegemony, it will be analyzed firstly what does hegemony mean for people in the age of globalization; secondly it will be tried to understand why the United States had gotten the its hegemonic position in the world order until today; thirdly there will be an answer to the question about why Europe couldn't take hegemonic role instead of the USA; and finally it will be tried to show how the American hegemony is declining. As a result, we can get the hall picture about the new decay in the world politics with a new generation which was born in the age of globalization.

- **The Features of the American Hegemony**

As Anderson illustrates the Gramscian approach to hegemony, there are two main concepts of hegemony. One of them is domination contains the exercise of violence as the ultimate currency of power. The other one is the direction which is an ideological capacity to win consent.¹ Therefore; any hegemonic concept should be in a dynamic equilibrium of force and consent. Additionally, the hegemon should be a particular state with its own special features such as; a different history and a set of national peculiarities. Since these are the

¹ Perry Anderson, "Force and Consent," *New Left Review*, (September-October, 2002), pp.21-22.

conditions because of the requirement of a hegemon to solve the coordination problem in conflicts of the world order. This can be an acceptable version of hegemony by publics of the world. In that sense, as Anderson explains that a hegemon should be a particular state whose features can not be shared by others, but its system should be generalizable by others.²

According to this approach, the American exception contains the features of the American society such as: a continental scale of territory which is protected by two oceans; a settler-immigrant population forms a society without any pre-capitalist past. Therefore; all of the requirements for spectacular economic growth, military power, and cultural penetration could be built. Additionally, because of the fundamental ideals of the American society it is seen as acceptable for other nations. As Anderson argues all of these features of the USA are reversed in Europe. This is the reason why Europe can not hold the hegemonic power of the world order.

All of special features of the American society were able to give chance to capitalist development in the 20th century. This event gave the hegemonic position to the USA. Since a hegemon should provide welfare for people under its rule. Additionally, the enrichment of American society because of the production bases in Fordism; the legal framework of production and culture; and the political proper is another matter for the USA to become a recognized superpower of the world order.³ However, at the end of this story, as Anderson illustrates the American hegemony is in the third level which is intermediate position between force and consent drives the USA to close corruption. In that sense, the USA eliminates the veto powers in General Assembly with IMF (International Monetary Fund) loans to the post-communist Russia and giving MFN (the most favored nation) status to China.⁴ In that sense, the American foreign policy traditions should be analyzed in order to understand the current position of the USA.

- **The Foreign Policy Traditions of the United States**

In the American society, as many intellectuals explain there is the idea of “God chosen society.” In that sense, Americans believe that their way is the best type of society for people to follow. As a result, foreign policy issue can not be separated from domestic policies. In other words, Americans have a feeling that there is a duty on them towards people in order to materialize the American ideals in the rest of the world. This approach was named as

² Ibid. p.21.

³ Ibid. pp.24-25.

⁴ Ibid. p.8.

Wilsonianism for many intellectuals during the time. In the time of the cold war, it was experienced as “global meliorism.”

According to Walter Russell Mead, the American diplomacy was overly successful since, it won the cold war. However, more generally, it diffused its language, culture, and products to worldwide.⁵ In that sense, the American dollar became the international medium of finance; the American language became the language of the world business; and American popular culture and American consumer products dominated the world media and world markets. However, because of the social features of the American society about their successful type of society, the relation of domestic and foreign policy makes it dangerous for the USA. Therefore; for some intellectuals, the primary danger is the uneducated public opinion about foreign policy. Since it can lead to an aggressive, unilateral foreign policy. For instance, Mead gives an example about Clinton’s policy faced a general public disinclination to send American forces anywhere abroad.⁶

According to Mead, in the cold war the old paradigms about isolationist and protectionist approach changed because of interventionist and free-trade policy demand of the cold war.

In a more historical approach, there can be count four decades in the American foreign policy. The first era was between 1776 and 1823. The United States won its political independence from the British Empire and immediately integrated to the British world economic system. The second era was between 1823 and 1914. During this time, the USA existed in a Britain-centered world order. Britain was securing the world order. As Mead argues that the USA firstly began to think seriously about it future if Britain fell. The third era of the American foreign policy between 1914 and 1947 contains two world wars. In that period, the USA experienced the declining of British global power and new chances to become world power. In that sense, the WWI made the USA the world’s greatest financial power. Additionally, the WWII gave potential ability to the USA in order to become the world’s leading power economically and politically.

The fourth era of the American foreign policy begins from 1947 when the USA formed its power in economic terms with IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank. In that stage, Americans concluded that the national interest required a strong maritime power able to uphold the balance of power in Europe and to maintain an international economic and

⁵ Walter Russell Mead, “The American Foreign Policy Tradition,” *Special Providence*, (New York: December 2001), p.10.

⁶ Ibid. p.31.

political order in the rest of the world. During that process, the USA experienced the cold war and in order to mobilize the American society, there were two myths. One of them is about “*them*”, which refers to the rest of the liberal world, and the other one is about “*us*.” As Mead argues that the USA couldn’t achieve to mobilize its society to make consent for forty years war. Additionally, because of the USA policies in the rivalry with the USSR, there was an attention to national benefits of the world nations in order to enlarge to its camp. In that sense, the USA respected international institutions, which were founded by her and it followed the concept of self-determination during the decolonization. Those were the “consent” part of the American hegemony during the cold war. However, after the end of the cold war, there was no more attention to keep the international system in its current situation. Ironically, this caused the death of consent about the American hegemony among people under the control of the USA.

In a more political approach, we can categorize the American foreign policy tradition into the two ways. The first one is the *real politik* approach which was characterized by Nixon and Kissinger policies into the cold war. In that sense, Kissinger put economic issues at the center of foreign policy. However, Walter Russell Mead names this tradition more generally into the Continental Realism. In his explanation, the ultimate aim was based on the balancing Europe in economic terms. In other words, it was not concerned about what kind of regime is existed in the rest of the world.

Another inheritance of the cold war to the USA is the elitism in policy making. In that sense, Chomsky and so many intellectuals criticize the elitist approach in foreign policy. For instance, Chomsky argues that top decision making positions relating to international affairs are heavily concentrated in the hands of representatives of major corporations, banks, investment firms, the few law firms, and some bureaucratic institutions.⁷ The assault on Cuba was conceived, planned, and implemented by a small group of men in executive department. Additionally, during those years the Central Intelligence Agency enlarged its power and freedom to undertake various self-selected interventionist projects around the world. Another explanation of elitism is the USA policy is about the increasing supremacy of federal government, especially the presidency office in executive branch of the State. Within the burgeoning government, power flowed away from Congress towards what became known as the imperial presidency.⁸

⁷ Ibid. p.32.

⁸ Ibid. p.69.

More generally, there can be an institutional perspective about the policy making process in the USA. In that sense, as Mead illustrates that the Pentagon maintains extensive contracts with foreign governments and militaries and it has strong view on overall American foreign policy. Beyond the Pentagon there are intelligence agencies, each with its own set of views, activities, and coordination with State. There is also a small bureaucracy of the National Security Council and the wider world of competing cabinet departments. Therefore; overall institutional division is about the Defense Department and the State Department.

In the sociological level, the United States is not unique in having idealistic and/or populist voices in its foreign policy. And as Mead argues that the American foreign policy changes from generation to generation and from decades to decade. He categorizes the USA foreign policy into the four schools. Those are Hamiltonians, Wilsonians, Jeffersonians, and Jacksonians.⁹

Hamiltonians see the first task of the American government as promoting the health of American enterprises at home and abroad. They have historically attempt to ensure that the USA government supported the rights of the American merchants and investors.

The second school contains people who believe in the duty of the state to protect the American democracy. They have been more interested in the legal and moral aspects of the worlds order than in economic agenda. Wilsonians typically believe that American interest require that other countries accept basic American values and conduct both their foreign and domestic affairs.

The third school that has often opposed Hamiltonian policy has been the continuity of the American democracy in a dangerous world. Jeffersonian tradition has looked for the least costly and dangerous method of defending the American independence while counseling against attempts to impose the Americans values on other countries.

Finally, the fourth school is named for Andrew Jackson. This school represents a deeply embedded, widely spread populist and popular culture of honor, independence, courage, and military pride among the American people. Therefore; the fundamental basis of this approach is based on the mobilization of masses. However, as Anatol Lieven criticizes, Jacksonian approach is the “*anti-thesis of American revolution.*” In that sense, it mobilizes the white Americans thought to values of American society.

⁹ Ibid. pp.87-88.

After the end of the cold war, the four traditional schools have become relevant than ever.¹⁰ During the cold war, the axis was settled among Jacksonians and Hamiltonians versus Wilsonians and Jeffersonians. With the end of the cold war, each school interpreted this event in a different way. As a result, the cold war alliances broke up and new coalitions struggled to cohere in response to new international conditions.

In the new decade, Hamiltonian program of free trade and globalization meant the increasingly influential community of NGOs the foundations who supported them largely Wilsonians united those two schools. In that sense, Hamiltonians and Wilsonians were the globalist believed that the construction of a global order was the fundamental task of American foreign policy. For Wilsonians, this was the promoting rule of law, spread of democracy, and for the protection of human rights. For Hamiltonians, it meant a unique opportunity to develop a worldwide trading and finance system based on the unchallenged might of America's military forces and on the dynamism of its economy.¹¹ The Gulf War was seen by Hamiltonians as a preventive war against an aspiring nuclear power. For Wilsonians, the war could be called a war for international law with the UN Security Council.

In other words, it was the time for a capitalist order enjoyed a degree of economic, cultural, and intellectual hegemony. On the other hand, Wilsonians responded to the end of the cold war with a sevenfold program.¹² First one was assisting the transition of the old Soviet Union and its former European satellites towards full, stable democracy. The second one was to complete the rout of communism, and see the growth of democratic regimes in Asia, starting with China.

The third aim was to consolidate the shift in Latin America away from military regimes toward at least formal democracy. Fourthly, they hoped to assist South Africa's transition toward multiracial, multiparty democracy, and to spread democratic values and practices to other sub-Saharan countries in Africa. In the fifth one, they wanted to use historical window of the democratic spring to generate the role of international judicial and political institutions. The sixth aim was to give a greater voice both internationally and within countries to something called "*civil society*." And finally, their opinion was significantly feminist and they made attempts to enlist the power and prestige of the USA for a systemic program to improve the lot of women around the world.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.264.

¹¹ Ibid. p.268.

¹² Ibid. p.283.

However, both of the traditions' foreign targets and success couldn't evaluate the domestic debates on them. For example, Hamiltonian trade and development policy during the 1990s didn't succeed in winning widespread popularity for the Hamiltonian agenda. On the other hand, as with Hamiltonians, the success of Wilsonian policy abroad didn't materialize Wilsonian influence at home. As W. Russell Mead argues there were major reasons for that. In the first place, a decade of American advice and aid in Russia ended with Russian public opinion with suspicious of and alienated from the USA. Secondly, spreading democracy to China policy become effective issues in George W. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign.

As a result, as it was illustrated by Mead, Hamiltonians and Wilsonians dominated civilian offices in the executive branch. In the military institutions and the Congress the political balance was in favored of Jacksonian and Jeffersonians. The Pentagon has become a center for Jeffersonian and Jacksonian thinking. In other words, with the domestic failure of globalists to gain popular support resulted in the victory of Jacksonian and Jeffersonian traditions which are dominated by military thinking. As a result, the USA is experiences Bush administration as a Jacksonian foreign policy to protect the American hegemony.¹³

In conclusion, it was tried to give main features of the American hegemony and what kind of foreign policy tradition drives it. In that sense, the historical and political analysis of those traditions was to illustrate the reasons of current foreign policies of the USA in a theoretical perspective.

- ***Is the American Hegemony sustainable?***

For some historians, all of the major empires collapsed due to the becoming away from soft power. In that sense, in the post-cold war period two events made the American foreign policy based on force instead of consent. In other words, the 9/11 gave chances to presidency, more generally elites in executive branch, to follow an expansionist policy abroad. Secondly, the Balkan War in the mid-nineties gave a chance to America in order to command Europe toward a preventive strike with unilateral action of the USA.

In the new decay, Bush administration is in rivalry with Europe, but the two events as said before made relations with China and Russia softer. The war on terrorism offered a much better basis for integrating rival power centers under American leadership than human rights rhetoric. The ABM Treaty is dead, NATO is moving into the Baltic States without resistance

¹³ Ibid. p.307.

from Moscow. This event is another explanation of the American hegemony is in corruption level.

On the other hand, the European approach to the world order is more based on treaty-based diplomacy, incremental pooling of sovereignty, legalistic attachment to formal rule making, and valuable concern for human rights. However, Robert Kagan argues that those are the political medium of weak part in the world order. Therefore; its political position forces Europe to use soft power mediums in the world politics. But it is not an escaping point from the view that using harder tools in the world order means the end of your hegemony. Since as it was said before, a hegemon should contain force and consent elements in the same time. For Europe, there is the necessity of unification in order to balance the American power.

In that modern era, the USA has its vast intelligence network, its five global military command, its more than one million men and women at arms on five continents, its carrier battle groups on watch in every ocean, and its 30 percent control of the world economic product. Therefore; as Michael Cox argues what word other than empire better describes the American international order?¹⁴

Especially, after 9/11, in an age of unparalleled global dominance the USA had every right to see itself into the international role of setting standards, determining threats, using force and meeting out justice. As a result, it is imperialism by any other name.¹⁵

As Cox argues that global order presupposed power, power resided with states, and it was up to the strong state (the hegemon in using the jargon) to pay the bills and enforce the rules of game.¹⁶ By the current unilateral foreign policy of the USA, it loses local alliances and it cannot provide wealth for the world nations. However, they are the main elements to discriminate any strong state from empire to hegemon. If any strong state has these tools, it can be called as hegemon, but the USA is far from that concept.

In economic terms, the USA economy accounts for nearly 30 percent of world product, it is roughly 40 percent bigger than many of its rivals, the USA dollar still remains mighty and the Wall Street is still located at the heart of the international financial system. Furthermore, the world economic system is not completely out of control; states still have a key role to play and enormous resources of at the American state provide the huge influence on the world economy.¹⁷

¹⁴ Michael Cox, "Empire? The Bush Doctrine and the Lessons of History," in David Held and Mahtias Koenig-Archibugi (ed.), *American Power in 21st Century*, (Polity Press, 2004), p.23.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.25.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.35.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.39.

As Wallerstein tries to show us the current or existing system, it is a crossroad whether it will continue or not. As he assumes the system will change due to the several reasons. In other perspective, if we look at the existing system is called globalization from the understanding of it as an American Empire or new imperialism, the system also in a crossroad.

According to Michael Mann, there are four principle reasons for the end of the American Empire. These are ideological, economic, military, and political powers.¹⁸

In ideological matter, it is the age of nationalism in world politics. The world experienced de-colonization, which is an output of raising nationalism in the third world countries. The USA also had no powerful local alliances to bargain with those nationalist movements in today's events. There is also a struggle against the modernist approach in the third world countries. This reaction by the nationalist addresses the USA since it is the ruling part of the modernization and world capitalism. Additionally, with today's means of communication, it becomes easier to express ideologies such as nationalism, anti-imperialism, racial equality and human rights into the global level against the ruling elites in the world.¹⁹

In economic perspective, the USA now dominates the world economy much less that it did in the first decade after 1945. The US is the biggest debtor nation in the world. When the British Empire was collapsed, its military cost were about 2,5 about percent of its GDP, but the US has military costs which is 4 percent of its GDP.²⁰

In military, the USA military budget for 2003 was 40 percent of the world's total military spending, exceeding the spending of the next 24 states combined. It is 25 times greater than the combined spending of all seven "rogue states" identified by the USA as its enemies. However, as Mann illustrates empires require conventional, not nuclear forces, which the US spends on. In that sense, the USA conventional forces include 1,45 million men and women under arms less than China's 2,5 million. The USA has only 5 percent of the world's soldiers. However, you need people to control the world.²¹

In political power, there is an ideological group in the USA who believe that the world's biggest power can act unilaterally without the political mandate of the UN incurs cost in military, economic and ideological powers. The mandate brings unconditional permissions

¹⁸ Michael Mann, "The First Failed Empire of the 21st Century," in David Held and Mahtias Koenig-Archibugi (ed.), *American Power in 21st Century*, (Polity Press, 2004), p.52.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.72-75.

²⁰ Ibid., pp.57-59.

²¹ Ibid., p.64.

to use foreign bases, allied troops, the cash to fund the venture and above all legitimacy.²² As it was said before, the USA loses its local alliances by acting unilaterally and ignoring the UN and Europeans.

As a result, as the British and Romans had done in the past, the American Empire will experience the same end since she does not take the lesson from history. When the barbarians took over the Roman Empire culturally first and then delivered a left hook and overrun it militarily, the disaster became inevitable. In other words, the British Empire met its final and fatal setback in Suez and the French Empire collapsed in Algeria. Finally Afghan misadventure was the Soviet's final and fatal blunder.²³

In economic dominance, the USA can no longer be taken for granted, especially in an age when it becomes increasingly dependent on the financial largesse of others to manage its growing debts.²⁴

- **Conclusion**

From all of the explanations above, it can be understood that a hegemonic power should contain force and consent elements in its body. Additionally, becoming away from this balance makes it a terrible end for the hegemon in the world history. As a result, figures were illustrated above are the remarkable explanations for the American hegemony to go an end. In that sense, if the USA wants to keep the system under its control, it should respect to opinions of people. The Iraq War, permanent support to Israel in the Middle East, eradicating poverty, and sharing benefits from the world trade more fairly are the main debates are waiting solution from the ruling ground of the world order.

²² Ibid., p.67.

²³ Abdelwahab El-Affendi, "Waiting for Armageddon: 'The Mother of Empires' and its Middle East Quagmire," in David Held and Mahtias Koenig-Archibugi (ed.), *American Power in 21st Century*, (Polity Press, 2004), p.258.

²⁴ Michael Cox, "Empire? The Bush Doctrine and the Lessons of History," p.23.