



Research Article

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Declining United States Leadership and the Future of International Political System

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been a major player in promoting international peace and security. Today the declining US leadership has raised some questions such as: What are the factors that led to the decline of US leadership internationally? How did the US react to its dwindling leadership role? Are the current US strategies for regaining leadership in international politics effective? Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: Is declining US leadership a potential threat to international peace and security? How effective are the current US strategies in regaining leadership in international politics? The long cycle theory was used in this study. The study also relied on secondary data such as textbooks, magazines and internet sources, while content analysis was used to analyze the data collected. This study argues that the declining US leadership role poses a potential threat to the future of the international system, as no state like no other is willing to provide the financial and other resources necessary to meet global challenges for years to come, compared to the US's overall commitment to promoting international peace and security. Finally, this study regards the current US approaches as ineffective and therefore advocates new approaches.

Keywords: United States, Peace, Security, Leadership, Great powers

1. Introduction

The relationship between the great powers in international politics has been characterized by rivalry over the years. In addition, this relationship between the great powers alike has spawned various forms of power structures that have existed in the international system, some of these power structures or arrangements showing a greater degree of political stability than others. Hence, this historical rivalry in relations between the great powers tends to have resulted in cyclical phases. For example, since 1495, when Portugal sought hegemony in international politics, competition between the great powers for world leadership has developed from one great power to another.

The international system has seen three major wars in the 20th century, namely World War I, World War II and the Cold War. A feature of the Cold War era was the emergence of bipolarity in world politics. In addition, there were changes in the post-Cold War era that brought uncertainty about the characteristics of the international system in three ways: a relatively stable international political system (Zakaria, 2009), the spread of western liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1989) and the emergence of hegemonic rule over political and economic ideologies (Kegley & Blanton, 2011). Today the international system has become unipolar, with the United States emerging as the global hegemony that prevails in world politics.

Nevertheless, there is a current shift in the contemporary balance of power configuration in international politics in what Huntington (2005) loosely showed that is an international system in which there is a single dominant power, but the resolution of conflicts and other world issues will be borne out by dominant power and other great powers. This perspective to the knowledge of present power configuration in world politics states that the US will remain the global hegemony or superpower in addressing key international problems that centred on world peace and security while the resolution of interstate challenges will require the efforts of the superpower (US) and other great power in Asia and Europe (such as China, Japan, Britain, Russia). However, recently, there is growth in the potential of some great powers such as China and Russia among others who are beginning to resist US hegemony. Thus, there is a lacuna between US potentials and how other great powers have perceived US powers at the international level (Kegley & Blanton, 2011).

In recent years, US leadership in international politics has declined, which has raised some fundamental questions about the US's ability to maintain its leadership in international politics. Questions like: How did the US react to its dwindling leadership role? Are the current US strategies for regaining leadership in international politics effective? It is against this backdrop; This study attempts to answer the following research questions: Is declining US leadership a potential threat to international peace and security? How effective are the current US strategies in regaining leadership in current world politics?

2. Theoretical Framework

International relations scholars have developed various theories over the years that attempt to explain the structure of the international system in modern times, such as the hegemonic stability theory, which states that the emergence of a hegemon in the international system is a necessary condition for the maintenance of the international peace and stability. However, the hegemonic stability theory does not provide us with adequate answers to the research questions in this study: Is the dwindling US leadership role potentially a threat to international peace and security? How effective are the current US strategies in regaining leadership? Hence, this study is in the context of long-cycle theory, which explains the rise and fall of leading international power as the dominant political process of the current world system.

Long cycle theory is used to explain the nature of the international structure over the years (Chase-Dunn and Anderson, 2005). Kegley and Blanton (2011: 86) claim that the long-cycle theory holds that international wars were accompanied by periods of international rule-making and institutional building more than five centuries ago. Changes in the cycle have occurred along with shifts in the relative power of the large states that have changed their relationships with one another. Thus, with its unrivaled power, the hegemon has reshaped the rules and institutions of the international system in order to maintain its pre-eminent position.

The great weight of hegemony is constantly placed on global leaders. In order to defend its position and continue to reign, a hegemon must pay the price of upholding political and economic stability. Every prior hegemon has carefully worked after the last global war was attacked, but this has changed over time as the burden of global participation grows. In the past, this fight for dominance has paved the way for another world war, the collapse of one hegemon, and the emergence of another. The claim that these cycles are caused by economic, military, or domestic causes has been

refuted by long cycle theorists.

3. Declining US Leadership Role and International Political System

Two multipolar models provide answers to the contemporary international system. One of the key models is the multipolarity is the desirability of Heywood (2007:142) described as a system of coordinated links between more states based on laid down principles and treaties. This model is based on three factors. The first has to do with, states the recognition of the effects of nuclear proliferation (Weapon of Mass Destruction) in the multipolar world order. Second, globalization has affected the international system by promoting interconnectedness/dependence among states in the international system as well as creating new rifts and divisions among states in world politics. Third, the success of multilateralism is also situated within the context of global governance and regional institutions that would establish the needed legal framework for peaceful resolution of the conflict between and among states and other non-state actors (Heywood, 2007).

The second model is the which showed that states that there is the likelihood of the world shifting towards anarchy and instability. This is because as great powers emerged from the multipolar order, they pursue their interest because of the freedom they have as a superpower. It is essential to note that states under such an arrangement will result in alliance formation and counter-alliance formation to deter potential aggressors and probably take benefit of weaker states actors. It can be claimed that one of the reasons for the First and Second World Wars were attributed to great powers to pursue their interest and expansionist agenda. Therefore, it can be argued here that the tendency of the international system evolving into a multipolar system will potent danger for the future of international peace and security. There is a growing concern amongst foreign policy experts as to if the declining US leadership role potent any danger to international peace and security or not following the dynamics inherent in the international system that has led to the rise of multipolar, bipolar and unipolar world order. The rise of the US following the collapsed of the Soviet Union in 1991. Decades after the rise of the US as a superpower. Since the Roman Empire, no nation has held such sway over the world's culture, economy, technology, and military (Krauthammer, 2002).

The "Post-American" (an international system where the dominance of hegemonic role play by the US no longer exist) world has necessitated the rise of great powers in international politics has helped in shaping and redefining the pattern of international politics. Zakaria (2009:4) argues that at the politico-military level in international politics, the world has maintained a single-super power while in other spheres such as socio-cultural, economic, financial and industrial the world is shifting towards multipolarity as other great powers are exerting influence in these areas.

Huntington (2005) has argued that despite the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower, the combined effort of other states is required to address some important international issues. It is important to note that despite the economic competition between the US and other great powers in world politics, they have managed to regulate their security-strategic relationships in the fight against terrorism (Mead, 2006). Similarly, the United States will continue to be relevant as it remains a global superpower to be reckoned with, while other great powers follow the US in pyramidal order (Gelb, 2009). Thus, the decline of US leadership in international politics poses a potential threat to the future of the international system. This is because no great power has the ability to take responsibility for the world as the US has in the course of the world Years have done to promote international peace and security.

No other country is in a more advantageous position to manoeuvre through the complex currents of twenty-first-century geopolitics (Spalding 2019: 11-12). We still have the best military in the world, spending greater amounts on defence than the preceding seven countries combined; our economic system stays the most creative and flexible in the globe, in spite of risks of getting too hot and large inequalities; improvements in technology have unlocked vast domestic interest in natural gas and clean, renew The period in which we may create an entirely novel global framework before others do so is provided by these advantages, which are not permanent nor automatic.

One area that has received less attention is the fight against global terrorism. The US's success in fighting global terrorism has been praised by other great powers who have partnered with the US to name the global wave of terrorism that is calling into question the security of many states in Asia, America and Australia, Europe and Africa. It can be argued that most of the world's terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda; al-Shabaab; the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; Boko Haram (<https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>), among others, restricted its activities by the USA and other great power alliances.

An assessment of states' contributions to peacekeeping operations around the world shows that the US continues to be a leading financier of UN activities. As of 2020, the following country contributions are to the United Nations: US 27.89 percent; China 15.22 percent; Japan 8.56 percent; the UK 5.79 percent; France 5.61 percent; Italy 3.31 percent; Russia 3.05 percent; Canada 2.73 percent; South Korea 2.27 percent while other countries in the world 19.48. Today no country in the world makes remarkable contributions to the peacekeeping of the United Nations. It's important to note that since 1994, the U.S. Congress set the U.S. payment at 25% because U.S. valuations were too high. Current Donald Trump administration proposes \$ 1.07 billion for United Nations peacekeeping by FY2021, a 20% decrease from the approved FY2020 of \$ 1.52 billion (US Congressional Research Service, 2020).

Overall, the strength of the US economy and its contribution to international peace and security in the phases of a current economic meltdown compared to the engagement of other great powers such as China, Russia and Japan for international peace and security is an issue to consider. It is argued here that, despite its dwindling status in contemporary international politics, the US has so far remained elegant in maintaining its leadership position. Therefore, the readiness of great powers such as China, Russia, India and Japan to take on the leadership responsibility of the USA in the current international system, which is characterized by manifold uncertainty and commitment, is a question which, after a critical assessment of the role of these great powers in world politics, is the last one Years.

4. United States Strategies and Leadership Role in International Politics

In recent years, there are variations in the international system that has been influenced by globalization. One of these changes is that it has resulted in the rise of contending multipolarity in world politics. The main factors that have triggered the world to be tilling towards multipolarity include the growth of China, India and other great powers, the growing power of non-state actors and the dynamic nature of power relations in the international system. The United States foreign policy posture towards other states have been brought under heavy criticisms in recent years. For instance, in 2001 President George W. Bush claims that the US role in the international system would be the story of a power that went into the world to protect but not possess, to defend but not to conquer. As a result, the international community started to have doubts about the Bush Doctrine's promise that the US would "act unilaterally, however it wishes elsewhere, regardless the approval of others." (Heywood, 2007:332).

The aftermath of the 9/11, mark the execution of the Bush Doctrine in which the US began its War on Terror by invading Afghanistan, overthrown the Taliban regime and subsequently identified Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the "Axis of Evil". Subsequently delisted Syria, Cuba and Libya. By 2003, the US-led forces in a coalition of "alliance of the willing" went to war with Iraq. However, the US influence in the Middle East has subjected to criticism because of its ideological and strategic approach. This remark has sent a dangerous signal to the international community. Subsequently, Mathew (2000) has rightly observed that it is a global phenomenon over the years when countries become hegemon, they tend to want everything their way, and it has not worked out.

The US's ability to maintain its leadership role as an international hegemon has been discussed by foreign policy experts in recent years.

Spalding (2019), in his observation on the waning influence of the US in world affairs, correctly

noted that the US "We have been misled by our avarice and the ideal of globalisation into believing that free commerce inevitably frees people from the chains of authoritarianism and creates the conditions for democracy. The lure of cheap labour, affordable goods, and skyrocketing stock prices has been alluring, but by renouncing our industrial skills and dominance, we have ceded our autonomy and sold out our population by depriving them of employment. And we've been duped: Investing in a totalitarian state that demands the funds never leave the country is permitting thieves to loot our treasury, not our pocketbook (Spalding, 2019:15).

One of the fundamental issues focused on the cost of US military obligations to promote international peace and security. Over the years, the US drive to acquire more military software and hardware has widened its debt profile, which has drawn criticism from US citizens for having financial resources necessary for the development of other critical sectors of the American economy, such as health care and housing provided will be channeled into the development of its military capabilities. One of the consequences of gaining more US military capabilities is making US citizens more insecure and reducing US respect in the community of nations. Today the United States is one of the largest economies in the world. Despite this strengthening, the US economy faced a number of challenges, ranging from a budget deficit to economic challenges posed by emerging economies such as China and the European Union (Kennedy, 2006). It is appropriate to point out here that the decline in US leadership in international politics is likely to lead to the emergence of a multipolarity in which the European Union, China, India and Russia compete with the US for power. It follows that the power constellation in international politics is shifting towards a multipolar system in which there will be two superpowers and more great powers influencing world politics.

The effects of the global economic crisis that began in 2008 had an impact on the US economy. The 2008 Great Depression is considered to be the worst economic crisis since the 1929 Great Depression that hit the world economy. Hence, the previous US leadership has arguably not provided the necessary economic reforms that will restore the US economy. Although remarkable progress has been made, with some gains in economic growth, it appears that the US needs more resources to fund a number of its policies and programs abroad.

It is important to point out that China has acquired six spheres of influence in world affairs, some of which the US has neglected. These include business, military, global diplomacy, technology, education, and infrastructure. The first strategy used by the Chinese is to use money as a tool to influence US politics and US corporations. Second, using US capital against their national interests to create unfavorable trading conditions against the US by ensuring that Chinese products and manufactured goods flood US markets. As a result, the US labor market and average wages will continue to stagnate. Third is the use of various digital media to manipulate its history, to manipulate researchers to view China as a law abiding and just nation in the community of nations (Spalding, 2019: 12).

However, a critical assessment of current US strategies for regaining leadership has not been effective for the following reasons. One of these reasons is the US neglect of compromise and consensus-building policies over the years, which has limited US leadership in world politics (Freedland, 2007; Johnson, 2007). As the second largest economy in the world, China uses infrastructure projects such as the construction of roads, railways, power plants and telecommunications platforms as non-assertive, safe, but powerful weapons to influence potential allies and rivals (Spalding, 2019: 126).

According to Spalding (2019), who commented on the erosion of US leadership, the US's global strategy is also crucial. "Our political, military, corporate, and budgetary leaders have failed to recognise the delicate game the CCP has been playing. They have been functioning under the now-outdated assumption that only bombs and guns may be used to wage war, which is understandable. However, the CCP's approach is to use a range of alternative strategies and methods to combat. It promotes and encourages an ongoing focus on worldwide monopolisation of infrastructure, economic sabotage, coercion, and theft in order to broaden China's sphere of influence (Spalding, 2019:12).

After all, in many ways the US has failed to adopt the rights strategies to maintain its leadership role, and has enabled such larger powers as China, Russia, Japan, India and the European Union to form a formidable force to help the US Dominance to question international affairs. It can be said that previous attempts by the US to maintain its leadership role in international politics have not been effective in need of change. To this end, the question that arises in the minds of international relations experts is whether or not the US can regain its leadership role in international politics. Our position in this study is yes, provided the US is willing to learn from its past mistakes and to adopt a new friendly approach that takes into account the interests of other states.

5. Conclusion

The dwindling US leadership in international politics in recent years has sparked intense debates among foreign policy experts. Therefore, this study provided answers to the following research questions: Is declining US leadership a potential threat to international peace and security? How effective are the current US strategies in regaining leadership in international politics? This study supported the long cycle theory. Finally, this study found current US approaches ineffective because the US has neglected the politics of compromise and consensus building over the years, instead using coercive measures in pursuit of its national interests. This strategy is arguably unacceptable to emerging superpowers, who often oppose US domination in international politics.

6. Recommendations

First, the United States must shift its foreign policy stance from being aggressive or dominant to one of compromise and consensus building with other states. This will, among other things, help the US regain its respect and pride in the community of nations.

Again, the US government should look inward, addressing its domestic policy challenges such as rising inflation, unemployment, housing and budget deficits, by focusing on reforms that aim to improve the living standards of low-income Americans. This is in line with the popular maxim that charity begins at home. Hence, the US government should address its domestic political issues that have led other countries in the world to accuse the US of its inability to address their domestic political challenges, but advise other countries to achieve what it failed to achieve at home on their annual Budget allocation for the acquisition of more military hardware and software to the detriment of other critical sectors of the economy, as modern international political economy is not determined by the military factor alone, other factors such as the economy, global diplomacy, technology, education, and infrastructure are too important for pursuing leadership in international politics.

Moreover, the US government should reconsider its foreign policy, particularly towards major powers such as China, Russia, India, Japan, and the European Union, to learn some of the strategies it has put into the fight against the US in recent years. Areas of study include business, military, global diplomacy, technology, education, and infrastructure, among others. Additionally, the US should consider Asian countries, especially China, as its priority for engagement. The US government should intensify its efforts to cope with competition with China by weakening it through bilateral cooperation wherever the interests of the two countries are conflicting, as today's economies are deeply intertwined and conflict between America and China becomes inevitable. Both the US and China will have to work to ensure that inevitable conflicts due to trade disputes do not become uncontrollable.

Finally, the US government should work more diplomatically with a country like North Korea over its nuclear program, taking advantage of economic and military cooperation with its allies like South Korea and other key regional actors like China and Japan.

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