

## IS THERE A DRIFT TOWARDS POST-HEGEMONY IN THE GLOBAL HIERARCHY?

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### **Abstract**

*The impending power transition in the global hierarchy has already triggered post-hegemonic phase in the international system. The 'Rise of China' along with alternate power centers have considerably constrained US clout to obtain 'desired outcomes' and few significant political developments in the first decade of the twenty-first century are already tilting the debate in favour of drift towards post-hegemony. A review of the academic debates between 'primacists' and 'declinists' school has been done within the article to establish that uncertainty and ambiguity prevailing in the contemporary global hierarchy not only provides substance to the scholarly debate on post-hegemony, but speaks of a world away from US dominated and controlled patterns of interaction and influence.*

**Keywords:** US, Hegemony, Primacy, Post-Cold War, International System.

### **Introduction**

The sudden demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 along with the disappearance of a bipolar international order led to enthusiastic proclamations of "Unipolar moment"<sup>1</sup> by advocates of US primacists. The unprecedented military preparedness and economic prowess with explicit absence of a peer competitor gave credence to the argument that the "American Century"<sup>2</sup> is not only well entrenched but capable to last further into the twenty-first century. Thus preserving "US hegemonic role in a unipolar world" became the over-riding objective of every post-Cold War US administration.<sup>3</sup> While *Pax Americana* was being hailed by a number of security study scholars, foreign policy analysts and policymakers, another heated debate started at about the same time with primary focus on whether unipolarity can sustain or the maintenance of "hegemony" a wise policy for the US?

With balance-of-power realists predicting unipolarity to backfire as had repeated bids for hegemony in past by counterbalancing efforts of other great powers, advocates of "American exceptionalism" continued to view failure of this hitherto ironclad rule as an exception to "American primacy"<sup>4</sup>. Despite the most

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forceful and comprehensive defense of unipolar stability, and durability of American hegemony from Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth in their 2008 book *World Out of Balance*, scholars in the opposite camp kept predicting impending end of *Pax Americana*. It won't be wrong to claim that for every analyst announcing the demise of America's power potential and global leadership, we find an equally compelling American or Western analysis securing another decade of American preponderance.

Amid all these conflicting views, my argument about US drift towards post-hegemony will discuss the current academic debate between US "primacists" and "declinists" school, shedding light on the uncertain times we are surviving and how this ambiguity provides substance to debate on post-hegemony.

## **Power Structure of the Post-Cold War International System**

Henry Kissinger wrote in 1994 that "almost as if, according to some natural law, in every century there seems to emerge a country with the power, the will, and the intellectual and moral impetus to shape the entire international system accordance with its own values".<sup>5</sup> Twentieth century bore witness to the application of the statement by blessing US the pre-eminent status, whether the twenty-first century will also, is a question still being contested in the academic circles.

Two most significant events in the last quarter of the twentieth century that not only brought an end to more than five decades of intense rivalry between two competing ideological blocks (US/Soviet Union; Capitalism/Communism) but also led to vast speculations about the future power structure had been the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Some authors tried to make sense of the post-Cold War period, especially after September 11 as "post-post-Cold War"<sup>6</sup>, referring the tragic and terrible event as the clear dividing line that made world different from what it had been hitherto then.<sup>7</sup> However, the world had changed in far more complicated ways than to be made sense of it by just adding another "post" to already existing "post-Cold War" label.

A "new world order" by G.H.W. Bush was one of the foremost ideas to be floated immediately after the end of the Cold War i.e. on September 11, 1990.

The concept manifested that not only would “power” play a secondary role along with “state” as primary actor but would be replaced by international organizations and entities as the lead actors. The basic objective behind this proclamation being that realism and power politics have been replaced with a cooperative liberal perception of international relations in this new order. Since then the idea has been hailed through different labels from “idealpolitik”<sup>8</sup> to “neo-liberalism”<sup>9</sup> to “neo-Wilsonian idealism”<sup>10</sup> and “neo-idealist moment”.<sup>11</sup>

When scholars like Francis Fukuyama were hailing “The End of History”<sup>12</sup> back in late 1980s and celebrating ultimate triumph of market economy and liberal democracy espoused by the West as the final form of human government expecting all states to gravitate towards it for pure self-interest, there were others like Paul Kennedy who saw a vision of a multipolar world owing to the “imperial overstretch” of the reigning hegemon and rise of other influential actors like European Union and Japan<sup>13</sup>. How strong this perception was, can be gauged from statements of Paul Tsongas - the US Massachusetts Senator - who said, “The Cold War is over: Japan won” at 1992 Democratic Convention.<sup>14</sup> Still others like John Mearsheimer in an article in 1990 argued that international order in post-cold war period would be a reversion from bipolarity to multipolarity. But his vision was of a far more pessimistic world. A world that cast doubts on optimistic projections of a peaceful, prosperous future; A world that he arrived at by drawing parallel between early twentieth century experience of Europe and future great powers.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from the two grand ideas being floated immediately in the post-Cold War period, a third perspective gained importance and they were proponents of the ‘unipolarity’ school. It stressed US hegemony<sup>16</sup> and expressed admiration for Pax Americana<sup>17</sup>. One of the most initial and clear manifestation of this vision appeared in the leaked draft of Pentagon’s *Defence Planning Guidance* (DPG) for the fiscal years 1994-99, in March 1992. It referred to preserving unipolarity as its goal which was subsequently altered owing to its very controversial nature and strong resistance against it. It explicitly stated:

*We must account sufficiently for the interests of the large industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political or economic order and that we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring political competitors for even aspiring to a larger regional or global role.*<sup>18</sup>

The main protagonist of grand idea of unipolarity was Charles Krauthammer, who in a 1990 article “The Unipolar moment” proclaimed an unprecedented era of US dominance that was expected to last for approximately a decade before giving way to multipolarity.<sup>19</sup>

Did US have any idea “what to do with it primacy”<sup>20</sup> was a question put forward by Robert Art. Most agree that in the era after the end of the Cold War, US did not play part of the sole remaining superpower.<sup>21</sup> It found itself in a position that required understanding of the new prevailing situation.<sup>22</sup> Hence, 1990s made the unipolar vision moot<sup>23</sup> as neither G.H.W. Bush nor the first Clinton administration could either devise a new foreign policy vision or implement “the idea of unipolarity”. Thus, argued L. Gaiser and I. Kovac: “Consequently, the power structure of the international system changes from bipolar (in the Cold War) to multipolar (in the post-Cold War).” Further adding, if the Gulf war is accepted as an indication of unipolarity, even then US did not follow up, missing the historic opportunity to be reduced to a historical moment. “It was so brief that it lasted a few months in the transition from bipolarity to multipolarity,” and failed to have “a relevant impact on the changing of the power structure of the international system....the unipolar moment of the US came to fruition 10 years later.”<sup>24</sup>

Though the second Clinton Administration was a bit more assertive and Madeline Albright, the then United States Secretary of State, for the first time stated publicly “the indispensable nation” title for the US in 1998<sup>25</sup> but it was the G.W. Bush Administration in 2001 to be credited for a clear vision and strategy to implement the unipolar moment. Even before the catastrophic event of September 11, his administration emphasized national interests and the military preparedness to implement their grand vision.<sup>26</sup> Bush Junior was determined to preserve US supremacy<sup>27</sup> and Condoleezza Rice article in *Foreign Affairs* in 2000 made explicit such an intention.<sup>28</sup>

Opening of new bases in ex-Soviet Republics (Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Uzbekistan)<sup>29</sup>; withdrawal from Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty; veto on BWC (Biological weapons Convention) protocol verification; disinclination to sign the Kyoto-Protocol; refusal to ratify the Rome Statue of ICC (International Criminal Court) were all early manifestations of the new grand vision which Ikenberry saw nothing less than “neo-imperialistic”.<sup>30</sup> This was unabashed vision of US global supremacy

and aggressive unilateralism. It involved deep distrust of global institutions and multilateralism generally; emphasis on military “pre-emptive strikes” to defeat terrorism and curb “rouge states”; keeping “weapons of mass destruction” out of wrong hands and a putative campaign for creation of new democratic regimes.<sup>31</sup> What intensified the unipolar drive of the Bush Administration after September 11 was not a significant change in the international structure rather it were the political decisions that made the world unipolar in 2001, like the political decisions that had made it multipolar in 1990s.<sup>32</sup>

The unparalleled political-military-economic preponderance generated equally unprecedented confidence in Bush Administration, which not only came forward with its own “Bush doctrine”<sup>33</sup> conceptualized in 2002 US National Security Strategy but also in the 1-4-2-1 strategy of Pentagon. This strategy visualized an unprecedented force that would not only defend US homeland, operate in and from four forward regions but would defeat two regional adversaries swiftly and simultaneously along with the ability to achieve regime change in one of the regions.<sup>34</sup> Such was a pervasive impact of this preponderant power that not only Kennedy has to retract his statement of the decline of the US owing to “imperial overstretch” predicted in late 1980s<sup>35</sup> but even Krauthammer was compelled to reframe the earlier “unipolar moment” into a “unipolar era”.<sup>36</sup> Even a noted American journalist W. Pfaff writing in the *The International Herald Tribune* stated “Washington is considering whether it should deliberately use American political, economic and military activities to consolidate and expand American global might, making the twenty-first century even more the American century than was the second half of the twentieth,” and reminded us that “sun sets on every empire”.<sup>37</sup>

The triumphant mood of the Bush administration manifested itself in assertive unilateralism. It was especially visible in swift ousting of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and that too with substantial international approval, and of Saddam Husain in Iraq. In the later case there was prevalent international opposition and few key NATO allies publicly registered their disapproval too. These episodes led to apprehensions about the very nature of American power and words like “superpower”, “hyperpower”, “empire” and “hegemon” increasingly came to be associated with US sometimes as acknowledgement of its unprecedented power and at others as warnings from others; as a sign of growing resentment towards unbridled and overwhelming power exercised by the lone

superpower. It was not until 2008, US had to learn the hard way that military power was not “the almighty” that could solve all challenges.<sup>38</sup>

The new imperialism which turned into simple militarism and US steadily lost ideological legitimacy abroad. Michael Mann reflected, “whereas in the recent past American power was hegemonic....now it is imposed at the barrel of a gun.”<sup>39</sup> He further stated that though American empire might not yet be over-stretched but “its stretch is incoherent”. “This giant’s military might sits uneasily with economic and geopolitical resources that originate in multilateral arrangement....Its militarism also greatly outstrip its political capacity to rule any conquered country and contradicts the ideology of freedom and democracy.”<sup>40</sup>

This unilateral adventurism generated widespread resentment and dented US “soft power” significantly. At about the same time, we saw that some scholars and analysts were coming round to another perception. Krauthammer asserted that US was “past the apogee” of its unparalleled power.<sup>41</sup> In spite of having the strongest power and the largest military, US power to get others do what it wants them to do was constrained and it led Joseph Nye to state that unipolarity is a misleading term as it exaggerates the degree to which US can obtain outcomes it requires in different dimensions of world politics.<sup>42</sup>

Besides Nye also mentioned how some aspects of international system were unipolar while others multipolar. He made a distinction between “relative” and “absolute” decline; while later is defined as the sense of decay and former is one in which the power resources of other states are used effectively vis-a-vis US. He refuted US decline because of “imperial overstretch” but cited “domestic under reach” as a reason that can precipitate such a path. His “three-dimensional chessboard” concept captures the diffused nature of power, which according to him posed a greater danger than power transition. In this concept the top chessboard is occupied by military which is largely unipolar with US. According to him, America is likely to retain the unprecedented position for quite some time. Economic power occupies the middle chessboard and its been multipolar for more than a decade where others besides US, Europe, Japan and China are gaining in importance. The bottom chessboard is the realm of international relations; here power is largely diffused because of non-state actors. He further asserts it makes no sense to speak of hegemony, primacy, unipolarity or multipolarity as far as the bottom dimension of chessboard is concerned.<sup>43</sup>

Friedberg addresses the same problem by differentiating “power as control over resources” with “power as control over outcomes”. He further elaborates just because the US has the largest economy and the most powerful military might does not mean it can get preferable and desired outcomes all of the time.<sup>44</sup> Samuel Huntington has debated concept of unipolarity back in 1999 when he came forward with one of his own “uni-multipolarity” concept. He said, “There is now only one superpower. But that does not mean that the world is unipolar. A unipolar system would have one superpower, no significant major powers, and many minor powers.... Contemporary international politics..... is a strange hybrid, a uni-multipolar system with one superpower and several major powers.”<sup>45</sup>

While there were others who believed that US had been declining since 1970s and US response to September 11 attacks only accelerated decline. Immanuel Wallerstein remarked, “The economic, political, and military factors that contributed to US hegemony are the same factors that will inexorably produce the coming US decline”.<sup>46</sup> How far damage has been done through its self-interested unilateral assertiveness can be gauged from the statement that “the United States finds itself –a lone superpower that lacks true power, a world leader nobody follows and few respect, and a nation drifting dangerously amidst a global chaos it cannot control”.<sup>47</sup> Wallerstein was not the only one expressing concern about US unilateral exercise of its huge military might, Kishore Mahbubani also saw blind pursuit of its narrow self-interests which were costing US a lot. “The ‘root causes’ of the problem of American power vis-à-vis the rest of the world,” has aptly been identified as “this huge edifice of American power is structurally designed to serve only one purpose: to further American interests”.<sup>48</sup>

Hass asserts that though US is and will remain the single largest power but “the reality of American strength should not mask the relative decline of the United State’s position in the world – and with the relative decline in power an absolute decline in influence and independence”.<sup>49</sup> For him multipolarity might be a generation or two away but power and influence are even less linked in era of nonpolarity and it will be increasingly difficult for Washington to lead an occasion, where collective responses to regional and global challenges are required. For him history, US policy and globalization have brought the inevitable end of the unipolarity.<sup>50</sup> Power and influence are interlinked and this theme is repeatedly invoked by those who point out declining ability of the US to get desired outcomes and as a sign of its vanishing hegemony. Power shifting

sideways is another argument given by Susan Strange as she delineates this drift from states to markets and to non-state actors.<sup>51</sup>

Hass “age of non-polarity” thesis wasn’t the only novel addition to the debate of alternative world order, Nail Ferguson has already aired his idea of “a polarity” and warned those who were eagerly looking towards retreat of American hegemony that rather than a multipolar world of competing great powers, a world that was awaiting them is a world with no hegemon – “a polar” world- “a global vacuum of power. And far more dangerous forces than rival great powers would benefit from such a not-so-new world disorder.”<sup>52</sup>

Amitav Acharya looks beyond the language of hegemony and polarity, and gives a vision of a world order realized through the metaphor of a multiplex cinema, which according to him is “a complex that houses several movie theaters”. “In a multiplex world, the making and management of order is more diversified and decentralized, with the involvement of established and emerging powers, states, global and regional bodies, and transnational non-state actors”.<sup>53</sup> In such a world the liberal hegemony story presented by its American proponents is equivalent to one movie at one time in one theater. Although American show may dominate the box office for a while Acharya asserts, but audience are bound to lose interest when given alternative choices.<sup>54</sup> He clearly differentiates this multiplex world from that of a multipolar world. It stresses not the number of powers but the interdependence among them and is more decentred than a multipolar world with more scope for local and regional approaches.<sup>55</sup>

Another notable figure who contributed to this declinist perspective was Fareed Zakaria with his “rise of the rest” thesis and vision of a “post-American world”. This is a world where except the politico-military level, power is moving away from American dominance in every other dimension (industrial, financial, cultural, educational and social). A post-American world is likely to be different from anything that has preceded it – a world defined and directed from many places and by many people.<sup>56</sup> Rise of alternative centers of power chiefly will bring end to US primacy is debated by Charles Kupchan who thinks it would actually be because of the “tiring burdens of global hegemony”. Further adding “what makes America’s unipolar moment fleeting is the combination of the rise of other powers and US waning and unilateralist internationalism.”<sup>57</sup> He

visualizes a digital era replacing today's industrial era and multipolarity replacing unipolarity.<sup>58</sup>

Amidst all these divergent speculations, there were still others who saw a return of bipolarity with China replacing Soviet Union of the last bipolar order. As early as 2007, Carlo Pelando made a very compelling case for a new inevitable bipolar strife between US and China. In his book *Grand Alliance* he argued that this new fight would be played for triumph of either autocratic or democratic capitalism and suggested a grand alliance of US, Europe and Russia to be forged for democratic capitalism to prevail.<sup>59</sup> One thing that had been consistent through all these speculations had been theme of the US decline. Even the National Intelligence Council made a prediction about the future trajectory of power, speculating that in 2025 "the US will remain the pre-eminent power but the American dominance will be much diminished".<sup>60</sup>

Thomas Wright also believed that unipolarity waned in 2008 and he designates the period from 1990-2008 as a "post-Cold War Concert of Power" that "rested on US unipolarity and hegemony as well as the collective willingness (of other major powers) to work within it to varying degrees".<sup>61</sup> While "declinists" were forcefully arguing their case, there were others ready to brush aside these arguments and stress on US ability to reinvigorate its waning hegemony and primacy. Confident about the resilience of American system and society and they believe that prognostications of American decline are nothing new. Back in 1980s this debate had raged between scholars in the field of International Political Economy (IPE) especially when Robert Keohane talked about a period "after hegemony";<sup>62</sup> Robert Gilpin referred to "intensified mercantile competition" because of decline of US hegemony<sup>63</sup> and David Calleo raised the question for policy makers how to grapple with US power in decline.<sup>64</sup> Others however dissented at that time too. Notable among them were Susan Strange and Stephen Gill. Strange wrote about the myth of the hegemonic decline, insisting that many contributors to literature have chosen indicators which are either irrelevant or imprecise<sup>65</sup>; while Gill broke away from theory of US decline by presenting his neo-Gramscian perspective on hegemony, which according to him was not simply a physical capability such as military might and economic weight but as "intellectual and moral leadership"<sup>66</sup>.

Some of these authors prefer to use anemic words like global "leadership"<sup>67</sup> while others go for the inoffensive terms like "primacy"<sup>68</sup>. Still

there are others who unabashedly use the term “hegemony”<sup>69</sup>. Brooks and Wohlforth had been the most ardent champions of US unipolarity and its durability. They claimed “If today’s American primacy does not constitute unipolarity, then nothing ever will..... There has never been a system of sovereign states that contained one state with this degree of dominance.”<sup>70</sup> While Mandelbaum went a step further and claimed, “The United States is no longer a mere superpower; it has ascended to the status of a ‘hyperpower’”,<sup>71</sup> though he nonetheless cautioned that US might not be able to sustain the burdens of global leadership.

“Empire” was another term being used to encompass the extent and the vastness of US power. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri asserted that that what we are dealing with, is in fact an “Empire”, that is “a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire ‘civilized world’” and in which “United States does indeed occupy a privileged position”.<sup>72</sup> While the role of restructuring unipolar world by arrogating to itself “the global role of setting standards, determining threats, using force and meting out justice” was US “neo-imperial vision” in eyes of Ikenberry.<sup>73</sup>

This overwhelming power was being acknowledged from every nook and corner. US dominate business, commerce and communications; its economy is the world’s most successful, its military second to none.”<sup>74</sup> While for American triumphalists like Robert Kagan and William Kristol: “Today’s international system is built not around a balance of power but around American hegemony”.<sup>75</sup>

Another addition to the debate is Nye latest book with the title *Is the American Century Over?* For him the American Century began when US economy represented nearly half of the share of the world economy in the post-war period and dated it from 1945-70. Though the abnormal share returned to the normal - of roughly one fourth of the world economy to its pre-war portion but it led widely to perceptions of American decline. Nye remarks: “the American Century roughly coincides with the twentieth century, reaching its peak in the mid-century, and it will end in the next decade or so when analysts expect China to pass the United States as the world’s largest economy.”<sup>76</sup> As far as “purchasing power parity” unit is concerned China has already passed US in GDP (gross domestic product) while if the economy is measured through exchange rate of currencies then it may take a decade for China to beat US.<sup>77</sup>

Nye asserts that China overtaking US in economic size will not automatically mark end of the American Century. He defines power as “the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants and there are three ways to do that: by coercion (sticks); by payments (carrots); and by attraction or persuasion”.<sup>78</sup> Relying only on economic size to define American Century would be misleading. Instead it should also take into account the resources which are used to affect global balance of power.<sup>79</sup> However, in my opinion downgrading role of economy would also be tantamount to distorting the entire picture and it would not be an exaggeration if I say that it was the economy as the single largest indicator that brought the mighty Soviet Union to its knees, more than any other factor.

## Conclusion

The list of scholars celebrating US unipolar durability and sustainability is just as long as those speculating its exit and announcing end of *Pax Americana*. The debate hitherto has been inconclusive and it is expected to go on till a clear new hierarchy of power is apparent. One argument which has been established beyond doubt is the gradual shift of power from one centre of power to an unknown and uncharted territory. It seems too early to speculate what it will be. Will it be an age of “non-polarity”, “a polarity”, a “multiplex world” or will it be “no one’s world” or simply the familiar “multipolar” or “bipolar” international order, is too early to speculate. What, however, is written on the wall that China is emerging fast and it is set to make its presence felt and go for its rightful place which its growing power has entitled to it.

Henry Kissinger saw scope for “so dominant an America” shrinking in 2010 because of three successive wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan and because of economic conditions which will inevitably bring about pressure on military budgets, constraining the scope for intervention and imposing the need for establishing priorities.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly those who for long have been hailing explicit absence of counterbalancing and revisionist behavior of other major powers can see the return of both through Russia and China. Russia’s coercive diplomacy and military interventions in Georgia, Ukraine and Armenia had been useful in checking and preventing further expansion of EU and NATO in Russian “near abroad”. Besides it has also launched countless provocations against Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Finland and Denmark by intruding into their air and

maritime space. Such provocations cannot be brushed aside without labeling them as hard-balancing by a resurgent Russia.

China and Russia are not the only states vying for their place in the emerging configuration of powers. States like India and Brazil has also been hailed as new members of this powerful circle and they are actively seeking to establish themselves as great powers with their own “area of influence” and interests. Besides these new emerging power centers, European Union and Japan have increasing realization of changing international environment. Though still firmly allied with the US, they are nervously watching as US is gradually losing its hegemony and with it the power to shape “desired outcomes”.

One of the leading challenges that a declining power has to confront when a power transition is taking place at the global level is the ‘crisis of its legitimacy’. With the emergence of new powerful actors and competing interests, the actions of a declining hegemon come under increased scrutiny. Approval of the domestic public assumes importance especially when it involves spending taxpayers’ money and no adventurous foreign expedition could be undertaken without having public’s back. “Any system of world order, to be sustainable, must be accepted as just – not only by leaders, but also by citizens”.<sup>81</sup> US assertive and militant unilateralism in the first decade of the twenty-first century made its legitimacy disputed and made it questionable even to those Western allies which have so far been ardent followers of US led order. “If the approval of those whom its policies affect is the test of a government’s legitimacy, then the United States, in its capacity as the world’s government, looked distinctly illegitimate”.<sup>82</sup> But the rising speculations of US impending decline made all these assertions even more vocal. This “legitimacy crisis” has constantly figured in post-hegemonic phase, when public fatigue with protracted Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts linger into Libyan, Ukrainian and Syrian cases.

How strong had been the perceptions of American decline in public can be gauged by the Pew Poll surveys of 2002 and 2013. In 2002 survey about US place in the world about 55% of Americans felt it was more important and powerful than it had been a decade before while 17% felt contrary. By 2013 those figures had been almost been exactly reversed.<sup>83</sup> Nye notes that even though America is not in absolute decline but American century may still end simply because of the rise of others. No single country is set to replace US but alliances

among them might bring an end to US pre-eminence and its ability to maintain an international order.<sup>84</sup>

Question is not whether China, Russia, India and Brazil can construct an alternative collation with ability to overwrite rules centering US, EU and Japan priorities. Such a proposition hinges on the assumption that changing international environment has kept previous loyalties intact or is unable to interfere much with already established political fault lines. One of the timeless facts associated with international politics is that it had always been in flux. This flux introduces unpredictability element into the equation. Fierce enemies might become staunch allies or the vice versa. If history is any guide than case of Japan and Germany would testify to afore-stated hypothesis. This argument only suggests that counting Japan and EU in the American camp can be as misleading as placing China, Russia, India or Brazil in the opposite camp. The only thing which distinguishes former from the later is that they have underwritten rules of the established international order and hence their satisfaction with the status quo rests higher than the later. While the later still are struggling for their rightful place where their newly earned positions have placed them and they might be willing to cooperate with each other on this single indicator even if nothing else provides enough incentive to be in the opposite camp.

Post-hegemony characterizes this ambiguous situation. If, on the one hand, time tested friends are getting beleaguered due to US inability to comprehensively address their concerns in their respective regions and these erstwhile allies are assessing their neighborhood and maneuvering their options; On the other hand, US ability to affect desired outcomes is increasingly coming under strain and deepening the "legitimacy crisis" it is already facing. It is not the material factors alone which could be bringing an end to US hegemony, but the political decisions taken by US, its allies and even competitors have already heralded post-hegemony in international relations.

Not only is the unipolar era visibly drawing to a close but a drift towards post-hegemony is simultaneously underway.

## NOTES

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