

Hegemony or Empire: A Critique of U.S Role in World Politics

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ABSTRACT

It is generally believed that U.S is a benign hegemon and the liberal agenda like promoting free trade along with globalization, spreading of democracy, liberal institutionalism and humanitarian intervention, launching of cosmopolitan enterprise, which U.S pursues is for the benefit of all human beings. But if one delves deep into all these good looking and altruistic agenda items, there are clear ulterior motives that favor mostly the capitalists who run the show in the U.S under the garb of Liberalism and Neo-liberalism, Neo-Conservatism. Marxists and especially Neo-Marxists explain this position of U.S in a clear, distinctive and comprehensive way. The research paper would highlight almost all the seemingly altruistic agenda items, the “unquestioned common sense”-clad hegemony of the U.S and the criticism leveled by the Neo-Marxists who take clue from the classical Marxists writings.

KEY WORDS: Free trade, globalization, democracy, humanitarian intervention, cosmopolitanism, Marxism, Neo-Marxism, Hegemony.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is hard to ignore the debate about free trade which would accrue fruit to all; globalization- the world has become a “global village” and it is the time of “death of distance”; democracy as the best form of government and it is to stay for long as it has won the battle for the “end of history”; norm-based international institutions- WTO, IMF, IBRD, but who are the decision makers, ‘who, whom’? are the right questions; human rights- it is all right, if you are on the right side of history(ally of the West), ‘we are seriously concerned’, if you are on wrong side of history(strategic competitor) ; humanitarian interventions, if ‘ black gold’ is there, and threatening the importunate protégé’(the likes of Israel), no problem, if not; cosmopolitanism- all humans are one, but visa regimes get stronger, body searches at air ports stricter, surveillance of own citizens normal and legal.

The disproportionate media coverage has made all these topics as almost common man topics, which in real sense are not an iota closer to reality. The reality is that there was a gap between the developed and the developing world, and is not only intact, but has increased manifold: rich are becoming richer while poor became poorer, and this is unfortunately the stark reality. What are being covered is talk the talk, and walk the walk has been put on a back burner. How all this was “manufactured” and who did all this, let us have a look.

How U.S manipulated international financial system to pave the way for “dollar-Wall-street Regime” and the becoming of U.S as a hegemon?

The great depression of 1928 shook the world. There were many causes of the great depression, but for George Maynard Keynes and Dexter White, two factors were important: Flexible exchange rate and free movement of funds (Gowan, 1999, p.16). In order to construct a new, rule-based and stable international monetary system, they proposed fixed exchanged rate, with gold as the anchor, freely convertible into dollar i.e., 35 dollars an ounce of gold, while other currencies to be adjusted to dollar, and ‘financial repression’- no free flow of funds save for foreign productive investment (Gowan, 1999,pp.16-17). The system was called Bretton Woods regime.

Cardinal Recheleu once put that “states have no principles, only interests” and that is true for the U.S as well. The vagaries of international politics were at full display, when two powers, U.S and U.K became hostile to some of the basic tenets of Bretton Woods system, which they themselves had devised. U.S was unhappy over the free convertibility of dollars into gold (Gowan, 1999, p.17), its structural deficit problem due its entanglement in Vietnam War, and the vulnerability of U.S to the price hike of OPEC, according to Jackson and Sorenson (1999, p.177). U.K was angry over the ‘financial repression’ clause as it led to the

diminished significance of London as an off-shore city. It was for these reasons that Bretton Woods was scrapped by the Nixon administration in August 1971.

This is what is known to almost everyone who have interest in International Relations and International Political Economy, but what is less known is the facts that there were clear corrective measures like disentanglement from Vietnam, depreciation of dollar against gold, reducing imports through domestic deflation, but instead of doing all this, the system itself was put to an end, so that a way is paved for the “Dollar Wall-Street Regime”. Secondly, the jacking up of oil prices was the decision of U.S government to put pressure on U.S allies in the Western Europe and Japan (intra capitalism conflict for classical Marxists) and to give U.S private banks more important role in the international Financial institutions opines Gowan (1999, p.21).

Gowan (1999) also argues that “this ‘dollar seigniorage’ gave a potent political instrument in the form of new regime Dollar Wall Street Regime(DWSR) along with many economic and political advantages: it catapulted private banks to the center of international financial system, pushing out the dominance of the central banks; it opened up an enormous hole in the public supervision of the international financial operators; it made the financial system and exchange rate of the other states, especially those of the South to the developments in the American financial markets; It generated powerful competitive pressures within the OECD countries and gave U.S the leverage to figure out what kind of competitive pressure and what kind of international regulations should exist Dollar and Wall Street reinforce each other, and in 1981 Wall Street was given off-shore status” (p.26).

Concomitant to all this economic leverages were strategic advantages as well. It helped U.S to establish hegemony in the regions which were outside the control of USSR in pre 1991 period and almost across the globe in the Post Cold War era.

According to Michael Mastandanu (1998) ‘in the post World War II era, economic and security were intertwined, drifted apart in 1970s, but in the post cold war time both U.S statecraft and IR scholarship are stressing the integration of economic and security, the reasons being: First, distribution of material capabilities; secondly, perception of strategic environment; finally, perception of U.S in international economic competition’ (pp.825-854).

Here comes the question of ‘linking economy with military strength, and strong economy is essential for sustaining military strength in the long term’ contend Gill and Law (1988, p.72). The wealth of nations is related to the forces of production- land(natural resources), labor and capital, and in modern times human capital is singled out as the most important as certain types of knowledge are crucial for a range of productive activities, according to Gill and Law (1988, p. 72).

It is pertinent to quote David and Law (1988) that ‘Military expenditure also impacts economy, and spending too much on military spending may act as a drag on national productive activities, hence the difference between wealth-creating activities i.e., investment in human capital, plant, equipment and in research and development and wealth-distributing activities i.e., income redistribution through welfare program, subsidies, and tariffs for particular industries, becomes significant’ (p.73) . So, it is correct to assume that the bigger the economy, the stronger the army, the greater the say in international politics, hence Power.

Power is a loaded and highly contested term and needs some elaboration. For Professor Dahl, power is a capacity of A to get B to do something which B would not otherwise do, or power is a “ successful attempt”(possession and willingness) to get B to do something which B would not otherwise do, so power is related to behavior for him. This refers to as one-dimensional concept of power: One-Dimensional view of Power which Focuses on: a) behavior; b) decision making; c) (key) issues; d) observable (overt) conflict; e) (subjective) interests, seen as policy preferences revealed by political participation, informs Lorenzi (2006, p.89).

Then there is a two-dimensional view of power given by Bachrach and Baratz (1962, p. 949) ‘to the extent that a person or group ^ consciously or unconsciously creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts, that person or group has power’, and they cite Schattschneider’s famous and often-quoted words: “All forms of political organization have a bias in favour of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others, because organization is the mobilization of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out”.

Steven Lukes (2005, p.29) gives three-Dimensional View a critique of behavioral focus, deals with: “a) decision-making and control over the political agenda (not necessarily through decisions); b) issues and potential issues; c) observable (overt or covert) and latent conflict; d) subjective and real interests”.

How power brings hegemony with it? And Gramscian understanding of hegemony is that people are not always ruled by force but by ideas as well as the research of Mukherjee and Ramaswami (2000, p.367). Gramscian concept of hegemony is only understandable in terms of an analysis of structural and behavioral power... and highlights the role of ideas and culture, in that they serve to shape preferences and constrain perception of what is possible, according to Gill and Law(1988, p 77).

For Gramsci, power was like a centaur: half-beast, half-man (coercion and consent), and in terms of North-South relation the direct and coercive force of the colonial powers has given way to an indirect and even consensual face, in that market constraints, as well as a set of aspiration on the part of the elite and mass in the developing countries come together to motivate their productive arrangements as well as constrain their potential for economic and cultural development , say David and Law(1988, p. 78).

What is new in Gramsci use of hegemony is that previously hegemony was thought to be imposed through the use of force or coercion, but for Gramsci, hegemony could be enforced through consent...created and recreated through by the hegemony of the ruling stratum of the society [and] it is this hegemony that allows the moral, political and cultural values of the dominant group to be widely dispersed through out society and to be accepted by subordinate groups and classes as their own, according to Baylis and Smith (2001, p.212).

Gramsci concept of hegemony is applicable to a state, not to international politics and it was Robert Cox who developed Gramscian approach to international politics and IPE. Cox opines: “successive dominant power in the international system have shaped a world order that suits their interests, and have done so not only as a result of coercive capabilities, but also because they have managed to generate broad consent for that order even among those who are disadvantaged by it”(Baylisi and Smith, 2001, p.213).

Thus hegemony, which took the form of “unquestioned common sense” is established with the connivance of the elite of the periphery, and the masses are put in the dark so that they are unable to know as to what kind of struggle is going on against them and they start believing that ‘things really go better with coke’ and all this is done to give longevity to hegemony. Why hegemony? It is because that the situation is in the benefit of those capitalists who are associated with trans-national capital and their collaborators in the developing world.

Free Trade and Globalization: People do argue that free trade and globalization are for the benefits of all and there are no hidden agenda involved. Free trade will benefit everyone and there is no harm in doing free trade across frontiers, but for Radical Marxist, the issue is not that much simple.

Prebisch and Singer as quoted in Stefanović and Mitrovic (2011, pp.348-349) developed the hypothesis during the 1950s: “that the Third World countries are drawn into the international exchange that transfer economic surplus into the developed capitalist countries. In fact, less developed countries in the capitalist division of labor, specialize in producing and exporting primary goods, while developed countries export manufacturing goods. Free trade between the two groups benefits the development of developed countries while harming the development of less developed nations. This situation is the result of structural differences between the economies at different levels of development and unequal distribution of economic power on international scale...the result of such relations of exchange is the transfer of income from poor to rich countries”

For Samir Amin, ‘it is meaningless to consider the underdeveloped and developed societies independently, because both are parts of a single and unique entity -world capitalism. Every time capitalism enters into a relationship with less developed socio-economic formations, through the mechanism of primitive accumulation, it draws value from them. This mechanism is also present nowadays in the relations between the capitalist center and the periphery. It is represented by the transfer of value in favor of more developed parts of the world...therefore, the underdeveloped states act as sources of accumulation on a world scale...Position of the less developed countries in the world economy determines their socio-economic structure...so that the growth on the periphery produces not true development, but the development of underdevelopment’ Stefanović and Mitrovic (2011, pp.349-350). That is why Samer Amin recommends to the developing world to sever of all kinds of relations with the developed world.

For Wallerstein, ‘Capitalism as a world system exhibits tendencies to 1) hierarchization of space, 2) the class polarization on a world scale, and (3) the emergence of states of unequal power that corresponds to hierarchization of space. The world system is characterized by the states of the center, semi-periphery and periphery, which differ in the degree of capital intensity of production processes, level of real wages of skilled workers and the percentage of people who manage human capital and have a medium-high income, Stefanović and Mitrovic (2011,pp.348-349).

For Beams (2011), 'Free trade is a being preached by the West as a panacea for many evils: it would create interdependence, increased economic growth with simultaneous increase in life standard of the people, deflation and creating jobs, etc. But the problem with the freed trade preaching is that everything is not brought to the fore so that people/states are in a position to decide whether free trade is boon or bane for them. Take the example of Basle accord III: 'no regulation of the unregulated sector'(hedge funds, etc..) and the activities of the bankers will only come as a shock to those who have failed to examine the historical evolution of the capitalist economy and the ever-increasing parasitism of its leading financial components,[also]global ruling elite is organically incapable of making such a change and the present ruling order, in which the interests of humanity are subordinated to the dictates of a super-rich elite, cannot be reformed and that of Washington Consensus". The IMF push for capital-market liberalization for all nations was driven by financial-market ideology," says Joseph E. Stiglitz, a vocal IMF critic. "They have conceded defeat, but only after the damages were done."(Business Week: 2000)

Globalization is a catch phrase and is 'essentially contested'. On the positive side of globalization, it is argued that it has created millions of jobs from Malaysia to Mexico and a cornucopia of affordable goods for Western consumers; it has brought phone service to some 300 million households in developing nations and a transfer of nearly \$2 trillion from rich countries to poor through equity, bond investments, and commercial loans; it's helped topple dictators by making information available in once sheltered societies, and now the Internet is poised to narrow the gulf that separates rich nations from poor even further in the decade to come (Business Week, 2000).

Berg Berberoglu (2003, p.viii) contends that globalization is now under conditions of transnational monopoly capital, the highest and most accelerated stage of capitalist imperialism-that is, it is a global extension of transnational capital and the entire capitalist system that has penetrated every corner of the world and has done so with exceptional speed and intensity. For Peter Gowan, (2001) the economic globalization and Liberal Cosmopolitan discourse run parallel to each other deals with the market – the world economy, and just as liberal-cosmopolitanism radicalizes the old liberal internationalism, from a harmonious order between states to a liberal-cosmopolitan order above states, so liberal economic globalization theory says: 'We are no longer in a liberal international economy, where the international economy is essentially the sum of its parts. Instead, we're in a global market, a globalized market which dominates all the national economic parts and so each national economy now is subordinated to the logic of the global market.'

Liberal Cosmopolitanism: As globalization deals with the market side of liberalism and Cosmopolitanism deals with the political side of Liberalism. So, the Liberal-cosmopolitan idea is a notion that the Western states, called by Michael Doyle the 'Pacific Union', this Kantian union of states – Western Europe, the USA, Japan, and so on – called by Martin, the 'Western state', are striving for a global state. What they are talking about is cosmopolitan governance – that is, cosmopolitan rules and norms, not about everything, but about certain fundamental things, namely human rights, and, of course, some global governance in economic field. That's why I say that these people are cosmopolitan liberals, not actually democrats, even though they may well say that they are democrats, and no doubt they are good democrats when it comes to domestic activities. But the world order they want is to be a liberal one, not a genuine democratic state.

Liberals are asserting that we are moving towards a new, norm-based world, which Marry Kaldor (2003)refers to humanitarian regime: 'notion of humanitarian norms that override sovereignty, establishment of the International Court of Justice, Strengthening human right awareness'(p. 588). But Gowan (2001) looks at these norms and institutions with suspicion that how these norms reflect the reactions of the "West Pacific Union" and doubt their respect for these institutions by arguing how all these norms were flouted by those who helped devised them:

- "Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali was supported by all for the second term except U.S and it was the "one" that won the day;
- Erosion of the power of IMF as clear from its role in Mexico crisis in1995;
- U.S grabbing \$25 billion off the Europeans without so much as asking;
- Korea, November 1997: an absolutely incredible subversion of the articles of agreement of the IMF, openly manipulated by the US Treasury; the most unprecedented taking of a can opener to the Korean economy, in a way that we've never seen before – by the way, action by the USA described in the Financial Times by an unnamed German Central Bank official as 'financial terrorism';

- The GATT and the World Trade Organization (WTO), in the Uruguay Round – the USA has refused to subordinate itself to any law of WTO except one that is fair to the U.S;
- The International Criminal Court flagrantly violates the rule of law as it is not applicable to the five permanent members of the UNSC” (p.5)

There are also complementary differences: the globalization discourse is cognitive and fatalistic. It says: ‘We may like or dislike economic globalization, but it’s there to stay. If you want to be competitive you’d better adapt to it.’ Cosmopolitanism is normative and activist and exciting; it says: ‘Look, there is an inspiring dynamic opening up. If you join it you can bring it about.’ But these two things can run hand in hand – you can get depressed about the global economy, but let’s get into the global cosmopolitan liberal order, and so on (Gowan, Panitch, Shaw, 2001, p.3).

Spreading Democracy: One of the hallmarks of U.S foreign policy is to spread democracy across the globe, the rationale being that democracy is a far better system that have been “tried from time to time” and that democracies don’t find each other. But this does not mean that democracies don’t fight war with other states, especially with non-democracies/ authoritarian states and are not less brutal as well, Hiroshima and Naga Saki are cases in point.

It would be a tenable argument to make that U.S in most cases sacrificed democracy for the sake of an iota of stability. It was what was done by the U.S during the Cold War and she was willing to stand by those states which were not Communists and provided order...[and] Washington first and foremost focus was spreading capitalism, as it was easy to integrate ‘forward-looking authoritarian leaders’ into world economy.(Zachary Keck, 2013). ‘U.S support for Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Husni Mubarak’s Egypt, Yemen, etc., show that U.S has not given up the policy of supporting non-democratic states’ (Glen Beck, 2013).

Another important point to note is that U.S spreading “polyarchy rather democracy”. What US policymakers mean by ‘democracy promotion’ is the promotion of polyarchy, a concept which developed in US academic circles closely tied to the policymaking community in the United States in the post-World War II years ... polyarchy refers to a system in which a small group actually rules and mass participation in decision-making is confined to leadership choice in elections carefully managed by competing elites ... Democracy is limited to the political sphere, and revolves around process, method and procedure in the selection of ‘leaders’ (Robert Went, 2002). Here comes the duplicity of the U.S-led Western world: democracy promotion, when national interest demands; extending support to authoritarian regimes too, when national interests demand.

Humanitarian Intervention: Humanitarian intervention means intervention by the world community (say U.S-led West) in states where there is gross violation of human rights. It is grandiose project, and is being applied quite selectively. So what one has in this group of Western states pushing forward, across the globe, a new world order in which state sovereignty will be made conditional upon states respecting certain minimal rights of citizens – minimal human rights and democratic rights – and thus the old Westphalian concept of sovereignty becomes conditionalised rather like a dog license in Britain. In other words, you can have a dog in Britain provided – on condition – that you treated it right. If you treated your dog badly, the British authorities would remove your dog license and end your right to a dog. Similarly, states will face an international community, which above all means the coalition of Western states centered on the USA, and this international community will grant them sovereignty on condition that they respect basic rights of their citizens; and if not, if they don’t want, then the sovereignty license will be taken away and these developed states also known as ‘international community’ will intervene to various extents and in various ways in the delinquent state (Gowan, 2001).

U.S-led humanitarian intervention in the Balkans in 1990s was to exacerbate the already simmering tension France and Germany over the issue of whom to support whom and the same was repeated in Libya in 2012, which was seen more as “an enterprise of Anglo-Zionist axis, headed by US imperialism, having focused their attention on this particular “dictator”, with whom they have tried to come to an accommodation in recent years in order to complete their hegemonic role in the region for their imperialist interests” (Marxist Update, 2011). Therefore, one can infer from this that so-called world community has to respond to human right violation in those areas where major economic and strategic interests of the guardians of human rights are involved (Baloch nationalists and rebels/freedom fighters have also requested UNSC for humanitarian intervention in Balochistan against the “atrocities” committed by the state, and the issue would be taken up, when Pakistan is not toeing the line of U.S).

Nation-State System: The Westphalian state system is under pressure, what Rodrik refers to as *trilema*: the basic idea behind is that the nation-state system, deep economic integration, and democracy are

mutually incompatible... We can have at most two out of these three. If we want to push global economic integration much further, we have to give up either the nation state or mass politics. If we want to maintain and deepen democracy, we have to choose between the nation state and international economic integration. And if we want to keep the nation state, we have to choose between democracy and international economic integration (Robert Went, 2002).

The dilemma with the nation-state system is that on the one hand it is under pressure from MNCs, TNC, humanitarian interventions, etc., but on the other hand some states like U.S and some Western states are pushing this order on to other states, as is reflected in the already discussed Rodrik's Trilema.

Conclusion and Recommendations: It is to remark that some of the liberal and neo-Liberal agenda, whether it is free trade, or democracy, or humanitarian intervention, or globalization and cosmopolitanism, etc., are looking to fairly in the interest of the human beings across the globe, but after scrutinizing them from neo-Marxist perspective, then Robert cox was right to say that "all theories for someone and for some purposes, or what Foucault calls *Savoir poi* (knowledge-power) combine: all knowledge for domination/hegemony.

And the whole hype about neo-Liberal institutionalism, the process of decision making in these institutions, the pursuit of selfish national interest in the garb of interest of all, seem be a façade, when looked at from a different angle. And no better conclusion than this:

"However, it can be observed that during this process international institutions do not merely remain the arena for contestation of dominance... because of the political dominance of the hegemon in the process of decision making and its ability to coercively promote a specific agenda, and international institutions are reduced to the status of subordinate offices"(Malik, 2011, p.100).

Here are some of the recommendations for the better arrangement of affairs of the world.

1. U.S needs to come of the duplicitous role like supports for those states which clearly violate human rights but are in sync with US policy and decrying human right violations by those states, which are considered to be competitors of the U.S.
2. All humans are equal and need to be treated equally: citizens of poor African nations have the same feelings and emotions as that of U.S citizens, then why so much inequalities in the standards of lives, access to economic opportunities and say in politics.
3. Globalizations, if that much for the benefit of humanity, then, the fruit must reach to the developing states as well.
4. Democracy is the cry of the day, so the Western World should make all necessary efforts and arrangements to help democracy takes roots in the developing states as well. The developed states can provide funds and training in this regard.
5. There needs to a judicious, appropriate and judicious use of the 'humanitarian intervention' rather than a selective, controversial and inappropriate use of the noble action like humanitarian intervention.
6. Every effort needs to be made to narrow the economic gap between the developed and the developing world. Furthermore, workers of the 'Third World' should have same facilities and privileges as are available to the workers of the 'First World', as sweat of a poor of a poor country is as valuable as that of a poor of a rich country.
7. It is good to talk about liberal cosmopolitanism, but it is quite difficult to implement it in its true spirit, therefore, it will be good, if appropriate steps are taken for the preservation of local cultures , so that the intensity of 'cultural imperialism' could me reduced.
8. International norms and institutions need to be respected even if the national interests of the developed states necessitate action to the contrary.
9. The 'Third World' needs to bury their hatchets and move in a responsible way on both economic and political fronts.
10. The developing world needs to understand the vagaries of international politics and play an effective role in countering the hegemonic designs of any state collectively.

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