

# America and Post-Cold War World Order

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**Abstract – This paper argues that the nature and structure of world order characterised by American hegemony after the Cold war is changing. In cold war period, international system was bipolar and the power structure was primarily defined by militarily capabilities. But after disintegration of USSR in 1991, America emerged as the sole super power and the power dynamic in international system was a reflection of American interests. The hegemony of USA continued for a long time, but during this time period, other powers were getting stronger in various aspects like economy, polity etc. The emergence of these powers was a challenge to U.S hegemony.**

**This changing world order led to the “rise of rest” which posed resistance to an America centric world order. The international structure that was incorporated with American ideals and values is being redefined and reshaped by interests, ideas and values of rising powers. This has led to a significant change in world order, where the unquestioned primacy of America is not only being challenged but also alternative perspectives and views are being asserted. The emerging powers have resulted in making the international structure more diffused. The world is now characterised by global interdependence and requires cooperation of all these major powers.**

**In contemporary world, emergence of major powers like China and India is making a “multiplex world order” which entails “waning of the American- led liberal hegemonic order”. The present world order is characterised by growing role of non-American institutions, regional powers and regional organisations. Through institutions and organisations, rising powers are diffusing their values and norms and asserting their ideas and interests for playing greater role in international politics.**

**The paper concludes by arguing that only a reciprocal accommodation of these powers’ interests by the United States can assure a stable and peaceful world order. The ongoing conflicts in the international system can only be resolved through cooperation and mutual accommodation.**

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## COLD WAR POLITICS AND AMERICAN HEGEMONY

During cold war, the world was divided into two power blocs, United States of America (U.S.A) and Soviet Union (USSR).The balance of power which existed between the two blocs maintained equilibrium. The system was held in balance by Global rivalry and equilibrium between the two superpowers. The power balance shifted drastically with the fall down of USSR in 1991.The post-cold war was thus without a systemic equilibrium. U.S.A remained the only superpower after disintegration of USSR and hence shaping and directing world order. The structure of world was unipolar now, where the international system was actually reflection of American system, and international structure was incorporated with American ideals and values. The hegemony of USA continued for a long time, but during this time period, other powers were getting stronger in various aspects like economy, polity etc.

The emergence of these powers was a challenge to U.S hegemony.

America was still powerful and will remain as one, “among other states, but its hegemony in international politics which started in 1945 was fast waning off”<sup>1</sup>. The current world order is not characterized by concentration of power in a single state, but there is diffusion of power throughout the world. The Post-American world will be defined as the rise of the other great powers which in the words of Fareed zakaria is the “Rise of Rest”<sup>2</sup>. This doesn’t mean the decline of American power but the rise of other powers to match America in the international politics. There are states which are growing rapidly in terms of their economy. Their economic growth is skyrocketing. The growth can be seen in Asia but it is not confined to it. The rise of China and India is the manifestation of a rising

<sup>1</sup> Report 2012, by U.S National Intelligence Council.

<sup>2</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *The Post- American World* (New Delhi: Penguin books, 2008) p.2.

world. In various big countries, there are same set of forces like a growing economy, a resurgent society, a vibrant culture, and a rising sense of national pride. In 2006 and 2007, 124 countries grew at a rate of 4% or more, that includes more than 30 countries in Africa.<sup>3</sup>

The emerging international system is quite different from those that have preceded it. One hundred years ago, there was a multipolar order run by collection of European governments, which constantly shifted alliances, rivalries, miscalculations and wars. With the coming of bipolar world, equilibrium continued as power was distributed between two blocs. After the collapse of USSR, USA remained the sole super power which hegemonized the world order. Today, we live in a world where there is expansion of power and enhancement in military capability of states, which has resulted in diffusion of power throughout the world. At the Politico-Military level, we remain in a single super power world. But in every other dimension (industrial, financial, social, cultural) the distribution of power is changing, moving away from American dominance.<sup>4</sup> In terms of war and peace, economics and business, ideas and art, we live in a quite different world, defined and directed from many places and by many people. Before 35 years ago, China and Russia were great power threats to USA, which has changed now. At that time, particularly Russia was a great power threat, that was vigorously conspiring against the United States, arming guerrilla movement in states that were allies of United States, backing insurgencies and supporting civil wars, blocking every American plan in United Nations. Now, due to economic integration both Russia and China are interdependent and are assimilated into the global economic system which never happened before in history. Amitav Acharya defines it through the model of “multiplex world.” “A multiplex world order is not same as a multipolar world (as the key players in current international politics are not only great or rising powers). They include Non-state actors, international institutions, regional powers and organisations.” A multiplex world refers to the rise of many powers in an international system. Hence it does not encompass the hegemony of a single state, but it stresses on the “waning of the American- supported liberal world order”.<sup>5</sup> This type of understanding of world order does not comprise the decline of American leadership. This is best encapsulated by Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who said that, “without America none of the global climate challenges (e.g. climate change) can be faced by the states of the world. And American itself can’t solve all

these challenges on its own. We require each other to solve the problems that world is facing today”<sup>6</sup>.

The rising powers want space for their own principles and approaches to concepts like sovereignty, security and development. This leads to a considerable redefinition of the existing order, where unquestioned and supremacy of United States is not only being challenged but alternatives are being put forth. The result is that “Rest” are now “dissecting the assumptions and narratives of the west” and providing alternative views. The fact that newly emerging nations are more powerfully emphasizing their ideas and interests is unavoidable in a post-American world. The loss of a predominant U.S leadership role will not lead to instability in a world where there are many emerging states because stability of such a world order would be achieved through shared leadership among the emerging states as well as regional and civil society groups.

The emerging powers are posing challenges to U.S hegemony. In Asia: China and India, In Euro Asia; Russia, and in West-Asia: Iran, are changing the nature of U.S dominance. America during Bush period, included Iran in ‘axis of evil’ and sanctioned it over possession of nuclear weapons, but the recent nuclear deal which happened in 2015, reveals the constrains of hegemony of U.S.A. Further, in Afghanistan U.S.A negotiated with Taliban, which itself makes explicit the diminishing role of U.S and increasing role of other actors and non-State actors. Middle East is the new Strategic challenge to America. Russia and china is increasing its sphere of influence in West Asia. The recent setback to U.S in Syria and increasing role and success of Russia reveals the loopholes in power of U.S.

## FAILED WAR ON TERROR

The Post-cold war world had two phases. The first lasted from December 31, 1991 until September 11, 2001. The second lasted from 9/11 onwards. The first phase of the Post-cold war world was based on two assumptions. The first being the superiority of united states in military muscle with major advancement in political power but both these features of power were becoming less significant due to emergence of economy becoming crucial determinant of power. The second phase involved great power rivalry which was taking place between United States, China, and Europe. All the three major power were playing a role in shaping world order. United States focussed mainly on rebuilding Islamic world around Middle East through military power whereas, the other two powers, China and Europe paid much attention to increase economic power. United States instead of being strongest military power, could not even disrupt and destroy regimes, and

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.p.3

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Amitav Acharya, “ From the Unipolar Movement to a Multiplex World”, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/unipolar-moment-multiplex-world>.

<sup>6</sup>Cited in Fareed Zakaria, *The Post- American World* (New Delhi: Penguin books, 2008) .

was unable to commit all of its power and treasure to transforming a country like Afghanistan. America went to Afghanistan in October, 2001, less than a month after 9/11, to eliminate Al-Qaida. America imagined that a quick victory will be achieved which proved false. The American conception of making Afghanistan a democratic and tolerant country on their own was left to ruins, instead America had to negotiate with Taliban to stabilize Afghanistan. Everything about Afghanistan was a challenge: its rugged geography, its convoluted ethnic makeup, Labyrinthine social structure and jealous tribalism, its byzantine politics and the bitter legacy of decades consumed by war and occupation.<sup>7</sup>

The goals of America to free Afghanistan from Taliban and Al-Qaida were not materialized. The Taliban had maintained close ties with Pakistan's intelligence agency and received financial and military support from Islamabad. Pakistani support sustained Taliban military offensives throughout the 1990's.<sup>8</sup> The post-American world order is not only defined and shaped by the parameters set by U.S.A but actually, regional dynamics plays an important role in defining and shaping the behaviour of states and non-state actors, In case of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, Taliban sustained offensive United States strikes because of Pakistan's support to Taliban. Pakistan supported Taliban because of its own Indian strategic threat. To contain "Indian threat" Pakistan recruited, trained and provided the infrastructure to sustain Jihadi groups. Iran supported democratic government in Afghanistan not because America, the super power wanted to formulate a democratic government but sectarian minorities in Afghanistan had a security threat from Taliban.

Iran's nuclear programme was taken as national and global security concern. The major concern was Iran becoming nuclear power will lead to nuclear arms race and hence nuclear proliferation. In 2003, Iran reached out for talks, and offered comprehensive negotiations on all outstanding issues between two countries; it was out rightly rejected by America.

The recent nuclear deal between Iran and P5 + 1, which was initiated by American efforts, explains the increasing role of regional actors in world politics. Iran which actually<sup>9</sup> wanted to acquire nuclear capability, asserted that acquiring nuclear capability is its equal right to progress which Iranian's call "International technology democracy." This describes the Post-American world order, where there will be more actors, which will not go by dictates and terms of dominant but they will resist and challenge it. Further, the dilemma of Iran going nuclear made U.S to subsidize the growth of Russia and China. U.S to

make Russia and China agree on U.S sanctions on Iran agreed on conditions which are antithetical to its ideology. Russia agreed on the condition that Barrack Obama will stop talking about democracy and human rights in Russia, U.S will stop Eastward expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which explains the limitations to U.S power.

Historically, United States has faced many rivals to oppose its preponderance in international politics. This has led to the perception among American political stalwarts that world outside is pushing America to the wall. This is at least the fourth wave of such concern since 1945. The first was in late 1950s, a result of the launch of Sputnik satellite by Soviet Union. In 1970s, the second wave of such concern happened when oil prices skyrocketed and America got severely affected due to the increased oil prices. This convinced United States that oil is going to dictate the future course of power in international politics. Since Saudi Arabia and Western Europe possessed enormous reservoir of oil, this prompted President Nixon to declare the beginning of multipolar world. In mid-1980s, it was highly believed that Japan would rule the world because of its potential in technology and economic muscle. American system prevailed then due to its flexible, resourceful and resilient system but the problem today is that American Political system seems to have lost its ability to create broad coalitions that solve complex issues.<sup>10</sup>

In 21<sup>st</sup> century, the United States is not essentially a weak economy or a decadent society. But it has relied on systems that are captured by material interests like money, special interests, and effective ideological apparatus of various groups. The result has been such that there is very less room for content and substance and most importantly less action is done on the ground. The elitism in politics has rotted old democratic institutions of equality and fraternity with emphasis on lobbying. This has led to partisanship everywhere. On international sphere, this has weakened the stand of America and rather given a full space to China for domination<sup>11</sup>.

## RISE OF CHINA

The rise of China as an economic and military powerhouse is changing the global balance of power and challenging the U.S with a return to a world where there are multiple actors. America's interest lies in an open international economic system, built on the principle of free trade and open exchange of goods, services and money. China sees its interests in an opposite way, carving out various regions of the world into spheres of

<sup>7</sup> Vali Nasr, *Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat* (New York; Doubleday, 2013), p.16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.17.

<sup>9</sup> Vali Nasr (2013), P.103.

<sup>10</sup> Fareed Zakaria (2008), p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> Fareed Zakaria (2008)p.212

influence from which America would be excluded.<sup>12</sup> In the past, America has resisted being pushed out of Asia by a hegemonic force. From 1941 to 1945, America fought a world war with Germany and Japan, and then faced down the Soviet Union for decades to prevent such an outcome. America now fears that China may wish to exclude the United States from Asia exactly when the sagging U.S. economy badly needs all the ties that can be mustered.

Economically, China account for growing shares of global output and consumption and has a voracious appetite for commodities that it feeds via trade and investment links reaching deep into and every continent. China has risen by participating in the global economy, but the interdependence does not necessarily mean that china rise will be peaceful or that its coexistence with the united states at the helm of the global order will be harmonious. China is building up its military; its navy has extended its reach as far as the gulf of Aden (to suppress Somalia pirates) and the shores of Libya (to evacuate the Chinese citizens endangered by the fighting there). Chinese warships now routinely make port calls in the Middle East. Building bases on a series of islands along its own periphery and extending deep into the Indian Ocean will give china the necessary foundations for building a dominant naval position in some of the world's strategic waters. China is expanding its second nuclear capability, improving the effectiveness of its anti-ship missiles and building its capabilities in new domains such as cyber space and outer space. China has invested \$44 billion in oil projects beyond its borders, half of it in Africa. Between 2002 and 2003, trade between China and Africa doubled to \$18.5 billion, most of it oil import. China is building a blue-water navy and has invested in the "string of pearls" strategy of building bases in the Indian ocean (in places such as Sri Lanka) to protect its sea routes to Africa and Middle East.<sup>13</sup>

## RE-EMERGENCE OF RUSSIA

Russia is emerging and it is limiting the sphere of influence of United States. America cannot co-opt Russia to support its own strategic vision and approach. This is evident in case of Syria where America is losing the battle and Russia is wining by achieving it goals. The Russian annexation of Crimea also reflects the growing influence of Russia and winding down of American ascendancy in international politics. The rise of other powers and growth of economic and security interdependence are creating new constituencies and pressures for liberal international order. The direct involvement of Russia in Ukraine was considered as a direct challenge to the US hegemony and its military alliance NATO. Furthermore, its annexation of Crimea was a message that world order can't be dictated by the US terms. This change hinted

towards the changing dynamics of world order. Russia counts it as a victory, as other rising powers were not in favour of America, which itself reveals the changing nature of world order.

## CONCLUSION

The nature and structure of world order is changing. The United States is not the sole power which shapes and directs the world order. Post American world order is characterised by rise of other powers. The emerging power makes the structure of world more diffused. The world is now characterised by global interdependence and requires global cooperation. The strategic environment is changing and United States would find increasingly harder to articulate the proper use of military power and have to rely less on direct military action and more on building partnership. A multiplex world implies the world of multiple great and regional powers bound together in complex form of interdependence. As a result US will remain one of a number actors including emerging powers and a concert of the old and new powers shaping a new world order.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.p.221

<sup>13</sup> Nasr (2013) pp.215-229.

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