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PAX AMERICANA AND THE MYTH OF DECLINING AMERICAN GLOBAL POWER, 1945-2020

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, the power of the United States has declined in some respect. A power diffusion occurred and was most noticeable in the new millennium (from year 2000). The world witnessed power dispersion politically, socio-culturally, economically and in military terms. This necessitated further research into alleged declining American global power. A comparison was conducted among some great powers in respect to political, economic, scientific, and military prowess.This paper adopted the historical descriptive method and used the realist theory and theory of complex interdependence for framework and clarification. The findings revealeddegrees of increasedmultipolarity by a mix of established and emerging international actors across different sectors. There were increased collectivization in the global economy as exemplified by the likes of the European Union (EU), andBrazil Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS).Moreover, through concerted efforts great powers such as Russia, China as well as regional powers such as Iran and Turkey are making it increasingly difficult for the United States to unilaterally compel and dictate political and military outcomes especially in the Middle East. This paper concludes, that despite the decline across a number of sectors, the myth of American decline is however exaggerated. The United States is the common denominator of dominance across various sectors (political, military, scientific, technological, economic, educational, socio-cultural). The United States of America remains the only true trans-dimensional superpower, and will likely continue to be a major source of global influence for a considerable period of time.

Keywords: Decline, Diplomacy, Global, Military, Power

Introduction

Before the Second World War there were seven important powers in the world namely Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union, Japan, and the United States. By the end of the war however, the United States stood alone as the strongest nation in the world. Its power was enhanced by its war own effort, the defeat and devastation suffered by its enemies, as well as the exhaustion its allies. The United States entered the postwar era in a uniquely strong position. Practically unscathed by the fighting, the United States almost doubled its

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gross national product (GNP) during the conflict. By 1945, it accounted for around half of the world's manufacturing capacity, most of its food surpluses, and almost all of its financial reserves (Painter & Leffler, 2005).[1]

The United States held the lead in a wide range of technologies essential to modern warfare as well as economic prosperity. Possession of extensive domestic oil supplies and control over access to vast repositories of foreign oil provided an additional and essential element in its power position. Although the United States demobilized its armed forces from 12.1 million troops in 1945 to 1.7 million by mid-1947, the nation still possessed the world's mightiest military machine. Its navy controlled the seas, its air forces dominated the skies, and it alone possessed atomic weapons and the means to deliver them (Painter & Leffler, 2005).[2]Since the end of WWII, the U.S. had been the central player in the international system, leading in the creation of new international organizations like the United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. American diplomacy had been essential to multinational agreements on trade, climate, regional security and arms control. Americans was at the center of a rules-based international order.

However, the unpopularity and absolute advantage that heralded the end of the cold war in 1991 was challenged and diminished. Global military, political and economic power had becoming increasingly polarized as new centres of influence rose. Fareed Zakaria acknowledged that unpopularity waned due to a broader global diffusion of power, but argued that "the notion of a multi-polar world, with four or five players of roughly equal weight, does not describe reality today or in the near future (Zakaria, 2011)."[3] Citing the European Union's inability to "act militarily or politically as one" and the fact that China and India are still very much developing countries, Zakaria writes that the international system is "more accurately described by the term 'unimultipolarity,' or what Chinese geo politicians call 'many powers and one superpower.'[4]Similarly, Joseph Nye Jr. sees a shift toward multi-polarity in some aspects of the international order and the continuity of uni-polarity in others

[1]Painter, D. S., & Melvyn P. Leffler, M. P. (2005), The International System and The Origins of the Cold War,in M. P. Leffler& D. S. Painter (Eds), *Origins Of The Cold WarAn International History,* Second Edition, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group-Taylor &Francis.
[2] Painter and Leffler (2005), The International System and the origins of the Cold War
[3]Zakaria F. (2011), The Post-American World: Release 2.0, *W.W. Norton & Company*
[4]Zakaria F. (2011), The Post-American World: Release 2.0

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(Nye, 2011).[5]While the realist theory explains the hegemonic efforts of great powers like China and Russia, the theory of complex interdependence in turn appropriately highlights and clarifies the increasingly complex economic connections and relations in global economy especially among the established and emerging powers.

The realist's vison of the world rests on four main assumptions claim that:

- Survival is the principal goal of every state, foreign invasion and occupation are thus the most pressing threats that any state faces. The anarchy of the international system requires that states constantly ensure that they have sufficient power to defend themselves and advance their material interests necessary for survival (Mearsheimer, 1994).[6]

- Realists hold states to be rational actors. This means that, given the goal of survival, states will act as best they can in order to maximize their likelihood of continuing to exist rather than get destroyed (Mearsheimer, 1994).[7]

- Realists assume that all States possess some military capacity, and no State knows what its neighbors intend precisely. The world, in other words, is dangerous and uncertain(Mearsheimer, 1994) .[8]

- In such a world it is the great powers, the states with most economic clout and, especially, military might, that are decisive(Mearsheimer, 1994).[9]

In view of the above, international relations is essentially a story of Great Power politics. Offensive Realists maintain that, in order to ensure survival, States will seek to maximize their power relative to others (Mearsheimer, 2001).[10]If rival countries possess enough power to threaten a state, it can never be safe. Hegemony is thus the best strategy for a country to pursue, if it can. This seems to be the guiding principle of China and Russia as their pursuit of regional and global hegemony and creation of a multi-polar world order is increasingly setting them on a path of conflict with the United States. This becomes a cause for concern

[5]Nye J., S. (2011), The Future of Power, *Public Affairs*.
[6]Mearsheimer J., J. (1994), The False Promise of International Institutions,*International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, The MIT Press, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539078
[7]Mearsheimer (1994), The False Promise of International Institutions
[8]Mearsheimer (1994), The False Promise of International Institutions
[9]Mearsheimer(1994), The False Promise of International Institutions
[10]Mearsheimer, J., J. (2001), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Norton New York.

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for the United States as many developing countries are not only perceiving the Chinese economic system as a model worthy of emulation but significantly increasing their trade relations with China and Russia as their sphere of influence spreads across the developing world.

On the other hand the complex interdependence theory of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye explains the complex and intricate increasing economic connections between and among the contenders for superpower status (Keohane& Nye, 2001).[11]These countries despite their differences cannot afford to utilize military power as a tool of state craft cause of their interconnectedness. The trade war between the US and China was resolved through diplomatic means of negotiation rather than military warfare. Low politics (economic/ social/cultural) seems to be the focus rather than high politics (military/power).

Moreover, the manifestation of many forms channels of communication ranging from informal governmental ties to multinational corporations and organizations had effectively eroded the powers of national governments especially that of the United States the previously unchallenged world economic leader. Previous interstate-only relations are increasing taking place through non-state channels such as trans-governmental and trans-national entities. Multinational Corporations (MNCs) such Microsoft, Coca Cola, Samsung, Apple, Toshiba among others had systematically eroded state power. The United States the previous unchallenged global hegemon seems most affected as a number of economic decisions are no longer solely in the hands of governments but corporations.

Furthermore, as interdependence theorists noted relations, particularly economic ones among and between states had increased just as the use of military force and power balancing had decreased (Keohane& Nye, 2001).[12]Reflecting on these developments, the decline of military force as a policy tool and the increase in economic and other forms of interdependence had increased the probability of cooperation among states. As such there is increasing economic collectivization across the globe as relatively smaller economies come together in order to increase their collective powers and demand bigger stakes in the global economy. Examples include European Union (EU), Brazil Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS),

[11]Keohane, R. O., & Nye J., S. (2001), *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd edition Longman.
[12]Keohane& Nye (2001), Power and Interdependence

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Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), ASEAN, Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, Thailand (MINT) among others.

Measuring State power

Measuring changes in a nation's relative power is quite complex, but there are some basic indicators that could be useful determinants. These includes; the size and the influence of its economy relative to that of other powers, the magnitude of military power compared with that of potential adversaries, the degree of political influence it wields in the international system all of which make up what is called comprehensive national power. And there is the matter of time. As judgments based on only a few years' evidence are quite problematic. A great power's decline is the product of fundamental changes in the international distribution of various forms of power that usually occur over longer stretches of time. Great powers rarely decline suddenly. A war may bring them down, but even that is usually a symptom, and a culmination, of a longer process.

Political and Military Power

What makes a Superpower?

According to a range of definitions, a superpower is typically characterised by a state's ability to exert influence and project itself as a dominating power anywhere in the world. There are several measurements of power which include military and economic strength, as well as diplomatic and cultural influence a superpower should be a leader in all of these areas. International relations and US policy expert Gordon Adams contends that if power were solely measured in military terms, there is no question the US is the only military superpower (Adams, 2018).[13]According to the World Economic Forum, the US is currently the only global military power with the ability to plan, deploy, sustain and fight on a scale and at a distance from its homeland across the land, sea, air and space in a way that's just not possible for any other country (Monck, 2018).[14] China is a distant second in terms of military spending which is roughly US$250 billion as against America's US$620 billion. China's

[13] Adams G. (2018,June 26), A New World is Dawning, and The US Will No Longer Lead It, *The Conversation.* http://theconversation.com/a-new-world-is-dawning-and-the-us-will-no-longer-lead-it-98362

[14] Monck A. (2018, August 2018), The Choice Facing a Declining United States; America Can Try to Hold On to Global Hegemony as It Slips from Its Grasp or It Can Learn from Britain's Mistakes, *The Atlantic.*https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/08/americas-global-influence-is-declining/568708/

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astounding ascendency, its growing contributions to world economics, its growing diplomatic pushes, as well as its advances with technology and artificial intelligence, had all substantiated its claim as a possible rival to US world superpower status.

Moreover, a resurgent Russia is probably the only nation that currently truly poses not just a regional but global challenge to the United States, albeit a minor one. Russian nuclear forces are able to strike the U.S. mainland and cause considerable harm. Russia had also shown a willingness to actively oppose U.S. policies as part of maintaining its global profile. It is much more likely to cast a veto in the UN Security Council than is China in fact Russia has cast roughly twenty times as many vetoes as China. Russia continues to seek to play a role in all regions of the world, despite its relative weakness as a power. It actively participated in the six-party talks with North Korea, sought to improve its relations with China, cooperates with Japan in the area of energy, and has increased its sphere of influence in Africa.

US Declining Political and Military Power

This ongoing power shift is already affecting and impacting major power relations. The power shifts are increasingly visible. In the Middle East, the US repeatedly and consistently tried to isolate Iran as a pariah and weaken the regime until it fell. However, Iran remains an increasingly assertive and influential power in the region, defending and promoting its interests and competing with the Saudi regime. Moreover, the Russians intervened and saved the Bashir Al-Assad regime in Syria when it was almost set to collapse. The Russians alongside Iran saved a regime that seems doomed to fall and have in turn established deeper long lasting links in the region. Furthermore, Turkey, a rising regional power, acts increasingly independent of the preferences of the U.S., its NATO ally as was seen in its unilateral declaration of a no fly / combat zone in northern Syria in its war against Kurdish separatists. Despite all these however, Maria RostRublee argues the United States is still the closest to what is understood to constitute a global superpower, but added that it increasingly isn't meeting all the criteria for one (Zhou, 2019).[15]

Economic Power

[15]Zhou C. (2019, 22 June), Is America Still the World's Only Superpower or Is China a Real Rival? Experts Aren't So Sure Anymore, ABC News.
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-23/united-states-still-the-worlds-only-superpower/11195636

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The economic base of U.S. world power had witnessed a decline over the last two decades. A country's global power is always relative to that of others, and World Bank figures show that between 2000 and 2014. China's share of the world's total gross domestic product (GDP) nearly quadrupled, Russia's share tripled, India's share almost doubled, while the U.S. share decreased by 28 percent (Lane, 2015).[16] America is still the world's single most powerful state, but global leadership requires both hard and soft power and the wealth on which power is largely based. If America's current relative economic decline continues, its ability to influence the world will also continue to fall. China is the biggest beneficiary of this US economic decline.

China

China now plays almost as powerful a role in the global economy as the U.S. China has created new multilateral organizations for security discussions and one for infrastructure loans, which the U.S. declined to join. It has developed a global lending program the Belt and Road Initiative and had stepped into a stronger global role on climate change (Adams, 2018).[17] And China is spreading its political and economic influence into Africa and Latin America.

India

India is another emerging global power whose increasing contribution to the global economy cannot be overlooked. George Yeo Yong-Boon, Singapore's Minister of Foreign Affairs, observed in 2008 that there has been "an enormous shift of power and influence in the world. It is mainly a story of the rise of China and India(Ferreira-Marques, 2008).[18]Even the US has acknowledged India's ascendancy and called upon its leaders to responsibly manage its new position in the world order (Obama, 2010).[19]India's economy is currently among the top ten

[16] Lane L. (2015), Oil and World Power, *The New Atlantis Journal of Technology and Society*www.TheNewAtlantis.com
[17]Adams G. (2018, June 26), A new world is dawning, http://theconversation.com/a-new-world-is-dawning-and-the-us-will-no-longer-lead-it-98362
[18]Ferreira-Marques C. (2008, January 24), Key Quotes On The Shift In Global Power, *Reuters News Agency*.www.uk.reuters.com/article/2008/01/24/us-davos-power-idUKL2461117220080124
[19]Obama B.(2010, June 4), India Is a Rising and Responsible Global Power, Times of India.)www.articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-06-04/india/28292047_1_responsible-global-power-statevisit-strategicdialogue

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economies in the world by nominal GDP74 and the fourth largest by purchasing power parity (World Bank, 2011).[20]

European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) in the past decade has rivaled and challenged American economic superpower (Etzioni, 2013).[21]The EU had been making into the global economic south for a considerable period of time, entering into agreements with regional integration blocs such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The economic influence of the European Union is undeniable in the international community as European countries seek to counter U.S. economic policies. Furthermore, global economy is witnessing collectivization as powerful economic blocks arise across the globe. This includes; European Union (EU), Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), Mexico, Indonesia, Turkey (MINT),Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), among others. Thus power is getting less concentrated in the hand of the traditional global leaders such as the US. Added to this erosion of US economic power is the increasing impact of globalization as it disperses economic power widely around the globe. This is also increasing the role and influence of powerful non-state actors such as separatist groups and multi-national corporations.The architecture of old power had been transformed and redistributed systematically eroding any capacity of the US to possess an absolute advantage or assume unchallenged leadership.

American Continual Hegemony

Despite all these however, the United States of America is still considered the only country with the military, diplomatic, technological, scientific, educational, socio-cultual and economic assets to be a decisive player in any region of the world. The United States accounts for 25 per cent of global wealth, 35 per cent of world innovation, and 40 per cent of global military spending (Belasco, 2011).[22] America still had a huge lead over other countries for example it still has four times as much wealth as China and five to six times the military capabilities. The United States has the richest and most secure land on the planet, the most

[20] The World Bank (2011), Gross Domestic Product 2010, PPPwww.siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/GDP_PPP.pdf
[21]Etzioni A. (2013), The Devolution of American Power,*The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* Vol.37:1 Winter
[22]Belasco A. (2011, March 29), The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11, *Congressional Research Service*http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf

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productive population (Zhou, 2013).[23] America's military superiority remains unrivaled full stop. The US accounts for 37% of global military spending, and spends more than four times what China, the world's No. 2 spender, does on its military. The U.S. dominates across land, sea, air and space (Zhou, 2013).[24]

Moreover, the stability and influence of the American political system, ideology, and value concepts have indeed has been greatly affected in the 21st century, However, after all, the United States is still the leader and the representative of western style democratic governance and market economy around the world; it still enjoys the most powerful influence in political ideology, system, and values (Kagan, 2012).[25] Political power comes in many dimensions. For the U.S., foreign aid is an effective way to cement its political clout globally. In 2013, the U.S. doled out $32.7 billion in financial assistance; second was the UK at $19 billion (Bremmer, 2015).[26] The U.S. has the oldest working national constitution in the world, as well as strong institutions and rule of law to accompany it.

Furthermore, the United States remains the world leader in scientific and technical strength. There has been no change in the strength, status, and influence of the American capability for innovation and its global competitive power. In science and technology, higher education, culture of innovation, military strength, world politics, and security, the United States is still ahead of the rest of the world (Congressional Budget Office, 2011).[27] The core advantages of the United States are science and technology and the service sector, including financial services United States is still ahead of the rest of the world in basic science, and it is still Americans that have received the most Nobel prizes (Kagan, 2012).[28] Of the 9 largest tech companies in the world, 8 are based in the U.S. Give the growing importance of the technology sector, that's a big deal. For decades America worried about energy dependency,

[23]Zhou C. (2019, June 22), Is America Still the World's Only Superpower Or Is China A Real Rival? https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-23/united-states-still-the-worlds-only-superpower/11195636
[24] Zhou C. (2019, June 22), Is America Still the World's Only Superpower Or Is China A Real Rival? https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-23/united-states-still-the-worlds-only-superpower/11195636
[25]Kagan R. (2012, January 17), Not Fading Away, Against The Myth of American Decline, *Brookings Institute*.https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/not-fade-away-against-the-myth-of-american-decline/
[26]Bremmer I. (2015, May 28), These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpower, Time Magazine. https://time.com/3899972/us-superpower-status-military/
[27] Congressional Budget Office, "The Budget and Economic Outlook: Fiscal Years 2011-202;," Publication No. 4236 (January 2011), http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/120xx/doc12039/01-26_fy2011outlook.pdf
[28] Kagan (2012, January 17), Not Fading Away, Against The Myth of American Decline.https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/not-fade-away-against-the-myth-of-american-decline/

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yet today America is the world's No. 1 producer of oil and natural gas, in large part due to the development of hydraulic fracturing, a product of public research and private energy (Bremmer, 2015).[29]

America's research universities and scientific institutions are best in class, allowing the nation to focus its ingenuity where it's needed most. And America is spending the money to keep its comparative advantage intact, 30% of all research and development dollars are spent in the U.S (Bremmer, 2015).[30]According to the World Bank, GDP per capita in the US was $53,042 in 2013; in China it was just $6,807. And crucially, the American economy remains the bedrock of the global financial system (Bremmer, 2015).[31] Over 80% of all financial transactions worldwide are conducted in dollars, as are 87% of foreign currency market transactions (Bremmer, 2015).[32] As long as the world continues to place such faith in America's currency and overall economic stability, the U.S. economy remains the one to beat. In addition, American companies remain very competitive on a micro level, just as the economy as a whole is on a macro level. In recent years, even though the U.S. economy was not performing very well, far more companies in the global top 500 came from the United States than from any other. Among the assessments on the competitive power of all countries and regions around the world, the United States is still a big country that is listed among the leaders (Congressional Budget Office, 2011).[33] Also, the advantages of the United States are even more obvious in terms of soft power. Soft power in this context refers to non-military influence peddling and non-coercive persuasion. No other countries in the world, including Europe, China, Russia and Japan, can compete with the United States or be on the same level as the United States in terms of the global deployment of soft power.

Besides its status and influence in politics and security, which are beyond comparison, the influence of U.S. culture, education, life style, and thinking also cannot be matched by those of other countries around the world. Hollywood movies, fast food, music, sports stars, and other cultural products remain known all over the world. On a different note, the education

[29] Ian Bremmer, "These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpower" (May 28, 2015) https://time.com/3899972/us-superpower-status-military/
[30]Bremmer, (2015, May 28), These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpower
[31]Bremmer, (2015, May 28), These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpower
[32]Bremmer. (2015, May 28), These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpower
[33] Congressional Budget Office (2011, January), The Budget and Economic Outlook: Fiscal Years 2011-2021, *Publication No*. 4236http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/120xx/doc12039/01-26_fy2011outlook.pdf

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system in the United States attracts the most outstanding young people from across the world (US Department of Education, 2010).[34] America's research universities and scientific institutions are best in class, allowing the nation to focus its ingenuity where it's needed most. And America is spending the money to keep its comparative advantage intact: 30% of all research and development dollars are spent in the U.S(Bremmer, 2015).[35]In these areas related with soft power, the status and influence of the United States both have not declined or changed much and, it must be said, other countries and regions in the world have not strengthened themselves in these areas. The rest of the world still faces a huge soft power deficit with the United States (Nye, 2010).[36]

Conclusion

A comprehensive analysis of all contenders for global superpower reveals some startling and uncontestable facts that the USA remains the only true trans-dimensional superpower whose powers cuts across all important aspects and indicators of superpower measurements. In view of the above, while the power of the US is diminishing, it has not diminished to the level of irrelevance. As such the US is set to the world's only true superpower for a considerable period of time.

[34] National Center for Education Statistics, (2010, December), Digest of Education Statistics, *U.S. Department of Education* Table 408 http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_408.asp?referrer=list
[35]Bremmer, (2015, May 28), These Are the 5 Reasons Why the U.S. Remains the World's Only Superpowerhttps://time.com/3899972/us-superpower-status-military/
[36]Joseph Nye J. (2010, May 19), Is America in Decline?*Chatham House*www.chathamhouse.org.uk

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