

Hegemonism and The Diminishing Role Of States In The Emerging World Order: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

The scenario of world politics has been the pre-eminence and preponderance character of the states in the pursuit of their basic interests over economic and political resources. The inception and delimitation of the states took root in the Westphalia consensus of 1648; its universal character spread across the globe, making the states the principal actors in the international system. The period between 1945 and the demise of the former Soviet Union was characterised by two dominant and superpowers namely USSR and USA. Following the end of cold war, the unipolarity exemplified by the USA has been challenged by the emergence of multipolar powers coupled with emergence of non state actors that tend to influence the structure of power equations in the world politics. In spite of the trend of prevailing hegemon currently dominating the realm of international relations, it appears that non-state actors tend to diminish the preponderant roles of the states in the world politics. The polemic follows that certain cultural and social forces currently at play in the international realm may erode the pre-eminence of states in the near future. While the realist perspective acknowledges the pre-eminence of state system in the international system, the current scenario evolves certain non state actors, cultural and social forces that participate and influence the operations and mode of international relations. The level of states' participation in the international system arises from the strength of their domestic agential powers, which invariably determine and explain the quality of states' fungibility and international agential capability to deal and handle issues of national interest in the international politics. But these forces are bent to undermine the domestic and international powers and roles of the states in the international system as it presently constituted. The paper adopted a qualitative method in its investigation and anchored its theoretical analysis on balance of power theory. Findings showed that in spite of the avalanche presence of non state actors in the international system, it is obvious that presently the states still play significant roles in world politics.

Keywords: Hegemon; world politics; state; world order

Introduction

The onset of the current international system recognised the states system as the major and sole actors in the world politics. The hegemonic structure of the international system has always been connected with the sole and position of great powers, relevant at that time, and military power can be distributed in different ways - an idea scholars called polarity (Dickson, 2011). Polarity defined as the degree to which the global system revolves around one or more extremely powerful states or poles as power concentrates in a single (unipolar) centre of power or is distributed between two (bipolar) main powers or among three or more (multipolar) great powers (Kegley, 2007). The hegemonic structure of the contemporary international system stemmed from rivalry exhibited by the superpowers dominated by defunct USSR and the United States of America as major state actors in era depicted as the Cold War. The Cold War of the two superpowers was not an episode like other wars of modern times. The Cold War was invented to describe a state of affairs. The principal ingredient in this state of affairs was the mutual hostility and fears of the protagonists principally the United States and the former Soviet Union. These emotions were rooted in their several historical and political differences and were powerfully stimulated by myths which at times turned hostility into hatred. The Cold War dominated world affairs for a generations and more (Peter, 2005).

While the domination by the two majors powers between 1945 lasted and steeped in ideological conundrum and warfare, the rest of the world that were not engaged in the Cold War were given derogatory appellation depicting their status in the world affairs. The phrase "Third World" was first proposed by Dag Hammarskjöld to designate the poor countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It was a Third World because it rejected the notion of a world divided into two, a world in which only the United States and USSR counted and everybody else had to declare for the one or other (Peter, 2005:183). It will be recalled that state of developments of state were not historically the same all over the world, and so states outside the sphere of the superpowers took their turn to undertake world issues in their own pace. The decision of the new states of Asia and Africa, with few exceptions to throw in their lot with neither superpower was much influenced by one man, Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru was a world figure before becoming prime minister of the most populous of the new states, and held that office uninterruptedly for seventeen years. Nehru was the principal creator of the post-imperial Commonwealth as an association of monarchies and republics of all races whose links were not ideological but historical and accidental (Peter, 2005:185). Nehru's act that sponsored and propelled the very idea and combustions of nonalignment strategy, which placed the Third World as actors in their own capacity. At the same time, of course the, United States and the Soviet Union were splitting the world, as much as they could in two between them, with the Third World alternatively asserting itself against and taking advantage of the increasing bipolarity (Steven, 2009). With abysmal

collapse of the defunct USSR, and eventual demise of the Cold War gave US unilateral and unipolar posture in the world affairs.

But while the United States held sway as the predominant and preponderant sole power in the post Cold War with high domestic and international agential power to influence the outcome of events and issues in world politics, multilateral and multipolar structures that are governmental and non state actors emerged with certain consequences on the international politics. The emergence of counter-culture groups and evident neoliberal multinational corporations, co-operations and international regimes have helped to shape the current outcome of the international system. Emerging states with rising power resources from Asia in particular act as counterweight to the dominant place of the United States of America in the current world order. It is on this thrust that this paper examines the prevailing character and features of the present world order.

Theoretical Framework Of Analysis

Several theories inundate the study of international relations aimed at explaining the social processes that cut across the boundaries of states. In this study, it becomes appropriate to situate the study with the domain of balance of power theoretical underpinning. The principle of balance of power was fully applied in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was written into several treaties of the eighteenth centuries. It is still a basic principle in international relations, and doubtless will continue to be as long as the nation states system is the controlling pattern of world politics (Perkins, 2010). Georg Schwarzenberger, Kenneth Waltz and Hans Morgenthau became the principal proponents of the theory of balance of power. Schwarzenberger (1951) noted that balance of power as an equilibrium or a certain amount of stability in international relations. Morgenthau (2012) sees balance of power in four strands:

- (i) a policy aimed at a certain state of affairs;
- (ii) an actual state of affairs;
- (iii) an approximately equal distribution of power; and
- (iv) any distribution of power.

Following the end of the Cold War international system, emerging trends of power alignments and centers started dominating the international system, eventhough the United States is still powerful, but that does confer on it the power of unipolarity it assumed the collapse of the defunct USSR in 1991. This is manifest in the recent time, when US threaten to go to war in Iran, but was stopped by a combination of others powers. With emergence of non state actors and Asian Tigers brought about polycentrism as counterbalance in the international system.

Evolution Of State And Non Actors In The International System

The development of actors principally the dramatis personae states took a historical tradition that span many centuries. The modern world including its state system has roots in the

culture of western Christendom which, between the fifth and tenth centuries of this era struggled to emerge from its barbaric darkness. The church played a significant part in the development of diplomatic practices and of international law. Complementing the church was the development in Arabia of Islam, a situation which has tremendous impact on the development of international relations Nduba (1993). The development of the states as the actors in the international system was a struggle that passed many stages in history. The international political system or the international system for short is relatively young. It is roughly estimated to be between 400 and 500 years ago old; a relatively short time considering the fact that man's recorded history dates back several hundred thousand years. It generally agreed among scholars of international relations that the contemporary state system dates back to the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, which brought the Thirty Years War to an end in Europe, and the independence of the units in the Holy Roman Empire (Olusola and Amadu,2002). It is also of perforce to note that there were historical antecedents to the account of Westphalia, so that acknowledgement of the growth of the states would not only be European history, but global historical development.

However, the broad agreement among scholars regarding the origins of the international system does not imply that there were no other systems before 1648. We can identify several epochs prior to the Treaty of Westphalia; for example, the Greek City States, Imperial Chinese system, the Indian system, and the Roman and the Byzantine Empires, Mali, and Songhai empires in West Africa, to mention a few of them. Of course we should not also forget the Holy Roman Empire, which existed immediately before the Treaty (Olusola and Amadu, 2002:15). While it has been established that the states started having international outlook confined within Europe as at 1648, colonialism, imperialism and globalisation brought other independent states across the globe together.

Consequently, international system became enlarged with the independence of many countries from Asia, Latin America and Africa. Apart from the dominant place the states occupy in international system, recent and extant literatures have adumbrated the emergence and avalanche of the contending actors that tend to struggle over resources in the world politics. These actors include Multinational Corporations, international organisations, ideological, religious, ethnic, and cultural movements, charismatic personalities, and from international system to international society. The roles of these emergent actors are currently reducing and diminishing the preponderant of the states in the international system. In fact, a new humanistic approach has been added that international relations are conducted by human beings, and not the states as pursued by the realist paradigm (Asobie, 2007). The place of these actors has received theoretical adulation and eulogy. It is obvious that states are been challenged by these actors, and most importantly counterweight of counter- culture groups currently threatening world peace untrammelled. Terrorism is on the increase with little or no serious containment from the world

body- the United Nations, co operations and international regimes. This shows that emerging social forces do diminish the preponderant roles of the state as the major actors and contenders in the international relations.

World Order: Contending Theoretical Perspectives

The contending international relations is fraught with numerous problems of security, economic, peace, health, conflict and co operations. Each of these itemised problems has received theoretical elaborations among scholars of international relations with a view to providing solutions to current world problems. The rise of transnational terrorism now poses a particular challenge, but other threats include crime syndicate, narcotic traffickers, computer hackers. These elements that the United Nations Secretary General has labelled uncivil society. They operate across borders and largely without identities (Nnoli, 2006). Cooperation and conflict epitomise the complex and often contradictory nature of political interactions. At the international level, cooperation refers to political actors proactively working together, whether that involves operating within existing structures, like the UN, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), or the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); starting new ones like the Kyoto Protocol dealing with the environment; responding to the International Criminal Court (ICC) did in response to the genocide in Sudan; or holding bilateral talks to mitigate conflict and find common ground , as India and Pakistan did in their series of talks in 2004 and 2005 over the serious dispute between them (Steven2009). Having examined the given frameworks upon which states tend to achieve cooperation and find solutions to world threats and problem in the international system.

Several times thus far, discourses have mentioned how our own belief, perceptions, and assumptions might colour our understanding of international relations. The levels of analysis in international relations are identified as system, domestic, and individual have also added explanations in the understanding of the cobweb and complexity in international relations. In the same vein this study will consider realism, liberalism and constructivism as analytical tools that present varied view of international system. Other views that are on the converse side include critical, rational, feminism and Marxism-Leninism.

Realism presents the understanding of the world as governed by law of jungle and dog-eat-dog environment, where the states with the highest domestic and international agential powers prevail in conflict. The chief proponents of realism are Hans Morgenthau (2012), Edward H. Carr(1964), Reinhold Niebuhr(196), Henry Kissinger (1979) and Kenneth Waltz (1979) placed more emphasis on power politics. The contemporary realists share the following set of related assumptions: (1) anarchy is the foundation of international politics and leads to power politics (realpolitik) as states try to ensure their security and often to enhance their power, (2) because of anarchy, states are prone to conflict, not cooperation, (3) stability in the international system is

better preserved by conflict than by cooperation, (4) states that prioritize cooperation or economic gain over security will not fare well in the international system, (5) states are the key political actors in the international system, and it is relations among them that matter most in the study of world politics (Steven, 2009: 35).

The tension between globalisation and fragmentation and between conflict and cooperation are mirrored in the tensions between realists and liberals. While the tension between the Cold war and seemingly the new world lasted, the liberal perspective of the present world affords the following attributes: (a) cooperation is not only possible despite anarchy and human nature, but beneficial, (b) there is more cooperation than conflict in the world, (c) people can and adapt, (d) international politics is a variable-sum, not a zero-sum, game, (f) cooperation can be facilitated by interdependence, institutions and democracy, (g) states that focus on cooperation and mutual interests will do better in the international system than those focus on security (Steven, 2009:35). The views of the contending paradigms above point to the fact that realism and liberalism continue to dominate and pose attempt to answer the complexity surrounding transnational's and international relations.

While the views of liberalism and realism continue to hold sway, constructivism came on the heels to reconfiguring the international system from state centric to society centric. In contrast, constructivists argue that states are far from rational; that they develop their identities and interests internally; and that their assumption, belief and behaviour determine the effect of the international system. The constructivist forge the identities based on values and belief system as what condition the behaviour of states in the international community, not rationally based on interest and security as pursued by the realists, and liberals who believe that the world order is safe through economic cooperation and democratic participation. The international system is viewed from various paradigms, but the point being that each perspective is tilting towards analysing the behaviour of states towards one another in the international system. (Steven, 2009:45). The current world order is being shaped by the ideology of liberalism and realism, contending views of critical and constructivist theories push for drastic change that can alter the current system to favour and uplift the place of the disadvantage and less developed states in the international system.

World Order: Changing Pattern Of World Powers - Unipolarity Vs Multipolarity

The world order from the inception to the contemporary continues to vacillate on the anvil of social and historical forces. Historical developments in the international system have recognised four types or stages of international systems to include: independent, hegemonic, imperial and feudal system (Viotti and Kauppi, 2009). Historic forces determine greatly the nature and composition of power structure in the world politics. The most obvious of these structural changes which impairs the operation of the balance of power is to be found in the drastic

numerical reduction of the players in the game. At the end of Thirty Years War, for instance, the German empire was composed of 900 sovereign states, which the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 reduced to 335 (Peter, 2005). At the outbreak of the First world War, there were then again eight great powers, of which for the first time two were located totally outside Europe – Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Russia, and the United States (Morgenthau, 2012).

This period that preceded 1945 was characterised by multiple centres of powers participating and sustaining balance of powers without hegemonic control as obtained in the aftermath of the Second World War, where power play was tilting between East and the West locked in the ideological conundrum. This was the birth of bipolarity, the evolving period of Cold War between the defunct USSR, and the United States (Morgenthau, 2012). One scenario which has been informed by the events since 1989 is the question of unipolarity. That is, that in the absence of another power to balance the United States in the international equilibrium, what we might have in the medium to long term future of the dominance of one ideology and one hegemony and such a situation might be ominous for world politics. This scenario is informed by the post-1648 history of international relations which abhors the dominance of one system by one country (Nduba, 1993:20). It is important to note the uniqueness of post-cold war era, an epoch that saw the unprecedented rise in the promotion of liberal democratic culture period described by Samuel Huntington as the Third wave of democracy. The demise and disintegration of former USSR seemed to have played down significantly on the ideology of socialism. But the obvious axiomatic trend in human history is that ideology is pervasive and cultural, and therefore does survive many generations. Socialism is the ideology of social welfare and proper management of world resources in the interest of all, so it remains the only pristine call for the remedy of social ills in the contemporary international system.

Let us take an overview of the current developments in the post-cold war era. Karen (2004) has listed certain key fundamental developments in the post-Cold War era to include: changes are made in Soviet/Russian foreign policy, with the withdrawals from Afghanistan and Angola in late 1980s monitored by the United Nations; Iraqi invasions of Kuwait in 1990 and the multilateral responses unite the former Cold War adversaries, glasnost and perestroika continue in Russia, as reorganised in 1992-1993, the former Yugoslavia disintegrates into independent states in Bosnia and Kosovo, leading to UN and NATO actions, wide spread conflict arises in Central and Western Africa, Central Asia, and Indian subcontinent, Al-Qaeda terrorist group network commits acts against the homeland of the United States and US interest abroad; US and coalition forces respond militarily in Afghanistan and Iraq.

These were the great changes that have taken place in the post-Cold war era with its drastic changes in the international system. Even after the economic downturn following the September 11 terrorist attack on the New York and Washington, DC, the US military and

economic capabilities are still the strongest in the world. Yet despite its primacy, the United States does not feel it is safe from attack. The global war against terror is far from over, and the issue of whether US power will be balanced by an emerging power is far from being resolved (Dickson, 2011:81). There is uncertainty about the spread of counterculture groups, and international terrorism engulfing the entire contemporary international system attests to the fact that the current state systems are being challenged seriously.

The Budding Global Power Structures And Resurgence Of Multipolarity

Multi-polarity or hegemony is situation where the three or more states dominate international relations such as the five great European powers after 1815 (Great Britain, France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia (Viotti&Kauppi, 2009:41). The classical understanding of multipolarity the distribution of global powers into three or more great power centres, with other states allied with one of the rivals, is inseparably linked with the idea of the need for balance of power. Multi-polarity may now be understood as a way of restructuring the global international system where the basic constituent parts are no longer the individual states but instead conglomeration of economic interests, united around the most powerful centres of attractions and economic growth (Dickson, 2011).

The preponderant place of the United States as the super player in the uni-polar order began to witness challenges and confrontations amidst the emergent other multilateral power structures and non actors in the aftermath of the Cold war. The growing influence of countries like Japan, China and India in productive technology and the development power fungibility continue to act as counterweight to the uni-polar and predominant stance of America. Multinational corporations, world counterculture groups, and international regimes play significant role in ensuring hegemonic balance. The decline of America's dominant roles, this paper lends credence that America unilaterally declared war on Iraq in 2003 on the flimsy excuse that Iraq was possessing nuclear weapon, but could not declare same war on Iran in 2014, a situation where Russia was taciturnly supporting Iran. The intervention and attempt to annex Ukraine Crimea Territory by Russia did not receive U.S. condemnation as they did when Iraq annexed Kuwait. Where was U.S. in defence of international laws in the above sited cases? This indicates that changes are occurring in favour of collective hegemony in the contemporary international system. But we have identified the international system to be revolving around the anvil of collective hegemony in this paper; the real social forces, groups and trends that challenge and keep posing threats to the traditionalist- realist roles and perspective of states and collective or multi-polarity are on the increase as certain strength of these forces are effectively contained by the collective hegemonic states.

Global Social Forces As Threats To The Roles Of The State

The contest of supremacy between idealism and realism on how best to address global human problems besetting the world metamorphosed in the formation of League of Nations 1918. As the jubilation and hope that heralded the emergence of League of Nations were cut short following the devastating holocaust of the World War II. The subsequent emergence of the United Nations in 1945 was sustained to address the challenges facing mankind in the world of complex interdependence. Environmental problems such as water shortage, desertification, global warming, ozone layer depletion, deforestation, transnational boundary, air pollution, toxic waste, considerable loss of biodiversity, and so forth, are part of a global, political, economic, and strategic landscape (Dokun, 1998). Issues of challenge against the realist and traditionalist centric view of the state became overwhelming in contemporary international relations in spite of the preponderant stance of the United Nations.

It is obvious that emerged paradigms in the international relations are basically the traditional alliance due to states, thereby making the states appear weak in the pursuit of their roles, goals and policies. The multiplications of actors across the length and breadth of international relations diminish the roles of the states. The major feature of international relations in the 20th and 21st century remains the increasing process of globalisations, which have tended to completely transform our commonly held notions of time and space. Indeed, the phenomenon of globalisation, as noted by several observers, has turned all of the planet earth into global village such that every point on the planet is in constant and close touch with the rest of the world via electronic, satellite or telephone communications (Odock, 2012:432).

Apart from the drastic roles of the globalisations on the state centric view of the international system, transnationalism has significantly changed the methodologies of realism in international realism. Transnational relation entails contacts, coalitions, and interactions across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organ of government (Nye & Keohane, 1971). These transnational relations, their proponents argue, have actually major changes in the number of actors in international relations, their patterns of interaction and the ability of governments to control international relations. The net effect of transnational relations has been able to render the state centric paradigm of international relations inadequate for analysing and explaining contemporary international relations (Odock, 2012).

The personalities, ideological, religious, ethnic and cultural movements play roles that pose threats to state positions as espoused by the realist paradigm. The major characteristics of these groups and movements is that they espouse and promote ideas, beliefs, and courses of action whose impact cuts across several independent states, whether it is the international working class ideology of Marx, charismatic Catholicism, Islam for the whole world or ethnic minorities such as the Native Indians of the Amazon forest, the Ogoni of Nigeria, etc, these movements have

become recognised, often enjoying the same privileges as the plenipotentiaries of powerful states. The participation of ethnic nationalities and religions and ideological movements in international relations poses serious challenges to the traditional conceptualisation of the state in terms of territory and a fixed population (Odock, 2012).

Further threats to the state position and roles are the transnational border crimes. Terrorism is currently the number one transnational threats to states (Viotti&Kauppi(2009:274). ISIS and Al-Qaeda networks constitute global threats and challenges to world peace and security.

The United Nations under the auspices of state is not winning the war on terrorism. Every day in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines, and elsewhere, U.S, soldiers are working to win the global war on terrorism Awasthi, (2009). As the global insurgency continue to soar, the US and the British militaries both define insurgency as actions within a state of a minority group intent on forcing political change by means of subversion, propaganda, and military pressure, and who intimidate the mass of the people to accept such change Awasthi,(2009:161). The adoption of this definition and approach, gives us the better scope of global Islamic Insurgency and the degree of counter-culture insurgence across the globe.

The global Islamic Insurgency works assiduously to get to final phase of establishing an Islamic government or state thereby casting coup de grace on the existing state system. In order to achieve the overthrow of the modern state system, they sponsor the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) not only in Iraq and the Middle East, but also in Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia Awasthi,(2009:161). So given the present diminishing international agential powers of states to combat and win the war on terror and global insurgency; the future of the state system appears weak and embroil in the vicious of circle of maintaining its relevance so to sustain existence and make the international state system safe.

Conclusions

The present international system is undergoing serious changes in socio-economic and political structures tilting towards collective hegemony against the unipolar order of the Post Cold war era. The United States is powerful but must tread with caution given the fact that multilateral power centres are emerging currently. The study has shown that there are threats to the survival of the state system as exemplified by the preponderant place of some counter-culture groups across the globe.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on World Trade Centre and Pentagon of the United States and inability of US to stem the tide of terrorism and counterinsurgency globally attests to the measure of weakness on the side of America. The global influence of Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other world counter culture groups threaten world peace and security in the present international system. The counter culture groups are challenging state system, pointing to the decline in the powers of states and the rise of non state actors in the international system. It calls for the concerted efforts of United Nations and its institutional affiliates to rise to these challenges. While the multipolar structures are hailed, its diminishing capability should be strengthened, so that terrorism and counterculture groups should be extirpated forthwith to make the world safe and peaceful.

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