

GLOBAL HEGEMONY VS. REGIONAL HEGEMONY: HOW THE US STRATEGICALLY INFLUENCES POWER

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<p>Article history:</p> <p><i>Received:</i> 19.07.2019</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 28.11.2019</p>	<p>Abstract: The article explores the controversial thesis that the United States strategically and consistently maneuvers against the emergence of regional hegemony across the globe. Whether it is Russia in the former Soviet space, China across the South China Sea, the United States works to disallow the expression of regional hegemonic power despite its own continued reliance on its global hegemony being accepted. The author goes to the heart of power positioning and exploitation in the 21st century: is the emergence of regional hegemony disruptive to the global system or beneficial? Is the United States' concerns altruistic or selfishly motivated by its own national security interests and global influence? Does it matter who is trying to wield regional influence? These and other questions are addressed, providing a new approach to understanding how power is being wielded today and for the foreseeable future.</p>
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This article explores the controversial thesis that the United States strategically and consistently maneuvers against the emergence of regional hegemony across the globe. Whether it is Russia in the former Soviet space or China across the South China Sea, the United States works to disallow the expression of regional hegemonic power despite its own continued reliance on its global hegemony being accepted. Up to now, most examinations have considered this simply an exercise of American foreign policy and global positioning according to its own best interests. What has gone largely absent from this is how much our understanding of American hegemony (its structure, its theoretical underpinnings, and its ultimate purpose over time) can provide a better explanation not just of American positions but also the interaction with major regional powers in this first fifth of the 21st century. Consequently, this article goes to the heart of regional perceptions about

American power positioning and exploitation in the 21st century.

Is the emergence of regional hegemony disruptive to the global system? Are the United States' concerns about regional power expressions altruistic or selfishly motivated by its own concerns about national security interests and its long-term global influence? Does it matter who is trying to wield regional influence? These and other questions will be addressed, lensed through both the current state of thought on hegemony and real-world empirical investigation, providing a new perspective on how American power today is not just being utilized but projected out to other critical security regions of the world. Understanding how that projection is viewed (and adapted to/countered by) regional powers will provide unique insights into the medium-term future of systemic power and world order.

The hegemony muddles

The first thing this work will declare is what it is *not*: it is not a review of the mountains of literature that offers slightly different but ever-more complex interpretations of what hegemony is or isn't. For the purposes of this work, it will suffice to take the relatively benign and non-controversial definition of hegemony as a prevailing order upheld by some mixture of consensual and coercive forces and that across most of the literature in international affairs the term 'hegemony' has a generally more beneficial connotation than the term 'empire.'¹ This work is also not challenging the assertion that since the end of WWII, and certainly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States has occupied unquestioned hegemonic dominance within the global system. That dominance has been material, ideational, institutional, and structural and pursued through both the aforementioned consensual and coercive actions.²

What is more intriguing to this project is teasing out that consensual/coercive dynamic within American global hegemony, how it has impacted the development of regional power around the globe, and to what ultimate purpose. Some works have deftly pointed out that this consensual/coercive diode has quite literally created a dual state: the ever-famous democratic one and the less-recognized security state.³ The former is always highlighted by the United States and touted as the reason why American power should not ever be considered an empire proper, that its initiatives and actions can rightly be seen as endeavoring to help the global common good in numerous and diverse ways. The latter is less public but increasingly more potent and seems to be behind many global maneuvers that work against the ideals and principles of liberal Western traditions (think invasive mass surveillance, rendition and indefinite detention, torture, and the violation of sovereignty). While some like to point out these two 'states' of hegemony as diametrically opposed to one

another, this work posits a perhaps controversial assertion: that they are instead two sides of the same American power coin and have, for years, regularly been interchanged, often with one being used to justify and rationalize the need for the other. Those who deal with hegemony strictly from the theoretical perspective might easily miss this important distinction, for its most vivid expressions come not within the academy but from the real world. Some have even taken to giving it a sinister-sounding autonomous nickname, The Deep State. But this article rejects the notion that the Deep State is something running perniciously alongside regular transparent power and undermining its most coveted principles. Rather, it is the functional amoral center of American foreign policy power and it has for a long time been actively serving the purpose of prolonging its global hegemony and preventing the emergence of any other contenders on the regional level.

This last point is important: too often discussions of American hegemony are focused on the plausibility of a new player emerging and taking the crown, as it were. Since that has always seemed an almost insurmountable objective, most of these discussions have rejected the idea outright. The most liberal will say simply that American hegemony is unlikely to continue forever and thus will eventually dissipate, but to be replaced by...*something* other than a new global hegemonic power. I am more interested in how other major powers around the world (China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, just to name some popular ones) have been met with resistance by American global hegemony while trying to express their own limited form of regional hegemony. What will be seen in this article is how that resistance is perhaps the greatest evidence of the United States doing everything it can to prevent future contenders from ever emerging. American hegemony is not resting on its laurels and it is not going complacently into the good night. It is, and has been, fighting tooth and nail for its continued dominance on the world stage and has viewed regional hegemonic power expression as a challenge of relevance that demands elimination.

It is rather fascinating how the literature has played close to this idea for quite some time

¹ Good, A. American Exception: Hegemony and the Dissimulation of the State // *Administration & Society*, 2018, No. 50(1), pp. 4-29.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

but yet never explicitly made the connection to the impact it had on regional power around the globe.

Perhaps with the focus so exclusively focused on whether or not a singular rival could emerge to replace the United States it made it less possible to see the smaller-scale but so significant influence at the lower regional level. The debate, for example, about how second-tier states seemed to not necessarily seek to frustrate American power but rather aligned with the US is quite telling: it was the fear of rising regional powers (often emphasized to the second-tier states by American foreign policy positions) that made alignment with the global hegemon more attractive.⁴ The purpose of this debate was to provide evidence as to why American hegemony, despite being weaker than in decades past, still might endure and be longer-lasting than anyone presumed. What the debate missed was how this was not an organic event at all but rather the purposeful strategy of the United States to further undermine growing regional power. Keeping critical global neighborhoods volatile for competing regional hegemons not only secured American global hegemony: it stuck holes in the balloon of rising regional hegemons.

This is not so much global conspiracy theory as merely sound strategy. The United States from the very beginning of the unipolar era has strongly sought to have its power equated not so much to its own individual rational pursuit of national security interests, but rather as the projection of what some call 'democratic hegemonism.'⁵ This form is easily the most benevolent: not linked to either single-state dominance or class superiority, democratic hegemonism is seen as a fragile consensus of ideals, perceptions, and values demanding a nurturing environment of like-minded states striving to achieve an international system epitomized by civil liberties, freedom, social activism, and transparent democratic

institutions.⁶ While this is indeed laudable as a goal for humanity, it is curious that we have not been able to draw strategic lines between this project and the manner in which America has always tried to project its global power hegemonically. If you can get others to buy into the idea that your power is somehow 'good for all,' then anyone rising to assert their own grander power gestures would not just be about themselves, or even about challenging the United States, but actually serving as agitators against the common global good.

It is an interesting conception, given that the US has so actively tried to suppress publicity away from its pursuit of national interests and cloak/veil them instead under the guise of this benevolent form of hegemony. In short, rather than being two different kinds, the security state in America has sought to rationalize its own actions by convincing others it is in fact working for democratic hegemonism. Indeed, another form of this has been how globalization (the supposed projection of democratic economic hegemonism for the benefit of all) has been accompanied by a powerful increase in American military spending and investment in military R&D. Indeed, the foreign sales of American weaponry has de facto resulted in the deputizing of the select chosen few to act as regional stewards in the name of American global hegemony.⁷

America has always prospered under this idealized image projected outward across the globe. Some might even argue it has been a powerful driver of policy. But what is more likely is that the driver of the policy has been institutionalizing American global hegemonic power and using these idealized images as the means to get to that end. It is this aspect of double standards that levels accusations of hypocrisy against the United States and fuels some of the most virulently powerful anti-Americanism.⁸ Indeed, this work is an

⁴ Selden, Z. Balancing against or Balancing with? The Spectrum of Alignment and the Endurance of American Hegemony // *Security Studies*, 2013, No. 22(2), pp. 330-364.

⁵ Valladao, A.G.A. Democratic Hegemony and American Hegemony // *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2006, No. 19(2), pp. 243-260.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Keaney, M. Globalisation, hegemony and perspective // *Political Studies Review*, 2015, No. 13(3), pp. 339-350.

⁸ Burman, S. Necklace or Noose? Challenges to American Hegemony // *Foresight: The Journal of Futures Studies, Strategic Thinking and Policy*, 2008, No. 10(4), pp. 69-75.

advancement of what has now been considered a time/context-dependent argument: most of the above critiques exploded during the mid-to-late 00s, what with America in the throes of two open wars and countless other military maneuvers in the Global War on Terror. They were ostensibly anti-Bush critiques about what had been done to *real* American values, as it were. But we have had two new Presidents since George W. Bush and our foreign policy positions and global power projections have not dramatically altered. Thus, these critiques need to be reevaluated not in the light of simply criticizing a president but in assessing the continued American desire to maintain its global hegemony. And that desire goes beyond individual and above political party.

This is not a hyper-liberal diatribe against the US trying to maximize its power to the fullest. That is the realist system of international relations we still exist in today. It is, however, a criticism of the academy not making the realization explicit of how the security state is literally pretending to represent benevolent democratic hegemonism while perhaps only pursuing selfish interests. This work is adding a new dimension and relevance to the neorealist vs. Gramscian hegemony debate: the neorealist version emphasizes the role of a great power to set up institutions, policing, norms, etc. The Gramscian version focuses not on brute force but on ideas and consensus, on the establishment of dominance by consent through means of ideological and political leadership.⁹ To an extent, at least when it comes to American power, this debate has been a false one: the so-called struggle between the security state and democratic hegemonism in America has been no struggle at all. The relationship was misdiagnosed: America has, in the 21st century, been propping up a publicly-declared Gramscian notion of hegemony while simultaneously enforcing it and overwhelming potential regional challengers to it with a decidedly aggressive neorealist form of great power hegemony. This combination, never before made explicit, has been monumentally successful in frustrating and blocking regional

hegemonic efforts to influence critical global security neighborhoods.

We have largely missed this dilemma and the pressure it places on regional powers, having to choose between accepting American initiatives without challenge or striving to create alternatives to that power that might be efficient and ultimately global but will likely receive intense pressure from American hegemony.¹⁰ In some cases, we have even been asking the wrong questions, as predictions about the supposed end of American global hegemony by 2040 have revealed great debates about whether the US has basically created a 'posthegemonic' world that cannot be dominated by a single state?¹¹ It is fascinating how the presumption is to associate American global power projection with benevolence and expecting its own acquiescence to the end of its global dominance. What the evidence shows instead is a state fully intent of prolonging that position of primacy as long as possible, while actively undermining not just global contenders but regional aspirants as well.

Some have studied the unique regional geography of the US as perhaps being insightful in this development of curtailing any expressions of regional hegemony around the globe. Since America had the great fortune to be unentangled by regional conflicts to a large degree and was able to relatively quickly subsume its immediate neighbors with a consensus about what political values should be most important, it has been able to take its own region for granted.¹² This singular freedom and relief at home translated into America maximizing its power and promoting forms of regionalism around the globe that they would not only not constrain the US, they would ultimately undercut the emergence of other regional powers that could arguably keep developing to challenge American global

⁹ Diez, T. Normative Power as Hegemony // *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2013, No. 48(2), pp. 194-210.

¹⁰ Valladao, A.G.A. Democratic Hegemony and American Hegemony // *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2006, No. 19(2), pp. 243-260.

¹¹ Knight, W.A. From Hegemony to Post Hegemony? // *Ideaz*, 2012, 10-12.

¹² Hurrell, A. Hegemony, Liberalism and Global Order: What Space for Would-be great Powers? // *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944), 2006, No. 82(1), pp. 1-19.

prominence. The present work builds on this important distinction which has existed with a very small voice for over a decade. Not only does this argument need to be heard more loudly, it needs to be expanded into the realm of regional power development on the global stage, evaluating how it has impacted those efforts to consolidate power within certain critical global neighborhoods.

In a manner of speaking, this work breaks down the false wall separating the American notions of hegemony and empire. America has in fact always been a deft hybrid of those two things. What needs to be changed is the idea that the benevolent hegemon image was somehow isolated and distinctly separate from the grandeur of American soft empire. It is not a coincidence that American military power coincided with American-led economic globalization: military dominance alone was not going to be enough to secure long-lasting global hegemony. It always needed to be combined with economic global dominance. Consequently, it meant the construction of a subtle system of soft/hard coercion, the asymmetric distribution of market power over the ability of others in the system to develop true self-sufficiency.¹³ Indeed, American global capitalism and American global hegemony have always run in tandem, not just for securing American power but recruiting (sometimes voluntarily, sometimes de facto forced) most others into the same system.¹⁴ This was often portrayed as America working for an extended 'peace' dividend but that seems to be brought into question: is this a system meant to ensure peace for all as its greatest return or is it best for securing and strengthening the projection of American power while weakening the potentiality of any emerging regional powers?

Evidence and argumentation loudly indicate the latter.

There is even a fascinating missed analogy in the work being done on the national influence of major philanthropic foundations in the United States. Major foundations were highly

constructive and influential in the building of America, boosting federal executive power when federal government was weak and individual states were strong, actively blocking and circumventing challengers that emphasized isolationism or 'parochialism', and promoting liberal democratic order and institutions.¹⁵ More important for this discussion, the modern equivalent of recognizing the power of such global foundation networks (of which America is the clear dominant player and the supreme example cited as America's 'soft power' being utilized abroad), is central to American foreign policy: the argument goes that these now transnational foundations have the power to safeguard liberty, battle corruption, and enforce and concretize the rule of law.¹⁶ But this premise is only valid if it is exclusively working for the promotion of democratic hegemonism *not* connected to a particular individual state. Perhaps not so ironically, striving regional hegemonies like Russia and China have often accused these non-state purveyors of American soft power of ultimately just doing the bidding of American security state hegemony. These accusations have largely always fallen on deaf ears in an international version of declaring 'consider the source.' But undermining the accusers, rightly or wrongly, should not automatically dismiss the accusation. If the wall between American power projection based on interest versus American power projection for the common global good is not nearly as altruistic or explicit as has been argued in the past, then maybe the questions being asked from such 'nefarious' questioners like Russia and China are still nevertheless legitimate ones.

What this section has shown is that our theoretical understandings of hegemony have often drawn false walls and made unsubstantiated grand benevolence assumptions about America's global position and its purpose in utilizing that power. It has proposed that while the picture painted is less positive and less ideal, having a more realistic and transparent understanding of how America has constructed and maintained its hegemony is important for

¹³ Paun, S. Is American Hegemony Stable and Sustainable? // *Geopolitics, History and International Relations*, 2010, No. 2(1), pp. 134-139.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Parmar, I. Foundation Networks and American Hegemony // *European Journal of American Studies*, 2012, Vol. 7, No. 1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

understanding how regional power imbalances might proceed far into the future. Up to now the academy has drawn on neorealism, hegemonic stability theory, balance of threat theory, and liberal international relations theory to offer explanations as to why US global hegemony will continue. Most if not all of these approaches have given evidence as to why the US lead is insurmountable and that other countries will not be able to counterbalance because of important security and economic benefits.¹⁷ Where new ground has been broken against this mountain of knowledge has been in the simple proposition that perhaps American global hegemony is not fostered because of the global common good and not even because of mutually beneficial relationships of an economic and defense nature. Rather, it has endured because of a very explicit, nuanced, and deliberate attempt to mask coercion through false consensus, to justify its own global power through the purposeful undermining of others regional power. It may be a bit more sinister in its portrayal, but it may also be more accurate. What is left is to deduce the impact this has had on two of the most obvious aspirants to creating real regional hegemony in the global system and who have, so far, not been nearly as successful as they would like: China and Russia.

China and Russia: The Frustrating Fight for Regional Hegemony

China

What most immediately jumps out of the more objective and rational literature on Chinese power is the focus on its limitations and contextualizing its true potential reach and scope. Clearly, outside of American national security analyses which have a vested interest in portraying Chinese power as significantly as possible, China does not and cannot operate in a political vacuum. Its success in building a massive transnational economic power base has also inextricably tied its long-term destiny to the success and prosperity of the partners existing within that enlarged network. Given

that network is still dominated by American power and reach, it means the Chinese have been obligated to at least recognize certain norms and ideational values that have been injected into this global geoeconomic system.¹⁸ This of course does not mean that China has already accepted liberal democratic principles and openly embraces civil liberty ideas on a grand scale. But it also does not mean it has been utterly oblivious to them and working tirelessly to undermine them. In fact, the evidence is quite compelling that unlike Western Europe and America, the original purveyors of liberal democratic ideals, contemporary China has essentially geostrategically ‘grown up’ in a world where those ideals were largely accepted as the language currency of interaction. Emerging powerful in such an international regime-intensive system means its behavior and power has always been under certain normative constraints.¹⁹ Thus, perhaps, the bigger riddle is not why China has failed to more fully adopted such norms, but rather why so many analyses of Chinese power seem to ignore how engaged and semi-adoptive China has always been with them? The answer naturally hints at a purposeful over-exaggeration of Chinese power, to portray China as a country *not* truly engaged in the international system and thereby rationalizing initiatives by the global hegemon to constrain and limit the expression of Chinese regional power.

This is seen quite readily in reactions to the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative by China, a massive geoeconomic economic/transport corridor project that will cross over 60 countries and create new access and interactivity from the South China Sea all the way to Amsterdam. Some analysis has portrayed the initiative with skepticism, openly noting how the OBOR could actually be gradually disconnecting China from dependence on the West and creating maritime trade that could over time build a more economically self-sufficient and sustaining Eurasia. Ultimately, it could be one giant attempt to make China more economically, and thereby politically, resilient

¹⁷ Layne, C. The Waning of U.S. Hegemony-Myth or Reality? A Review Essay // *International Security*, 2009, No. 34(1), pp. 147-172.

¹⁸ Pan, C. Rethinking Chinese Power: A Conceptual Corrective to the “Power Shift” Narrative // *Asian Perspective*, 2014, No. 38(3), p. 387.

¹⁹ Ibid.

to conflict and external pressure.²⁰ Washington DC has openly declared such potentiality as being not so benign and something to watch out for, intimating that any such expressions of Chinese power will unavoidably be to the detriment of the global system.

The challenge is whether this critique is coming from concern for all of the players in the global system or is it just voicing the concern of the single global hegemon? More fascinating still would be to remove 'China' from the above descriptions and see how people would in general react to an initiative that is meant to increase connectivity, build sustainability, allow new prosperity and development across a massive area of the world that is still hindered by poor transport routes, and ultimately create economic independence and security resilience for the main initiator of the project. How are any of these objectives 'non-benign' or something to be wary about? Were the personal country pronoun of 'America' inserted into this initiative it would likely be declared innovative and essential. Thus, it seems the judgment of the project is not based on the quality of the initiative nor on the overall positive results it may bring for numerous actors. It is judged, rather, on its ability to make a regional power less- contained within the constraining embrace of the global hegemon. No more, no less. The problem the US must face in the near future is how readily countries like China see this for what it really is: power opportunism on the part of America to further ensure its disbalanced and asymmetric monopoly on global power, even to the point of potentially hurting the development of a critical global region.

Perhaps most confusing within this case is in the acknowledgement that China is not a prime candidate to develop a competing global hegemony that mirrors the American approach. Unlike the United States, the Chinese projection of power into the global system (even at the regional level) has not included an ideational or value component. Quite to the contrary, China has more publicly favored the concept of a truly multipolar world, with

that conception signaling the constriction of unfettered American global hegemonic power and different political systems are afforded an equal stake in terms of global respect.²¹ Indeed, China has consistently promoted a global presence that is more fluid, more adaptable, and not tied specifically to any set of enforced normative values. Rather than striving to create a system which demands allegiance to a single set of norms and/or principles, China does not seem to care about others having different values and prefers to encourage a system based on a far simpler common understanding.²² What has been common in the West, however, is the portrayal of this policy as a justification for bad behavior, not as a nod to individual expression of state interests and priorities.

As was discussed earlier, since the United States has forcefully and successfully managed to cover the hegemonic goals of its security state under the cloak of benevolent democratic hegemonism, it gives it great flexibility to judge such ambiguity and adaptability from China as a negative aligned against freedom and liberty. Interestingly, it has been noted that while China tends to publicly obsess over symbols and uses of soft power, it very often engages in hard power initiatives as well.²³ What has been missed is how this debate over hegemonic expression has put China quite literally in a 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' scenario: efforts at providing a more context-dependent, regionally- independent, less-normative regional hegemony are dismissed but then any maneuvers that act in the same style as the precedent set by the global hegemon are even more powerfully denounced. So, policies that could be characterized as potentially capable of accommodation and compromise are instead judged as incoherent, opportunistic, and politically unfaithful.²⁴ The end product of this is a China that sees American grandstanding about

²⁰ Ljungwall, C.; Bohman, V. Mending Vulnerabilities to Isolation: How Chinese Power Grows out of the Development of the Belt and Road Initiative // *The RUSI Journal*, 2017, No. 162(5), p. 26.

²¹ Inkster, N. Coming to Terms with Chinese Power // *Survival*, 2016, No. 58(1), pp. 209-216.

²² Kilic, C. Chinese Hegemony: What Kind of Global Power? // *All Azimuth*, 2017, No. 6(1), p. 109.

²³ Inkster, N. Coming to Terms with Chinese Power // *Survival*, 2016, No. 58(1), pp. 209-216.

²⁴ Pieper, M. Chinese, Russian, and Turkish Policies in the Iranian Nuclear Dossier: Between Resistance to Hegemony and Hegemonic Accommodation // *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, 2014, No. 2(1), p. 17.

power while engaging in rather blunt examples of hypocrisy and diplomatic double-standards. What China perhaps does not understand is whether or not the United States truly believes that its contradictory behavior cannot be seen by others for what it is or does it simply not care about anything more than the maintenance of and acquiescence to its own continued global hegemonic rule over the system?

Russia

An examination of the Russian case in terms of how it feels about American global hegemony vis-à-vis its own regional dominance is fraught with cautionary tales about paranoia and an intellectual rush to judgment. Russia has swung on a pendulum since Putin first became President, oscillating between reluctantly accepting the inevitability of American global supremacy (while officially warning the international community that unipolarity is inherently unstable and distressing to almost all other actors) and de facto embracing American behavior, slyly arguing for it to be precedent-setting and thereby affirmed for its own foreign policy pursuits when it deems necessary (which of course the United States has always staunchly rejected).

Early on in the Putin presidency, when Russia had not yet benefited from the global upturn in oil and gas prices and the country was still hopeful that an American-Russian counter-terrorist alliance would reap benefits across the relationship board, two major themes emerged: first, there would be no rhetorical and categorical denunciations of American hegemony. Rather, Russian attitudes toward it would largely be based on how successful the bilateral relationship would be between the two. In essence, Russia was hoping for 'positive baggage' to replace negative historical legacies, leading to better interaction. Second, Russia would always closely watch the actions of the United States. Not necessarily to counter or try to block said initiatives, but rather to take stock of how the menu of options would be increasing for the Russian Federation as well, directly based on the choices made by the United States in certain global contexts and situations.²⁵

²⁵ Monaghan, A. "Calmly Critical": Evolving Russian Views of US Hegemony // *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2006, No. 29(6), pp. 987-1013.

It has been easy to forget this initial Putin foundation given how poorly Russian-American relations are presently. But if the present day indicates a negative, even cynical, bilateral relationship, then it is important to remember how that relationship evolved in a mutually interactive diode dominated not so much by Russian actions but reactions to American positions. The high expectations of being included 'in the West' early on were ultimately deemed illusory and failed, requiring the country to emerge with its current 'multi-vector' approach that emphasizes Russian independence, cooperative influence over its direct sphere of influence, and always ensuring through its foreign policy the continued evolution of Russia's external development.²⁶ It is interesting to note how American criticism toward the multi-vector approach somewhat mirrors the Chinese dilemma: American global hegemony seemed to push the Russian Federation into a strategic corner where it was not offered a real partnership with the United States and it was being countered from developing a truly independent regional hegemony. To many in the Kremlin corridors of power it seemed as if the only role being offered by the global hegemon was one of relative insignificance and decided impotence.

This last comment lends itself to a common lament within Russia that seems to not be shared by its American counterparts: Russian analysts have long questioned just how much of contemporary relations between the two countries are predicated purely out of a reluctance to disengage from past habit. The difficulty of truly changing tactics and altering a relationship that has been cemented so firmly in the adversarial end of the spectrum is difficult, not the least of which considering how many powerful vested interests exist on both sides in seeing the conflict relationship continue (a subtle aside to the military-industrial complexes of both nations).²⁷ But if the Russian side can be commended for at least beginning to wonder and self-question this bias possibility, the American side has largely dismissed this critique, all while constantly pulling out the 'Soviet card' to explain contemporary Russian

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

foreign policy maneuvers (whether it accurately describes the situation in question is seemingly unimportant). This dynamic alone accounts for a significant level of attitudinal discrepancies between the two countries that is still largely unaddressed and certainly not connected to the issue of hegemonic power (both global and regional).

When moving beyond the accusations lobbied by both sides against each other and attempting to look into Russian regional interactions absent that rhetoric, an interesting picture emerges that is not highly publicized in the West. The so-called ‘Near Abroad’ for Russia, the post-Soviet space in general, is often portrayed as an arena where Russia aims to dictate all terms in a domineering style leaving all other participants cowering in its wake. Actual evidence seems to give witness to the contrary: while absolutely acknowledging fear and suspicion over the 800lb. gorilla in the regional neighborhood, the states of the Caucasus and Central Asia have largely engaged in regional and international organizations with Russia that are exemplified by stability and predictability, even giving a level of exit opportunity (i.e., bilateral negotiations still can reign supreme, sometimes even within an existing international organization, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or the Eurasian Economic Union).²⁸

This framework has been termed both flexible and rigid: flexible in the sense that each state has always been allowed to independently construct its own bilateral relations and the degree to which it wishes to get involved in multilateral negotiations; rigid in the sense that there is massive legalization designed to enforce and safeguard the relationships and arrangements constructed and concluded by all sides.²⁹ Why this matters is because it means on the regional level Russia has been behaving largely in a way that is *opposite* to how Western mainstream media portrays it. Instead of a marauding regional hegemon out of control, it has in many instances conducted itself within

the ‘Near Abroad’ as a willing participant that cooperated, engaged, and even ceded certain controls and longstanding sovereign rights to every regional player, despite having such a dominant and asymmetric power imbalance in its favor. Indeed, the regional institutional design constructed across the former Soviet space seems to be one that includes both logic and flexibility, that balances the power and policy interests across the diverse members that wildly vary in individual influence, and succeeds in maintaining this cooperative environment despite a general context of mistrust toward the ‘regional hegemon.’³⁰

In short, time and again, the power needs and expectations of Russia across this region have been constrained if not completely stopped. Now compare this to a global hegemon that consistently paints a picture of Russia not only dictating affairs in this region but being a danger to stability and independence to countries like the Baltic states, Poland, and the Czech Republic. There is a disconnect between what the global hegemon decries and what the regional hegemon consistently does. The explanation for this discrepancy seems to not be the success of the propaganda of the latter but the former.

The involvement of Russia in the construction of the Eurasian Economic Union is also emblematic of this environment. Many analysts acknowledge that Russia aspires through these projects to achieve undeniable regional hegemony, *but* that hegemony has not yet been built. More importantly, Russia seems to recognize that the achievement of that hegemony is best organized through institutional mechanisms that emphasize social consent and cultural leadership, not just economic dependence and military domination.³¹ In this can be added a third international element that might be ameliorating any Russian desire to just unilaterally act: its own wariness of bilateral relations with China and its concerns over Chinese encroachment into the same

²⁸ Willerton, J.P.; Goertz, G.; Slobodchikoff, M.O. Mistrust and Hegemony: Regional Institutional Design, the FSU-CIS, and Russia // *International Area Studies Review*, 2015, No. 18(1), pp. 26-52.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Kirkham, K. The formation of the Eurasian Economic Union: How Successful Is the Russian Regional Hegemony? // *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2016, No. 7(2), pp. 111-128.

general neighborhood.³² Russia actually gets the unique perspective of generally aspiring to regional hegemony while *also* being forced to accept a subordinate role to another potentially more powerful regional hegemon. Its response to this has not been diplomatic petulance or military recklessness. Instead, it has sought to broaden and diversify its Asian engagement portfolio, opening up improved relations with Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam.³³

All of this matters because it signifies a battle over the Russian narrative between Russia itself and American global hegemony, which has a vested interest in Russia not improving itself and not developing into a legitimate regional power. In both cases, Russia and China are met with a powerful response that cuts across media, diplomacy, military technology, and economic development and aims to limit if not outright eliminate its ability to effectively leverage and influence its own immediate geographic region. Despite evidence that seems to show both countries on numerous occasions have not only affirmed international rules and regimes, despite examples from both that they exhibit a willingness to not just interact within the boundaries of global standards but will allow their own power to be somewhat constrained for the greater regional project, American hegemonic power has made every effort to paint the most negative picture possible about Chinese and Russian regional power. This work is not striving to paint the two as martyrs before an American altar. But it is also adamant about the intellectual, diplomatic, and policy need to portray the evidence as it actually exists, without hegemonic posturing. When this is done it is possible to see a China and Russia that are amenable to being constructive members of the international community. And that can only be considered a positive.

* * *

What this brief exploration has established is a passionate policy of the United States to maintain its global hegemony as far into the future as is possible. While not being expressly focused on within scholarly or policy circles,

³² Kuchins, A.C. Russia in the CIS in 2013: Russia's Pivot to Asia // *Asian Survey*, 2014, No. 54(1), p. 129.

³³ Ibid.

the role of regional hegemons has clearly been deemed a danger to that global hegemonic goal of the US. Consequently, it has endeavored to limit, constrain, and ostracize countries like China and Russia from successfully instituting their own programs of regional hegemony. Perhaps more sinister, the United States has consistently tried to engage a global program of positive propaganda when it comes to the functions and objectives of its own hegemony that is not entirely representative of how America employs its global reach and power. Strategically utilizing a Gramscian form of democratic hegemonism to sufficiently mask or hide a neorealist program of global hegemonic dominance may be brilliant in a still-realist-dominated world of international relations. But it also means there is a need to develop more scholarship that critically evaluates the consequences of that strategy.

A word of warning in the current political atmosphere of controlling narratives and seeking to destroy rather than engage competing alternatives: showing how Chinese and Russian regional hegemony may not actually be an entirely bad and evil development does not mean that China and Russia are without blame and do no wrong in the political arena. Obviously, in terms of mature and consolidated democratic institutions, these two countries still have much to do and far to go. But that achievement will never take place if the global power that is meant to best represent those ideals regularly undermines moments of success where both of those countries at least show the potential to be willing and open participants to the global order as *it has been constructed already by American hegemony*. And that, perhaps most disconcertingly, could be the real problem to analyze moving forward: is American global hegemony blocking Chinese and Russian regional hegemony because it is standing up for the rights and freedoms of smaller neighbors or is it simply trying to ensure a longer reign as the unchallenged dominant force on the global stage?

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ГЛОБАЛЬНАЯ ГЕГЕМОНИЯ И РЕГИОНАЛЬНАЯ ГЕГЕМОНИЯ: ВЛАСТЬ И СТРАТЕГИЯ США

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<p>Информация о статье: <i>Поступила в редакцию:</i> 19 июля 2019 <i>Принята к печати:</i> 28 ноября 2019</p>	<p>Аннотация: Автор статьи рассматривает противоречивый тезис о том, что стратегия США направлен на последовательное противодействие появлению региональных держав в разных частях света. Будет ли Россия на постсоветском пространстве, Китай в Южно-Китайское море, Соединенные Штаты стремятся ограничить их региональную гегемонию, хотя сами по-прежнему остаются глобальным гегемоном. Автор рассматривает сущность и способы использования власти в XXI веке: является ли появление региональных гегемонов разрушительным явлением для мировой системы или конструктивным? Обусловлена ли озабоченность Соединенных Штатов о национальной безопасности и собственном глобальном влиянии альтруистической или эгоистичной мотивацией? Имеет ли значение, кто именно пытается приобрести региональное влияние? Эти и другие вопросы рассматриваются в статье, а автор предлагает новый подход на понимание того, как международная власть используется сегодня и может быть применена в обозримом будущем.</p>
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<p>Ключевые слова: гегемония; регионализм; Соединенные Штаты; внешняя политика; Россия; Китай; власть</p>	

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