



First among Equals¹: The United States in a Future World System

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ABSTRACT

Power is fungible especially in the international system, so the US decline as a super power economically can be translated into a decline in other forms of power.

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Introduction

The world system is inclined to redistribution of capabilities¹ within the international, state or even the individual levels, especially, in the aftermath of major events that necessarily alter the status quo, such as, great wars or crises of enormous scales².

In the past few decades the world witnessed a number of events tantamount to crises with real global repercussions namely, the end of the cold war and the subsequent disintegration of the former Soviet Union causing, the collapse of the post Second War world system. Another significant event was the 11 September terrorist attacks on New York's twin tower building. That event was particularly important because it gave rise to the new conservatives in the United States whereby, the Bush Doctrine and the declaration of a world war on terrorism essentially determined the dawn of a new direction for world politics.

That meant that neutralism is not an option between the United States and its foes, therefore, all states should make their choice³ and the world became involved in the irresponsible American led war on the international arena, especially on the peripheries of Arab and Islamic states in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Syria and others⁴. This was the distinguishing characteristic of previous republican administration which was characterized by the excessive use

of military force and subdued international diplomacy to national American interests.

Power is fungible especially in the international system, so the US decline as a super power economically can be translated into a decline in other forms of power especially military might. Therefore, the claim that the US is becoming the first among equals becomes more realistic.⁵

That era witnessed arrogance and prevarication with international institutions and international law on a global range without enough clues, as when we witnessed the United States indicted Iraq with developing weapons of mass destruction.⁶

"The principal characteristic of twenty-first-century international relations is turning out to be Nonpolarity: a world dominated not by one or two or even several states but rather by dozens of actors possessing and exercising various kinds of power⁷."

In this position, he engages arguments from observers like Michael Beckley, who claims that America's edge will endure, and so will its hegemonic role in world politics.⁸

President Obama and his current administration have been persistent to get the way out of wars on all fronts, and gradually cancelled the concept of war on terror and decided to withdraw from many regions of conflict and military

¹ "First Among Equals" is a concept used to refer to Head of the Catholic Church (the Pope) in relation to the Council of cardinals that elects the pope from amongst its members. The Pope is thus *Primus inter pares*.

² Andrew Moravcsik. LIBERAL THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A PRIMER. Princeton University. 2010. p4

³ Huntington, Samuel. Political Order in Changing Societies, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) pp.3-5.

⁴ London, Herbert, Bush v. Obama Administrations' Foreign Policy Doctrines, September 8, 2010.

⁵ David Froom, Richard Pearl: The End of Evil, How to Victory over Terrorism, Civil, Amman, 2004, pp.64-65

⁶ The Telegraph, US will be 'first among equals' in 2030, Dec. 11, 2012.

⁷ Marc Thiessen, The Obama-Bush doctrine, Washington Post, May 31, 2012.

⁸ Emanuel Wallerstein. The Eagle Has Crash Landed. Pax Americana is over. Challenges from Vietnam and the Balkans to the Middle East. July 1, 2002-

⁹ Richard Haass. The Age of Nonpolarity: What Will Follow US Dominance. Foreign Affairs. May/June 2008. p.1.

¹⁰ Michael Beckley. China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure. International Security 36:3 page 42

campaigns, and tried to replace the concept of hostility with the concept of cooperation between countries⁹. Thus, Obama embarked upon a comprehensive health insurance program despite republican objection, which may indicate the failure of the American administration to achieving tangible results in the Middle East “peace process”, and failed to confront Israeli intransigence. However, Obama managed to strike a deal with Iran that kept the American position, together with the European stand, with regards to the Iranian nuclear program. However, whilst the nuclear deal with Iran might appear a significant accomplishment, we are still far from being out of the woods yet.

About the American Economy and Obama’s Plan

It is imperative in the American Political system to have cooperation between the executive, the legislative, and even the judiciary institutions in major decision making in dealing with the repercussions of crises such as the global financial crisis. President Obama pledged in his meeting with the bipartisan states governor’s participation on all levels in decision making and asked the governors to contribute in the success of the economic plan and offered his friendship to both Republican and the democrat senators.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, the American economy began to show signs of recovery from the financial crisis by creating new work opportunities and recovery of exports balance and other economic achievements. But the biggest and most obvious achievement for president Obama in the congress ratification of the public comprehensive health care plans and Obama will continue to have the last word decision making, and power in the new change.

The recurrence of international financial crisis may induce tendencies to end the hegemony of the United States of America over the international financial system and dominance over the IBRD, IMF and other international commercial organizations. The wide extension of the United States and its involvement in wars that couldn’t be won, such as the war on terror and the war in Iraq and Afghanistan paused a challenge to American hegemony or the uni-polarity of the World System, which was dominated by the United states of American, accordingly made unilateral decisions in the varied political and economic institutions¹¹.

A number of people¹² demand the change of the financial world system that depends on the US Dollar as a base without any conditional restrictions on the irresponsible financial policy of the United States of American.

The current president of the United States has to deal with a changing and very competing world in all aspects, especially the economic ones. The magnitude of the internal debt of the United States of America exceed 16 trillion dollars that have to be repaid by the coming generations of American workers, employees, investors and administrators in convenient payments and not by contriving financial crises or by

¹¹Suheyyla Ozyildirim.. Survival of Rationalism Between Hostility and Economic Growth. Journal of Peace Research .Volume 38 / number 4 / July 2001. p.515. also see: Al Itihad Emirate Newspaper, 18 Nov.20 13, <http://www.alitihad.ae/wajhatdetails.php?id=44673>

¹²Dumbrell, John .Issues in American Politics: Polarized Politics in the Age of Obama, Routledge. 2013.p 19.

¹³Yassin, Al Sayed: The Cosmic Universe, the struggle against the American Hegemony, NahdatMasser, Egypt, 2004, p25-27

¹⁴Warner, Jeremy. The sun is setting on dollar supremacy, and with it, American power. The Telegraph, 14 Oct 2013

following an inflation policy. This position becomes more urgent when comparing the size of American economy which approaches 17.4 trillion dollars on 2014¹³ with the Chinese which is approaching 17.6 trillion dollars and the European which amounts to 18.46¹⁴ trillion dollars. This arouses several questions on the future of American economic hegemony. There used to be an American saying, “if the American economy sneezes, all the world economics will catch flue”¹⁵. Today and due to the world financial crisis that originated in the United States, particularly in the mortgage market and spread to other countries, the world is questing for solutions to alleviate its dependence on the American economy to liberate its financial institutions from the American hegemony¹⁶.

There is a justification for forming a new International Financial system that reminds us with the post-second world war when the great powers were able to construct the Briton Woods system. For example, China pointed out in its main newspaper its huge balance of American Federal Reserve of trillion dollars, which could be used in case of an American attempt to restore the financial and exchange system which depends on the dollar base, and demanded a credit basket for currencies including the Chinese Yuan instead of the dollar as a base for world economy¹⁷.

At present the World system is witnessing the emergence of powers aiming at change and rearrangement of the world system into a multipolar framework and not unipolar, since it is no more possible for the United States to unilaterally exercise the world political decision as in the aftermath of the end of the cold war and the absence of the Soviet Union from the scene. The big powers such as china, Russia, India, Japan and Germany have a high political weight that cannot be ignored, surpassed, or confronted, especially the “BRICS” group (that are rising upon the world arena).

There is ongoing discussion on the electronic pages and research magazines about the future of the unilateral American hegemony on the world. Neorealists, according to Farid Zakaria 2011,¹⁸ believe that the United States is in a retreating position concerning its hegemony over international policy, while Josef Nye, a neoliberal sees the opposite and that the best American days are not over yet.¹⁹

Consequently, we may notice moves for reconstruction of the world system on a multi-polar base. An indication of that is the Syrian case; when the world was anticipating the American position which was ready to launch a strong missile strike and the Russian position which was against the American aggression on an independent state, even when it is in a civil war. It was obvious that Russia reinforced its

¹⁵ CIA Fact Book;

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html>.

¹⁶ World Bank. 2014 ;

<http://data.worldbank.org/country/EUU>

¹⁷Bakhtiar, Abbas. The Economy: US and the World. Pravda. 17.03.2008

¹⁸Modern History Sourcebook: Summary of Wallerstein on World System Theory.

¹⁹Ohemy, Kinishi: International Economy-the next phase, Dar Al Arabieh for Science, Beirut, Banan, 2006, p26-30.

²⁰Zakaria, Fareed. The Post-American World. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. p 174.

²¹ Nye, Joseph. Is the American Century Over, Polity Press, 2015.

political position by massing a number of warships on Syria's shores in a clear challenge to the American hegemony.

It is therefore expected that a future confrontation in the world system will be different from that which we became familiar with the past century, since the closet scenario will witness competition between the aforementioned great powers and the only superpower (the United States) which is no more able to subjugate the world to its will.²⁰ Because of this, President Obama's administration will try to minimize the accumulating enmity cases to the American policy by the participation of major world countries in decisions and responsibilities about the different issues, especially conflicts and wars. Obama will continue to maintain the American army as the strongest in the world, but he might minimize the deployment of the American army to a large extent in the different regions of the world, especially at the peripheries of the Islamic world.

United States Hegemony Challenged

Over the last seven decades the United States' prevailed on the world stage almost unchallenged. Its prowess reached its maximum peak when the former USSR disintegrated – seemingly then – beyond recovery. Soviet abrupt dissolution left the United States a broad margin for spearheading the world governance. Therefore, from 1990 until 2003, America stood to be “the last man” who, plunged down or manipulated international law and declared WWII on terrorism. However, the American invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan followed by the internal economic downturn pegged America's ability to peak any further than it has done until 2003.

This section argues that there are a number of potentially potent challenges to America's hegemony arose before America could catch her breath; the first challenge began with the founding of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001, marking Russian and Chinese determination to resist NATO's expansion towards their boundaries²¹. It is worth noting here that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization though might be considered a military and security alliance, its function is containment of NATO's expansive ambitions rather than aggression.

The next major hallmark of challenging America's hegemony is in the founding of the BRICS group of five. Despite the many constraints that South Africa, India, Brazil, China and Russia face internally, BRICS “is representative of a collective aspiration to influence and manage institutions of global political and economic governance, so that they reflect demographic and economic realities, not merely post-World War II agreements”²². However, “It is highly unlikely that they will be able to create a power bloc that is formidable

²²Al Khazen, Jihad: The New Conservatives Zion Christians Zionist, Dar Al Saqi, Beirut, Lebanon, 2005, p103-105.

²³ Marcel de Haas and Frans-Paul van der Putten The Shanghai Cooperation Organization Towards a full-grown security alliance? November 2007 Netherland Institute of International Relations, Clingendael http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20071100_cscp_security_paper_3.pdf

²⁴Samir Saran, Ashok Kumar Singh and Vivan Sharan., A long –Term Vision for the BRICS, Observer Research Foundation. http://orfonline.org/cms/export/orfonline/modules/report/attachments/bricsvision_1376295709857.pdf

enough to be a guiding force in the 21st century”²³. Indeed, in the consecutive declarations of BRICS summits there is deliberate emphasis on “solidarity”, “non-bloc nature”, “neutrality towards third parties”, and a clear rejection of unipolarity for, international legitimacy and unbalanced international relations have, under American hegemony, been neither upheld by America nor checked by her allies.

The United States continues to out power the ten largest militaries in the world combined. However, neither those powers nor such local powers as Iran are really what threaten America's global leadership. Military prowess is necessary for world leadership but the global money is turning the tables around and demarcating the real battle. The founding of the New Bank for Development by the BRICS could plausibly constitute the cornerstone for new financial and economic powers.

Obama's Stance in Troubled Middle East

The Obama administration inherited a region encumbered by complex issues, such as, the Israeli-Palestinian peace operation and surging militancy throughout the Middle East; the future of Iraq and Syria; the popular unrest in some Arab countries and civil wars in some others. It is worth noting, however, that all these issues are seen in the United States from the view point of America's interest. It is also well known that decision making in the American political system doesn't come merely through the President or Vice-president.

This section will take into focus the Israeli-Palestinian non-peace and non-war state of affairs and how the Obama administration views the conflict and approaches to resolving it. Nonetheless, Any stipulated negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel should be based on international law and resolved results, which lead to the end of occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, not based on the balance of power and the “status quo”, and also not on the Bush promises to Sharon on the vision of Bush, Obama or the coming governments on a solution, because this will reverse negotiations to the first square to negotiate previously negotiated and settled subjects.

The American President, Obama, nowadays faces a chain of accumulated crises resulting from irresponsible policies of the Republicans and neo-conservatives. These crises led to infuriating complications of the world financial crises, and the entanglement of the United States in many regions of the world in unguaranteed wars and against mythical foes who cannot be defeated victoriously. In his first steps as a President of the United States, Obama rebased the war on terrorism, and repudiated the idea of war against Islam, (Islamist) countries. He decided to close the detention base of Guantanamo and a gradual withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴

The American administration strongly supports, in all the international institutions, the concept of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the principle of two states for two peoples. The American administration has a great lapse between its internal and external dimensions, since President

²⁵Suresh P. Singh. BRICS and the World Order: A beginner's Guide, file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/GEGAfrica_BRICS_and_world_order.pdf

²⁶ National Security Strategy, The white House, Washington. February 2015,p.13 https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf

Obama represents a new approach that differs in form and content from that of the Republican administration. But, he cannot claim any achievement in solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or on any other context, unless he starts reforming the economic situation in the United States, and rearrangement of the internal market.

In spite of that, President Obama reiterated his commitment to the two states solution and his insistence on the implementation of the road map and a return for the peace negotiations. Here we might see an impingement between the schemes of the extremist right-wing Israeli government and the vision of President Obama for the two states solution. This will lead to optimism, since this vision is more closely related to the Palestinian vision which is based on the two states for two people than to the Israeli positions as expressed by the Israeli foreign minister "Lieberman"

Ending occupation should be *the* reference for meaningful negotiations and for having hope that negotiations will ensure peace and stability. This requires binding transitions of negotiations on a lasting solution and the establishment of a sovereign state of Palestine, in accordance with international legitimacy.

What concerns Palestinians is the utilization of the great global change and relocating the Palestinian issues in its new definition to the center of world events. With regard to the Arab initiative that substantive regional political and became an integral partner in the political discourse pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the achievement of a lasting peace in the Middle East. This Arab role in the region has the support of the new administration in Washington for several considerations, mainly, the attempt to diminish the Iranian role, cooperation in solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, and mobilization of surplus Arab capital to save the staggering financial institutions, whether in the United States or in Europe²⁵.

The "road map" is the internationally accepted and awaited peaceful solution between the Palestinians and Israel, notwithstanding that Israel has more than 14 reservations²⁶.

Therefore, the Palestinian president and the Palestinian Diplomacy should confront this position by reuniting the country, ending the partition status and enhancing the success of national debates he has also to reshuffle the Palestinian government to activate its role in the International arena. He also, has to get Hamas approval on a collective national program. With one or two reservations, this collective national program might be the beginning of drawing a peaceful Palestinian strategy that is acceptable to all parties. This in turn will lead to the first step towards breaking the siege and blockade on Gaza strip and the Palestinian people in general²⁷.¹⁵

The Palestinian people, the Palestinian government and the different leading institutions suffer from the division condition that impedes its presence and movement on the world regional arena, while there is a world consensus on the necessity of establishing a sovereign Palestinian state. The

²⁷Chomsky, Noam: What we Say Goes, Dar ilKitab Al Arabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 2008, p167

²⁸Steven Waltm, John Merhshmeier: The Israeli Lobbi and the American Foreign Policy, Al Matboo'at for publishing and distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, 2007, p303-308

²⁹Yassin, Al Sayed: The Cosmic Universe, the struggle against the American Hegemony, Egypt's renaissance, Egypt, 2004, p115

present Palestinian political agenda lacks any applicable scientific political plan this is capable of curtailing the Israeli program to impose a unilateral solution in Palestine.²⁸

Regional political developments might show a case of contradiction between friends, the United States and Israel as we aforementioned, because of differences on the position on the peace process; and also between Iran and its allies because of the American –Iranian rapprochement which was initiated by President Obama's administration. In both cases, the acting players may be obliged to reformulate their objectives and plans.

Observers can see that the administration of President Obama couldn't precede with its ambitious world plans, on either front, the middle East or China, and not have achieved a thing on home front. President Obama couldn't proceed on with its political programs without dealing with the world economic crisis. Most likely, President Obama is not in haste to achieve the diplomatic agreements before noticeable improvements in the American economy, in order not to be seen busy with international diplomacy instead of internal anxiousness and problems.

Future Perspectives

Order in the region was about to explode as a result of the insistence of the American to launch a military strikes on Syria under the pretext of use of chemical weapons against unarmed civilians amidst critical controversy between the American Administration from one side and legislators and most of the American people who refuse any external military strike.

Moscow made a surprising suggestion to put the Syrian chemical weapons under international supervision to be dismantled. The American Secretary of State's John Kerry and the Russian Foreign Minister Serge Lavrov reached an agreement in Geneva on 14/9/2013 to dismantle the chemical armament of the Syrian regime. Going back to the beginnings of redistribution of world capabilities, we find that the United States couldn't any more impose decisions on other states as was the case after the Gulf war and Europe will become the second largest economic and political power in the world (in view of future ambitions), while seeking to settle their differences peacefully, and aiming to play a first class worldwide role.

Consequently, it is imperative to put a national strategy to confront challenges in the international arena. This will enable us to achieve our objectives of freedom and independence, and enable us also too to confront the Israeli schemes of confiscating lands, Judaization of Jerusalem, and changing the aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict in favor of its interests. Meanwhile, there are obstacles to negotiations with continued settlement activities and declarations by many Israeli leaders that there is nothing to offer to the Palestinians and the dream of an independent Palestinian state remains impossible. All this makes it more difficult and critical for the Palestinians to face these challenged meanwhile; there is general understanding to our requisites from the world community as we have seen the United Nations in favor of upgrading the representation of Palestine into a nonmember state. There is an agreement with its American side that the aim of negotiations is to establish a Palestinian state within the vision of the two states for two people.

³⁰Al lawindy, Said: The Greater Middle East, American Conspiracy against the Arabs, Nahdat Masser, Cairo, 2005, P82

Bridging the divide between Gaza and the West Bank is only a beginning to a plausible challenge to the Israeli occupation, and to get experience in dealing with obstacles on the world arena. Public resistance might include a general national component that could be used or adopted as forward step to confront challenges to the Palestinian issue. Then, it is possible to utilize the international political signals, synthesis and discovery of positions by defining alliances, friends and enemies camps, so there will be more scope to deal smartly with the world position. It is impossible to confront pressures on the international arena along with an internal crisis. This paper will try to deal with the complex Palestinian crisis by separating what is internal from what is external and starting to deal accordingly. Our internal political and economic problems are great and complicated. Therefore, this paper suggests the isolation of the external crisis by adopting an existing peace initiative, like the "Arab Initiative", or developing a new Palestinian initiative, meanwhile, focusing on solving the major internal problems and obstacles²⁹.

In view of this gloomy scene, it is impossible for the Palestinians to utilize the international signals to discover and conceive with wisdom the intentions and influences in the international politics. It is also imperative for the Palestinian government and the coming government to utilize meticulously the tools of international diplomacy and not just to be satisfied with the negative position with no continuous ambition for international breakthrough. Here, we might benefit from the diversity between the programs of the basic active Palestinian powers, especially Fatah which adopts a peaceful negotiating strategy, and Hamas which adopts a continuous resistance strategy. The discord in the programs of the two movements might help to open what is known as the two-levels game in the world diplomacy which briefly means that the president might benefit from the parliament refusal of the negotiated agreement to reinforce his position against the other side it is possible to positively the great defect in the balance of power between the Palestinians and the Israelis by gaining additional power from the Palestinian democracy which might compensate for the feeling of weakness with regard to the Palestinian negotiator.

It is not a requisite to go back to the empty cycle of negotiations but rather to make a critical analysis study of the previous years, in order to reach findings and conclusions. We have also to get assistance from political and social Palestinian and Arab circles in arranging our internal and external relations, especially following the "Arab Spring" revolutions.

It might be necessary to develop a Palestinian peace initiative to get out of the present crisis and possibly within a defensive Palestinian peaceful strategy, based on the basic Palestinian rights encompassing most of the acting players³⁰.

A meticulous study of the future of staggering present negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis might lead the American custodian to the peace process to find himself forced to present an official American paper that represent a breakthrough to the still negotiations. Consequently, the United States will try to impose this solution on both sides if not on the Palestinians alone.

This scenario conquers with the balance of power between the two parties. The American side will not be obliged to pay high costs for this position and can blame the Palestinian stubbornness and not because of the Israeli policies or because of the American bias.

Here we can recover the advice of Professor Edward Said when he said "Never undermine the word No". Rejection of the imposed solution on us is better than compromising the inalienable rights of our people.

Concluding Remarks

Since the late 1990s, it became apparent that the gap between the United States' view of its role as a sole superpower and the realities emerging from within and from without the United States broadened beyond restoration. From within the United States of America we witnessed extremely hawkish politicians who lacked the characteristics and vision of statesmen who were most needed at that critical junction in world politics to land the world into a new order without animosities or chaos. President Bush's war on terror created bred more terror than it could ever conquer, single handedly.

Besides, the military adventures in the Middle East brought the US economy under heavy pressures at times when western economies were not growing. The Obama administration came to office promising to redress the damage that has been caused but it has been obvious that much of what has been done already is irrevocable.

The state of affairs inside the United States unleashed ambitious states such as China and Russia to claim decisive roles in influencing world politics and the global economy, and indeed they could do that with little resistance from the United States. In fact, the United States could only acquiesce, though not succumb. That is the exact translation for the statement "the American eagle has crash-landed." There is a big difference between America being the leader in world affairs and America being a partner in the new world order. The emergence of the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation organizations at a critical moment in the history American hegemony makes the United States the first power amongst others.

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Research Interests:

International Relations and Political Economy of the Middle East, Democracy and Democratization, Public Diplomacy, Strategic Communication, Methodology and Philosophy of Science.

³¹Odeh, Ahmad Fares. The peaceful Resistance: History and Prospects-Palestine as a model, Magazine of the Palestinian Issues, No.249-250, Summer 2012

³²Ohemy, Kinishi: International Economy-the next phase. Dar Al Arabieh for Science, Beirut, Banan, 2006, p128.