

A Military History of the New World Order and the Emergence of the U.S. Hegemony¹

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In this paper, I trace the rise of the United States (U.S.) military power and the different military strategies the U.S. pursued in this process, outlining in particular the military-economic aspect of the role that the United States came to play in the New World Order. In this regard, I argue that the institutional arrangements made in the 1950s between the U.S. and Western European countries, which are now being presented as the New World Order, lag behind the radical economic, demographic and political shifts that have occurred since then. As a result of this discrepancy, I contend that the United States increasingly resorts to military force to enforce these archaic arrangements, which do not correlate with the current state of the world. Finally, I claim that a plausible way to prevent further militarization of the world order would be to reform the international institutional order to better represent current economic, demographic, and political realities.

Alfred Mahan's views regarding the elements of sea power and the advantages of the U.S. in relation to those elements sheds some light in tracing the rise of U.S. military hegemony. His argument, which depends on the comparative advantage of sea transport, especially given the material conditions of the 18th and early 19th centuries, is economic. According to Mahan, sea power is by far the most important component of military might, because the most important trade routes are found in the seas, and the trade volume of the world consists mostly of sea trade, or at least it did in x century, when Mahan wrote. People choose to trade overseas as opposed to over land, because "both travel and traffic by water have always been easier and cheaper than by land."² Moreover, historical examples, such as the rise of the British Empire, support Mahan's case.

Of the six principle conditions affecting the sea power of nations, the first one is geographical position, in which regard Mahan favors an isolated and/or island nation because

“...if a nation be so situated that it is neither forced to defend itself by land nor induced to seek extension of its territory by way of land, it has, by the very unity of its aim directed upon the sea, an advantage as compared with a people one of whose boundaries is continental.”³

Being forced to defend itself only by sea is a great advantage, provided that the nation has a strong navy, which it *should*, otherwise the condition of being mostly surrounded by sea will make that nation vulnerable. A country does not necessarily need to be an island-nation to benefit from the advantages outlined by Mahan, since the United States, although not an island State, is certainly isolated from major seats of power in Europe. However, two other conditions seemingly favor an island state like England over an isolated state like the U.S.:

“..the geographical position may be such as of itself to promote a concentration, or to necessitate a dispersion, of naval forces. Here again the British Islands have an advantage over France. The position of the latter, touching the Mediterranean as well as the ocean...is on the whole a source of military weakness at sea. The eastern and western French fleets have only been able to unite after passing through the Straits of Gibraltar, in attempting which they have...sometimes suffered loss.”⁴

The U.S. overcame the same sort of disadvantageous situation with regard to the Atlantic and the Pacific by opening up and controlling the Panama Canal and acquiring posts in the Caribbean in order to secure the route to the Panama Canal. For Mahan, “the position of the U.S. with reference to this route [Panama and the Caribbean] will resemble that of England to the Channel, and of the Mediterranean countries to the Suez route.”⁵ Hence, the U.S. used the Monroe Doctrine, not with the benign intention to stay aloof from European affairs, but to dominate the Caribbean and become the only hegemonic power in the Western Hemisphere. Thus, *although the U.S. was not an island , it transformed itself into an island-State for strategic purposes by eliminating all rivals to its hegemony in the Western Hemisphere.* The Spanish-American War of 1898 was the last step toward this goal.

By exploiting its ample natural resources, pursuing territorial expansion through forceful conquest and other means, acquiring coaling stations in the Pacific, increasing its population through immigration, cultivating the enterprising character of the Anglo-American race and

instituting democracy, the U.S. has satisfied Mahan's other five conditions affecting sea power.⁶ Finally, enforcing an open door policy in East Asia, and eliminating potential rivals in the Pacific – aside from Japan – also helped crystallize U.S. regional hegemony and security.

If 'sea power' is the key concept of Mahan's approach, W. W. Rostow's key concept is 'industrialization,' which diffused to Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America in the form of revolutionary movements toward modernization, and which had an immediate impact on weaponry and communications technology. Whereas Mahan emphasizes sea lanes and prioritizes the possession of coaling stations along trade routes, Rostow asserts that "the ideological loss of key areas in Eurasia would have major military consequence for the U.S."⁷ As such, he is pointing to the fact that the industrialization of Asia, which was occurring as he wrote his book, would restructure the world arena of power in the 20th century, "just as the orientation of France, Germany, Russia and Japan to modern industrialization restructured the world arena of power as it existed in 1815."⁸

John Ikenberry does not seem to agree with Mahan or Rostow, although his emphasis on the military-industrial superiority of the U.S. at the end of World War II (WWII) resonates generally with Rostow's emphasis on industrialization.⁹ For Ikenberry, what distinguished the U.S. post-WWII was not only its military-industrial superiority relative to other countries, but the way in which the U.S. "pursued an institutional order-building strategy after the war," reaching "an institutional bargain that would lock other states into a congenial international order."¹⁰ On the other hand, George Kennan, the preeminent American strategist of the Cold War era, advocated a different approach for U.S. foreign policy and hegemony post-WWII, claiming that

"We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population...Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security."¹¹

The United States, by embarking on an ambitious project of international reorganization and institutionalization immediately after the Second World War, at a time when the U.S. had half the world's wealth and an even greater proportion of its military arsenal, consciously attempted to institutionalize and prolong the power asymmetry, wherein the U.S. held the most privileged position. As such, most international institutions, which were founded during the Cold War and

today form the basis of the New World Order, bear the imprint of a time when the U.S. was economically and militarily unrivaled in the world. Moreover, the task George Kennan assigned to ‘the pattern of relationships’ in the post-war era is *the prevention of the process whereby industrialization and wealth diffuses to the Third World*, which is a process that Rostow portrays as an inevitable and defining feature of the future world.

In light of the history of the rise of U.S. military-economic power outlined above, how does the New World Order (NWO) work—and *does* it work? Is U.S. military hegemony indispensable to the New World Order? First of all, I have to define the NWO and its institutions. In actuality, the NWO is nothing ‘new,’ but rather an elaboration and extension of the institutional arrangements made between the advanced industrialized countries of the West (i.e. the Free World) in the Cold War context. In that period, two different world orders, led by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., co-existed, along with a grey area of Nonaligned Third World countries. As the Soviet world order collapsed in the 1990s, the countries that had belonged to the Soviet order or to the grey area of the Nonaligned states were reorganized – not necessarily with their consent – under the expansionary phase of the U.S.-led Western world order.

The global expansion of the formerly Western institutional arrangement is now called the New World Order. However, the institutions that comprise the New World Order, such as the UN, the IMF, NATO, and the World Bank, were all founded immediately after WWII, when U.S. military-economic power was at its peak and the bargaining power of the U.S. was at its maximum. Therefore, the structures of these organizations resemble, not the material conditions of the year 2006, but those of the period from 1945-50. As a result, these institutions stubbornly reinforce, or at least attempt to reinforce, a power structure that existed half a century ago. On the other hand, as George Kennan clearly stated, the preservation and reinforcement of a 1950s power structure with the U.S. at its indispensable center, was exactly what these institutions were meant to achieve. Despite this institutionalized order, and in accordance with Rostow’s prediction, many Third World countries, most notably the NICs in East Asia and China, did ‘take off’ and industrialize, thereby restructuring the world arena of power in the second half of the 20th century. The decolonization of most of Africa and Asia, the industrialization of East Asia and the miraculous recovery of Japan, Germany and Italy are the most significant changes since the establishment of the institutional foundations of the New World Order in the early 1950s. Despite these changes, Japan and Germany, the countries with the second and third largest

economies in the world, do not have seats in the UN Security Council. Likewise, India, with its nuclear arsenal and more than a billion citizens, does not have a central role in any of the decision-making mechanisms of the NWO. And from the perspective of religious representation, four out of five members of the Security Council are overwhelmingly Christian countries, whereas Islam, the second most popular religion with its 1.2-1.5 billion adherents (constituting one-fifth to one-fourth of humanity) does not have a representative state in any of the global decision-making institutions. These incongruities reflect the fact that post-WWII, India and the most of the Islamic world were still under or just emerging from colonial rule, and the Japanese and German economies were in shackles. However, all of this has changed.

How does the NWO work if its institutions archaically represent the material conditions and power structures of a world that no longer exists? This is where the role of the U.S. military manifests itself as the indispensable feature of the NWO. Because the economic, social and cultural changes in the last fifty years have made the post-war settlement unsustainable in these respects, the post-war settlement must be enforced with brute military force on an overwhelming scale. How is this a viable option? The reason is simple: Even though the U.S. does not command half of the world's industrial production and wealth, as it did in 1945, it still spends more on its military (\$300 billion annually) than the next fourteen major powers combined, giving the U.S. unchallenged global military superiority. In this sense, U.S. military hegemony is indispensable to the preservation of a world order that has been outdated by the social, economic and cultural changes (progress?) that the last fifty years have brought. Moreover, if the U.S. insists on sustaining the post-1945 arrangements – ironically, under the rubric of defending the 'New' World Order – it has and will have to increasingly resort to military force, since global economic and political transformations such as the diffusion of industrialization, would otherwise delegate more power to newly industrializing third world countries and countries like China and India than what the post-war settlement prescribes. In summary, the U.S. military has set for itself the 'impossible mission' of reversing history and serving the most conservative and reactionary cause possible—keeping the world as it was fifty years ago.

Having defined the reactionary mission of the U.S. military and having highlighted its indispensability in sustaining an outdated world order, which is ironically refashioned as the 'New' World Order, the question arises as to whether the U.S. as a nation-state is indispensable. I argue that the U.S. is indispensable as a political-economic entity in so far as it provides the tax

revenues required for the sustenance of a global army while also providing a seat of power from which to administer this increasingly imperial military enterprise. In these respects, the transformation of the 'American republic' into an 'American empire' was and still is necessary as long as the U.S. insists on preserving the institutional arrangements and distribution of power of 1945.

Given these discrepancies, is it wise for the U.S. to remain indispensable? My argument above clearly indicates that it is not. Chalmers Johnson's *Blowback*, with its prophetic subtitle, *Costs and Consequences of the American Empire*, also demonstrates this fact with overwhelming evidence. Johnson accurately observes a "crisis in America's informal empire, an empire based on the projection of military power to every corner of the world."¹² His central thesis is that the negative costs and consequences of American Empire are so overwhelming and unpredictable that the U.S.'s imperial goals should be abandoned. In his terminology, "blowback...refers to the unintended consequences of policies that were kept secret from the American people."¹³ He emphasizes the over-concentration of global military power in the U.S., writing that "by 1995...the U.S. was the source of 49% of global arms exports."¹⁴ Finally, consistent with my argument, Johnson asserts that "increasingly, the U.S. has only one means of achieving its external objectives—military force."¹⁵

The New World Order depends on an asymmetry of power between a dominant military power – the U.S – and the rest of the world. How does the war in Kosovo fit into this framework? According to Wesley Clark, the U.S.'s military intervention in Kosovo was fully consistent with the 'imperial' strategy discussed above. Although the U.S.'s strategy of "coercive diplomacy" was not an absolute and pure exertion of military force, it clearly represents a shift away from conventional diplomacy towards a mode of interaction consonant with the NWO's imperial military structure discussed above. The special emphasis on the use of "overwhelming" military force against the enemy, and the reliance on "smart weapons" in Kosovo are symptomatic of this phenomenon.

If some degree of international order and stability is to be maintained, what else should be indispensable along with or instead of a hegemonic American military? My interpretation above indicates that reform of the international system, making the institutional structure more representative of the current social and economic make-up of the global community, might

provide a lasting solution. This solution would entail including Japan and Germany, India, some other sizeable Asian, African and Latin American countries, and countries of Muslim faith, into the central decision-making mechanisms of the major international institutions, such as the Security Council. More generally, international institutions should be regularly updated to reflect contemporary global economic and demographic (i.e. material) conditions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the United States employed a variety of grand strategies in becoming the dominant military power in the world. First, through expansionist conquest and the nationalist ideology of Manifest Destiny, the U.S. stretched its territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. Then, through the Monroe Doctrine, the U.S. isolated Europe from the American continent, and using its military-economic vigor, established an unchallenged hegemony over the Western Hemisphere. Once this hegemony was established, the primary directive of American foreign policy has been to 'prevent the emergence of a hegemonic power in any key area of Eurasia.' Hence, German hegemony in Europe was twice undercut, as well as Japanese hegemony over East Asia and Soviet hegemony over Eurasia as a whole. Moreover, relying on the overwhelming military-economic power it had relative to other states at the end of the Second World War, the U.S. established institutions that captured and preserved the distribution of power in the world in 1945. This set of institutions competed against the Soviet set of institutions in the Cold War bipolar world order, and as the Soviet bloc collapsed, they became the foundation of what is now called the New World Order. But since the structural composition of these institutions represents the material conditions of the early 1950s and not the conditions of today, there is a great deal of friction at the international level, with many states questioning the legitimacy and representativeness of the international order.

The institutional arrangements made in the 1950s between the U.S. and Western European countries, which now constitute the New World Order, are inconsistent with the radical economic, demographic and political changes that have transpired since then. Attempting to preserve the supremacy it claimed in the aftermath of the Second World War, the U.S. increasingly resorts to military force to enforce these archaic arrangements today. Yet the collapse of the colonial empires and of the Soviet empire testify to the fact that institutional arrangements that fail to recognize and actively reject realities of power eventually collapse, with

huge costs incurring to the centers of these empires. If the U.S. wants to avoid such a collapse of the international order, and the costs that it will suffer as a consequence, it should push for a global institutional re-ordering, wherein more power would be conferred to countries like Japan, Germany, China and India, as well as some sizable newly industrializing and Third World countries.

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Notes

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² Alfred T. Mahan, *On Naval Warfare*, Allan Westcott ed., Dover Publications, New York 1999.

³ Ibid, p.21.

⁴ Ibid, p.22.

⁵ Ibid, p.28.

⁶ Ibid, p.21. This page includes the complete list of six elements affecting sea power.

⁷ W.W. Rostow, *The United States in the World Arena: An Essay in Recent History*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York 1960. p.548. Actually, it is quite curious that Sir Halford MacKinder, a great scholar who made a similar argument about the way in which industrialization is going to change the world balance of power in favor of Eurasia, and further claimed that Central Asia will become the geographical pivot of history, is not mentioned in Rostow's arguments. MacKinder, in his famous article "The Geographical Pivot of History," claimed that industrialization, railroads and the new means of communication are marking the end of four hundred years of Columbian exploration and expansion, and that in the near future land mass will correlate with state power more than ever before in history. Hence large countries with adequate populations will become the new superpowers by default (i.e. Russia, the U.S., and China), and the colonial maritime empires will decline. For this article, look at the *Geographical Journal*, April 1904.

⁸ Ibid, p.413.

⁹ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2001.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.160.

¹¹ Ibid, p.169.

¹² Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, Owl Books, New York 2000. p.7.

¹³ Ibid, p.8.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.88.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.93.