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# Hegemonic (in)Stability Theory and Us Foreign Policy: The Legacy of the Neocons in the Middle East*

## Hegemonik İstikrar(sızlık) Teorisi ve Amerikan Dış Politikası: Orta Doğu'da Yeni-Muhafazakarların Mirası

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## Abstract

*The Middle East has always been characterized as a conflict-ridden region. The common belief in the academia is that the Middle East is a region with backward traditions in which democratic values cannot take roots. This paper argues that it is the US hegemony that is responsible for much of the turmoil in the region and looks at the issue from more theoretical perspective-namely Hegemonic Stability Theory- and maintains that the existence of a hegemon does not always guarantee order and stability.*

**Keywords:** *Hegemon, Hegemonic Stability, US Foreign Policy, the Middle East.*

## Öz

*Orta Doğu daima çatışmaların hüküm sürdüğü bir bölge olarak tanımlanmıştır. Akademide yaygın olan inanç genellikle Orta Doğu'nun, demokratik değerlerin kök salamayacağı, çağdışı geleneklere sahip bir bölge olduğudur. Bu makale, Orta Doğu'da hakim olan karışıklıktan, çoğunlukla Amerikan hegemonyasının sorumlu olduğunu savunarak, konuya teorik bir perspektiften–Hegemonik İstikrar Teorisi- bakmakta ve tek bir hegemonun düzen ve istikrarın garantisi olmadığı görüşünü ileri sürmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Hegemon, Hegemonik İstikrar, Amerikan Dış Politikası, Orta Doğu*

## Introduction

The Middle East has been undergoing a fundamental transformation in recent years. The Arab Spring that started in Tunisia in the winter of 2010, later spread to Egypt, Libya, and Yemen where rulers have been forced from power. In almost all Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries some major protests have broken out. However, not all of the other rulers complied with their people's democratic demands. The regime in Syria has been especially harsh in suppressing the opposition, which led the murder and displacement of many Syrians. To date, there is still a civil war going on in Syria and there is no sign that the Assad regime will come down

The United States adopted a surprisingly mild approach to these events. Even though the leaders in Tunisia and Egypt were all pro-American, who had the US backing in the past, the US opted for watching instead of directly intervening in the events. The new US policy was apparent in the France-led NATO intervention in Libya, which led to some to argue that the Obama Administration is reversing US Middle Eastern policy.

There is not a fundamental change in US foreign policy nor will there be one in the foreseeable future. The only change is the reduction of American visibility in the region. The US still tries hard to shape the Middle East through more indirect ways. The Syrian case can be the example in point. There is a civil war

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going on in Syria and there is no sign that the Assad regime will come down soon without a foreign intervention. The pro-American regional countries including Turkey, under the guidance and support of the US, have been doing their best to help the Free Syrian Army to topple the Assad regime. The US policy toward Syria is just a part of the American grand strategy to isolate Iran in the region. There is ample evidence suggesting that when the Assad regime falls, Iran will be the next. If that happens, then, it means that more difficult days for the region are to come. Therefore, it is safe to argue that the US will continue to get involved in Middle Eastern affairs through direct and indirect means at its disposal, which will create further turmoil in the Middle East. After the Cold War the US has emerged as the only superpower, even a hegemon, and according to some an Empire, its foreign policy actions have been more unilateral. Today, the US seems to be more multilateral on such international issues as Syria or Iran, but it does not change the fact that it still tries to impose its own policy options on regional countries, whether they be pro- or anti-American.

This paper argues that the Middle East has been the major focus of American foreign policy and will continue to be so. During the Cold War, the US, for the sake of security and stability, did not hesitate to back up repressive regimes in the region. After the Cold War, the US continued to support pro-West regional dictators out of the fear that Islamic fundamentalists would seize the power if democracy was allowed. In the post-September 11 era, the US policy in the MENA countries was shaped by "the fight against terrorism" (Monshipouri and Assareh, 2011, p. 123). The Bush Doctrine and its application to first Afghanistan and later Iraq change the balance of power and the social structure in the region forever creating serious destabilizing effects in the region.

The discussion in this paper will be on the consequences of American power and its application (mainly through the Bush Doctrine) in the Middle East and looks at the issue from a more theoretical perspective-mainly from the perspective of hegemonic stability theory. The paper argues that the existence of only one superpower, call it a hegemon or an empire, does not guarantee security and stability. Furthermore, as is the case for American involvement in the Middle East, it can be the source of insecurity and instability. Thus, the theory of hegemonic stability that looks at the issue from structural material power remains inadequate in the face of the current instability in the Middle East. This paper aims to address this inadequacy of hegemonic stability theory and argues that the existence of one superpower does not ensure stability in the international system.

## The End of the Cold War and US Foreign Policy

There has been abundant scholarly work on the consequences of the end of the Cold War in the last two decades. It has become widespread in academic and political circles to take the end of the Cold War as a starting point and explain all international events taking place right now in the world with reference to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the United States as the sole superpower. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, the main discussion centered around how the United States with its uncontested military and political power would choose to use that power in the system. Within the academia, Charles Krauthammer made one of the first statements. In his 1991 article, the *Unipolar Moment*, Krauthammer argued that unipolarity, not multipolarity, was replacing the bipolarity. "Our best hope" he argued 'is in American strength and will- the strength and will to lead a unipolar world, unashamedly laying down the rules of world order and being prepared to enforce them" (Krauthammer, 1991, p. 32-33).

Around the same time, an article that appeared in New York Times on 8 March 1992 revealed the existence of a forty-six page classified Pentagon document arguing that "a key US foreign policy goal ought to be ensuring world continued dominance. The Pentagon draft asserted that America's political and military mission after the demise of the Soviet Union should be preventing the emergence of a rival superpower in Western Europe, Asia, or the Soviet republics" (Brilmayer, 1994, p. 1). The document further argued that the US should achieve this goal by "convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests. To this end, the United States must sufficiently account for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from challenging (US) leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order" (Brilmayer, 1994, p. 1). According to New York Times

the document had two main characteristics: first, its rejection of collective internationalism and, second, the concept of 'benevolent domination,' "according to which world leadership is perpetuated by constructive behavior as well as military might" (Brilmayer, 1994, p. 1).

As the time passed, however, the Pentagon retreated from this position. It soon became clear that the US would ensure multilateralism in its foreign policy as the first Gulf War and other humanitarian interventions from the Balkans to Africa demonstrated. The 1990s witnessed an increasing intervention of the US in world affairs in close cooperation with international institutions and other states, which brought an old theoretical assertion back: for the security and the stability of the world, there needed a superpower-a hegemon.

The euphoria of the 1990s, however, faded away in the beginning of the 21st century when the United States was hit by the worst terrorist attack of all times on 11 September 2001. This horrendous event also marked the beginning of second generation of academic and political discussions that took September 11 as the new milestone in explaining international relations in general and American foreign policy in particular. Unlike the optimistic views of the first generation of work, the second generation drew a rather pessimistic picture in which the unrestrained power of the United States would ultimately lead to increasing unilateralism on the part of the United States. In the words of John Ikenberry "actions are afoot to dramatically alter the political order that the United States has built with its partners since the 1940s" (Ikenberry, 2002, p. 44). "America's nascent neoimperial strategy" he continues "threatens to rend the fabric of the international community and political partnerships precisely at a time when that community and those partnerships are urgently needed" (Ikenberry, 2002, p. 45). The Bush Doctrine and the ensuing interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrated that the US would not hesitate to use its colossal power unilaterally whenever its vital interests were threatened. These wars have, in turn, intensified the debate about the nature and prospects of American power (Held and Koenig-Archibugi, 2004). The Iraqi invasion led many to argue that the US had gone beyond being a hegemon and now is building an "empire". Even though the word "empire" was often used pejoratively by the critics of US foreign policy in the past, it seems that it has attracted a wide range of supporters in the academic and political circles in the United States[1]. Especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 many in the US started to openly talk about the case for the American Empire. A senior official in the Bush Administration, for example, argued in 2002 that the US "is an empire now"…and "the Bush Doctrine is indeed an imperial program, one that must be placed on the ideological terrain of universal empire" (Hendrickson, 2005, p. 2).

## Hegemony and Hegemonic Stability Theory

Hegemony, in its basic form, means leadership. Gilpin defines hegemony as "one state (achieving) preeminence over other states in the system" (Gilpin, 1981, p. 116). Robert Keohane defines it as "a situation in which one state is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations, and willing to do so" (Keohane, 1984, p. 35). In the economic context, hegemony means "preponderance of material resources…Hegemonic powers must have control over raw materials, control over sources of capital, control over markets, and competitive advantages in the production of highly valued goods" (Keohane, 1984, p. 32). Hegemony thus implies the existence of power disparity and a hierarchical power structure in the international system. The Realist/Neorealist theory states that "powerful states tend to seek dominance over all or parts of any international system, thus fostering some degree of hierarchy within the overall anarchy" (Wohlforth, 2008, p. 36).

The reason for international relations theorists to study hegemony is that concentration of power in the hands of one state has the potential to alter the course of interstate political relations. "In particular, an international system dominated by a single state possesses a potential solution to what is known as the public goods problem. Public goods are nonexcludable, in the sense that the producer of a public good cannot prevent others from taking advantage of it and thus cannot capture the full value of what it has created" (Brilmayer, 1994, p. 17).

Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) is a hybrid theory that draws on the realist, liberal and historical structuralist perspectives. Originally a theory of international political economy, HST argues that a liberal eco-

nomic order and stability occur when there is a single dominant power- that is, a hegemon. Thus, the theory contends that "the distribution of power among states is the primary determinant of the character of the international economic system" (Webb and Krasner, 1989, p. 183). Charles P. Kindleberger formulated this theory arguing that "for the world economy to be stabilized there has to be a stabilizer, one stabilizer" (Kindleberger, 1979, p. 305). Kindleberger represents the "collective goods" version of the theory in which he "contends that the maintenance of free trade requires what he calls (approvingly) 'benevolent' despot to provide certain institutional public goods" (Quoted in Snidal, 1985, p. 580). For Kindleberger, international economic stability is a public, or collective, good because all countries benefit from it regardless of whether or not they contribute to its production. He reasons that "given the absence of 'selective incentives,' these international public goods are unlikely to exist unless the group is 'privileged' so that a single state has sufficient interest in the good to be willing to bear the full costs of its provision" (Snidal, 1985, p. 581). Kindleberger's argument thus contends that a single dominant power is required to induce cooperation in the international system. However, "what its author originally intended as an interpretation of a specific historical episode was generalized subsequently into a theory that has been applied to virtually every setting in which nations interact" (Eichengreen, 1996, p. 1). Two main forms of HST can be distinguished: the collective goods version and the security version.

The collective goods version of the theory following the rationalist approach suggests that the hegemon should be "sufficiently large relative to all others that it will capture a share of the benefit of the public good larger than the entire cost of providing it" (Snidal, 1985, p. 581). As a result, HST leads to the conclusion that the emergence of international economic openness and a stable international regime of free trade depends on the existence of a hegemon providing leadership. The second conclusion the theory reaches is that "although the dominant leader benefits from this situation, smaller states gain even more" (Snidal, 1985, p. 581), thus, the small exploits the large. According to Snidal, this second conclusion is much more important because "beyond its appealing normative implications, it has important ramifications for the conduct of relations in the international system" (Snidal, 1985, p. 582). That is, when this happens, it is expected, from the rationalist point of view, that all states will welcome the hegemon's leadership and try to take a free ride on it. "In other circumstances, when power is distributed asymmetrically but hegemony exercised in ways that do not benefit all states, subordinate states will chafe under the (coercive) leadership" (Snidal, 1985, p. 582). Snidal here makes a distinction between two forms of hegemony: one that is "beneficent (that is, exercised by example and persuasion)and hegemony that is coercive and exploitative" (Strange, 1987, p. 555).

The hegemonic role of Great Britain in the late nineteenth century that provided stability and encouraged liberalization in the international economy and that of the United States that performed similar functions after the Second War all provided the empirical evidence for HST. The scholars of HST all "interpreted the instability and closure in international economic relations in the inter-war period as a result of the absence of a hegemon" (Webb and Krasner, 1989, p. 183). Great Britain and the United States created and enforced rules of a liberal international economic order. Both countries assumed those roles because it was in their interest to do so.

The security version of the HST argues that hegemonic powers supply different kinds of public goods: peace and security. As Robert Gilpin put it, "the *Pax Britannica* and *Pax Americana*, like *the Pax Romana*, ensured an international system of relative peace and security" (Gilpin, 1981, p. 145). Gilpin asserts both Great Britain and the United States as two successive hegemonic powers have tried to organize "political, territorial, and especially economic relations in terms of their respective security and economic interests. They have succeeded in this hegemonic role partially because they have imposed their will on lesser states and partially because other states have benefited from and accepted their leadership" (Gilpin, 1981, p. 144). Especially the United States as a hegemon has been motivated by self interest and security objectives.

In Gilpin's formulation, HST takes a more coercive form arguing that "international order is a public good, benefiting subordinate states…and the dominant power not only provides the good, it is capable of extracting contributions toward the good from subordinate states. In effect, the hegemonic power constitutes a quasi-government by providing public goods

*and* taxing other states to pay for them. Subordinate states will be reluctant to be taxed but, because of the hegemonic state's preponderant power, will succumb" (Snidal, 1985, p. 587). In this version, the hegemonic power can coerce other states.

Despite the existence of fundamental differences between the two versions of HST (Webb and Krasner, 1989, p. 184), two main propositions of the theory of hegemonic stability can be pulled out: firstly, order in world politics is typically created by a single dominant power and secondly, the maintenance of order requires continued hegemony (Keohane, 1984, p. 31). The hegemon's ability to provide stability and leadership is based on its military and economic dominance. It can set the rules for economic transactions and secure its investments abroad. But the maintenance of the status quo not only benefits the hegemon itself but also other states in the system benefit from it. "The stability of the system is threatened when the hegemon loses its dominant position" (Kohout, 2003, p. 55). Many American scholars argued that "the decline of order in the world economy and its financial system coincided in the mid-1970s with a time of weakness and humiliation in the conduct of United States foreign policy and as many of them came to think, of American power" (Strange, 1987, p. 555).

Furthermore, both the security and collective goods approaches share the idea that "the end goal is protection and advancement of the economic interests of the dominant state" (Burges, 2008, p. 68). The security approach, however, takes a more coercive form arguing that "the dominant state links conceptions of national security to the maintenance of a particular international economic order, forcing other states to subscribe to and participate in the maintenance of that order. By contrast the collective goods or benevolent conceptualization of Webb and Krasner as well as Snidal draw heavily on the suggestions of leadership set out by Kindleberger, arguing that it is the continued growth of the major actor and its ability to absorb costs, not necessarily sustained domination, that is central to the maintenance of the system" (Burges, 2008, p. 68). This conclusion, however, does not rule out the necessity of coercion to ensure that states abide by the rules of the system. A certain degree of coercion may be necessary, but it is often neither direct nor physical in nature (Burges, 2008, p. 68).

## The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory

Critics of HST, on the other hand, contested the validity of the theory on both theoretical and empirical grounds. The first line of critiques is directed toward the collective goods version of the theory. These critiques challenge the assumption that the creation and continuation of international cooperation depends on the existence of a hegemon. Keohane, for example argues that "although hegemony can facilitate cooperation, it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for it…Hegemony is less important for the continuation of cooperation, once begun, than for its creation" (Keohane, 1984, p. 31). He continues that "cooperation does not necessarily require the existence of hegemonic leader after international regimes have been established. Post-hegemonic cooperation is also possible" (Keohane, 1984, p. 31-32). Keohane supports his idea by empirical evidence from the period of declining British hegemony: "Between 1900 and 1913 a decline in British power coincided with a decrease rather than an increase in conflict over commercial issues" (Keohane, 1984, p. 34).

Other scholars also argued that HST fails to consider that countries may cooperate to provide goods and hence sustain the liberal economic order in the absence of hegemony (Bailin, 2001, p. 3). Empirical evidence suggests that even during the period of the decline in American power, the world economy performed well and remained open (Webb and Krasner, 1989, p. 195).

Some scholars claimed that there is a strong possibility for the hegemonic power to use its superiority to structure the trading system to its own advantage (Krasner, 1976, p. 322), not to the advantage of others in the system. The literature is rife with arguments that there is no connection between hegemonic self-interest and the provision of public goods. The literature on imperialism, world systems, and dependency theory has challenged HST on empirical and theoretical grounds arguing that hegemony does not benefit weaker actors in the system. Even if it benefits all countries in the system, those benefits are unevenly distributed. Furthermore, "hegemony may involve constraints on subordinate members of the regime and exploit nonmembers" (Snidal, 1985, p. 587). The United States has reaped disproportionate gains from

international cooperation it had created after the Second War and it continues to do so. Furthermore, Webb and Krasner argue that the security considerations of the hegemonic state may force it to impede international economic liberalization. They reason that "even though an open system may raise the absolute level of welfare of all participants, some states will gain relative to others. If the pattern of relative gains threatens the security of powerful states, international economic liberalization will be restricted even though those states could have increased their absolute welfare by participating in a more open system" (Webb and Krasner, 1989, p. 183).

The link between the creation of international cooperation (or regimes) and the existence of hegemony has been challenged not only in international economic relations but also in other issue areas as well. Robert Falkner, for example, argues that the United States as the hegemon "has appeared to be lukewarm about, and often hostile to, multilateral environmental policymaking. From the rejection of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to the withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, the United States has shown itself to be concerned more with national economic interests than global environmental threats" (Falkner, 2005, p. 585). Eric K. Leonard analyzes US foreign policy concerning the creation of a permanent international Criminal Court (ICC) and finds out that "American policy towards the ICC is not only hindering the international community's pursuit of global justice, it is also undermining the current status of American hegemony and the perpetuation of the American liberal order" (Leonard, 2007, p. 162). The Bush Administration, in fact, links the rejection to sign the Rome Statute with US national security interests. The 2002 National Security Strategy stated that:

*We will take actions necessary to ensure that our efforts to meet our global security commitments and protect Americans are not impaired by the potential for investigations, inquiry, or prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose jurisdiction does not extend to Americans and which we do not accept* (Leonard, 2007, p. 147).

The second line of critics directs their criticism toward the security version of the theory espoused by Robert Gilpin. Gilpin's theoretical shift from the benevolent form of hegemony to the more malevolent version, Snidal states, has dramatic implications. First, there is no reason to assume that the distribution of benefits favors smaller states. The hegemonic power, with its ability to force smaller states to share the burden of the good can alter the distribution of benefit to favor itself. Second, the hegemonic state can be more exploitative in the sense that costs the hegemonic state imposes on smaller states may be larger than the benefits that those states receive from the public good (Snidal, 1985, p. 588).

Empirical evidence also does not fully support HST. First, even though the students of HST envision an international system in which there is one superpower (that is, a unipolar system) US hegemony during the Cold War (but not British hegemony during the 19th century) was exercised in a bipolar world (Webb and Krasner, 1989, p. 185). Therefore, the implications of the theory hold only in a bipolar international system. In bipolar systems, many other intervening variables (the most important being the structural constraints resulting from superpower rivalry) may play important roles in the exercise of hegemony. The theory then partially explains the hegemonic order, that is, the one confined to the US-led capitalist bloc.

Kohout's analysis of Gilpin's work reveals that he "is neither able to prove that all hegemonic wars have resulted from systemic disequilibrium, nor that a declining hegemon leaves a dangerous disequilibrium in the system. Empirical tests by other scholars do not come to a clear statement. Interestingly, using the British hegemony as the test case, wars involving great powers occurred even at the high point of Britain's relative power" (Kohout, 2003, p. 56). Furthermore, it is not clear in the analysis that challenging the hegemon may not necessarily mean a challenge to the system.

As is clear from the above literature review, the main problem with structural analyses of hegemony is their exclusive focus on the concept of *dominance* rather than *leadership*. Indeed, Kindleberger put more emphasis on leadership than dominance and pointed to the significance of ideas for hegemony. This conceptual bias, however, has important implications for analyzing present US hegemony. While dominance in the security sense implies coercion on smaller states by using 'hard power' resources, leadership implies persuasion by using 'soft power' resources.[2] In the first case, the hegemon can be properly termed as an Empire, which can itself be the source of disorder and

instability. In the latter case, it is more suitable to talk about 'consensual hegemony" that draws heavily on Gramscian notion of hegemony and that fosters order and stability in the international system without inducing the emergence of challengers to the hegemon. Ideas, norms and culture in this account, then, become devices used to constrain the actions of potential challengers. The next section of this paper reviews the Gramscian hegemony and combines it with a structural theory. Structure means "social structure" as defined by Constructivism. It, therefore, offers more socialized version of hegemony.

## Gramscian and 'Social' Constructivist Hegemony

The ideas of the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci have had a significant impact on the study of International Relations. In 1983, Robert W. Cox introduced International Relations scholars to the work of Antonio Gramsci. In this publication, Robert W. Cox argued that "Gramsci's general conceptual framework provided the discipline with an alternative theoretical approach to the mainstream. Most importantly, it offered IR theorists a number of innovative concepts that promised to illuminate the mechanisms of hegemony at the international level" (Germain and Kenny, 1998, p. 3). The Gramscian notion of hegemony fundamentally differs from that of the Neorealist and Neoliberal Institutionalist approaches and hegemony is far more complicated than these approaches would suggest.

The Gramscian conception of hegemony puts more emphasis on "a vision that frames the Neorealist and Neoliberal Institutionalist domination in terms of co-option and cooperation, not coercion" (Burges, 2008, p. 70). In the Gramscian notion, power means a combination of consent and coercion; however, "to the extent that the consensual aspect of power is in the forefront, hegemony prevails. Coercion is always latent but is only applied in marginal, deviant cases" (Cox, 1993, p. 52). The concept of hegemony in the Gramscian sense emphasizes "consent in contrast to reliance on the use of force" (Joseph, 2002, p. 1). This type of hegemony exists when:

*The dominant state creates an order based ideologically on a broad measure of consent, functioning according to general principles that in fact ensure the continuing supremacy of the leading state or states and leading social classes but at the same time offer some measure of prospect of satisfaction to the less powerful* (Cox, 1987, p. 7).

Hegemony in the Gramscian sense implies that the dominant state or states "would have to found and protect a world order which was universal in conception, i.e., not an order in which one state directly exploits others but an order which most other states could find compatible with their interests" (Cox, 1993, p. 61). Thus, deference is required because it is too expensive to establish hegemony by force.

Joseph S. Nye, Jr. uses the term 'soft power' similar to Gramscian hegemony to argue that "soft power rests on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others" (Nye, 2004, p. 124). He continues that "the ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as an attractive culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority" (Nye, 2004, p. 125).

Even though both Gramsci and Nye, Jr. emphasize how hegemon creates an ideological or ideational framework, their analyses only explain the 'power' part of the story. However, the 'consent' part, which emphasizes smaller states' willingness to abide by the rules set out by the hegemon, is not given the importance it deserves. In order to fill in this gap, I define hegemony as the ability to create an international social structure that includes three essential elements: shared knowledge, material resources, and practices; and these three elements are interrelated (Wendt, 1995, p. 73). Shared knowledge, understandings, and expectations "constitute the actors in a situation and the nature of their relationships" (Wendt, 1995, p. 73). The hierarchical, or hegemonic, structure then would be a social structure composed of intersubjective understandings in which states identify with the hegemon and define their interests accordingly. If this happens, consent follows and, only then, can we talk about a 'benevolent' hegemon that is able to create what Wendt called the 'Kantian' international culture in which order, peace and cooperation can flourish (Wendt, 1999). In this case, hegemon also locks into the structure its own interests, which endures even during a hegemonic decline. If the social structure the hegemon creates fosters intersubjective understandings, which breeds distrust among actors in the

system, then, we expect the rise of potential challengers to the hegemon. In order to continue its dominant position and protect its interests, the hegemon is likely to be more coercive and exploitative. In this case, the system is highly instable and the hegemon is the source of that instability.

The second element of social structure, material resources, which is closely related to the first element of social structure, has a different meaning in Constructivism. What makes the Constructivist view of material resources different from that of Neorealists is the Constructivists' socialized view of such capabilities. Constructivists argue that "material sources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded" (Wendt, 1995, p. 73). Material capabilities that are owned by an enemy and those that are owned by an ally have different implications. This constructivist argument can also be useful tool in analyzing the effects of hegemony in the international affairs. For the hegemon, material capabilities owned by an enemy could be so threatening to the hegemon that the hegemon is likely to be tempted to start a preemptive strike. This hegemonic bias toward smaller states viewed as enemies and feeling exploited by the hegemon, then, will force smaller states to challenge the hegemon, which may start another preemptive war.

Finally, and more importantly, social structure consists of social practices. Social practices produce and reproduce the intersubjective meanings, which, in turn, constitute social structures and actors alike. The hegemon's practices in the system create a number of identities for the hegemon such as great power, imperialist, enemy, ally, and so on. Others observing the hegemon not only infer the hegemon's identity from its actions, but also reproduce the intersubjective web of meaning about what precisely constitutes that identity. As Ted Hopf notes "to the extent, for example, that a group of countries attributed an imperialist identity to the United States, the meaning of being an imperialist state was reproduced by the US military intervention. In this way, social practices not only reproduce actors through identity, but also reproduce an intersubjective social structure through social practice" (Hopf, 1998, p. 178). It is obvious that the actions of the hegemon produce intersubjective meanings that, in turn, determine the degree of consent, and consequently the degree of legitimacy. Hegemony without legitimacy is insufficient to deter violent challenges to the hegemon itself and the international order, and may provoke attempts to build counter-alliances. "Hegemonic authority which accepts the principle of independence of states and treats states with a relative degree of benevolence is more easily accepted" (Griffits, 2004, p. 65).

The Constructivist approach to hegemony offers an invaluable analytical tool to analyze US hegemony and its limits in the Middle East context, to which we turn our attention in the next section.

## US Hegemony and the Legacy of the Neocons in the Middle East

After September 11, American foreign policy has been defined in terms of the Bush Administration's conduct of war on terrorism. The main effects of these events were both increased US power and increased US unilateralism. In this era, American foreign policy was characterized by two dramatic shifts away from the means by which the United States established and maintained its hegemony during the Cold War: departure from multilateralism to unilateralism and departure from the idea of deterrence toward a policy of coercive diplomacy against countries the administration defined as 'rouge states' (Griffits, 2004, p. 67-68). Coercive diplomacy in its current form includes not only *preemption* but also *prevention*, which breeds instability and disorder, mostly in the form of terrorist attacks on both US (and more broadly Western) hegemony and the international system. This new grand strategy in American foreign policy was "advanced most directly as a response to terrorism, but it also constitutes a broader view about how the United States should wield power and organize world order" (Ikenberry, 2002, p. 49).

The Bush Doctrine that President George W. Bush announced to the world on 1 June 2002, during an address at West Point included a third element to the above grand strategy: "the United States will work hard to export democracy, since the requirements of freedom apply fully to Africa, Latin America and the entire Islamic world" (Cui, 2004, p. 241). In September 2002, Bush signed the 'National Security Strategy of the United States,' which formalized these three elements of the Bush Doctrine. Bush in his address defined Iran, Iraq and North Korea as the axis of evil that constituted a threat to the peace of the world,

and Iraq became the first victim of the Bush Doctrine. Once war with Iraq began, notice was served on others that they might be next. "This is just the beginning," one administration official told the *New York Times* in March 2003, "I would not rule out the same sequence of events for Iran and North Korea as for Iraq" (Quoted in Hendrickson, 2005, p. 3). The Iraqi war showed the willingness and the ability of the United States to act unilaterally. The Bush Administration broke dramatically from the constraints of multilateral organizations, insisting that no foreign government or international institution could control the decisions of the United States in matters of war and peace. However, the lack of international consent undermined US hegemony in the Middle East and in the international system. Instead of bringing peace and stability to the region in particular and to the world in general, the US actions in the Middle East proved to be unable to bring an end to many of the key conflicts in the region. Indeed, this new world order "seems to exacerbate existing tensions, and… to create an entire set of political and economic problems for the West generally, but also, paradoxically, for the United States" (Smith, 2002, p. 171).

The Bush Administration justified the invasion of Iraq on three pretexts: The first was the war on terror declared after 11 September 2001; against all the evidence Saddam Hussein was presented in the United States as an accomplice, if not a sponsor, of Osama bin Laden. The second argument was the threat of weapons of mass destruction. The information that the United States and Great Britain provided was untruthful. As the first two faded, a third argument grew in importance: Washington promised to make Iraq so attractive a model that it would set an example to the entire Middle East.

The new US grand strategy created a structure in the world and in the Middle East that "reinforced the image of the United States as too quick to use military force and to do so outside the bounds of international law and legitimacy" (Griffits, 2004, p. 68). This carries the risk for the United States to lose international support for its use of force, and over the long term may provoke more resistance to US foreign policy goals more broadly, including its efforts to fight terrorism. Paul Starr in 2003 explained this dilemma very clearly:

*When the weather clears over Baghdad, we will likely to find ourselves no safer from terrorism than before, but our alliances will be battered and our true enemies will be more convinced than ever that what they need to prevent themselves from becoming another Iraq is a real nuclear arsenal. If this war easy, it may be no indication of what is in store in the future* (Quoted in Agnew, 2003, p. 883).

Elevating preemption to the level of a formal doctrine resulted in dismissing other peaceful means that had a good chance of working. If this continues, "other states may wish to emulate the precedent set by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq, at the same time reducing its leverage to convince such countries not to use force" (Griffits, 2004, p. 68). As Griffits rightly argues "today's international system is characterized by a relative infrequency of interstate war. Developing doctrines that lower the threshold for preemptive action could put that accomplishment at risk, and exacerbate regional crises already on the brink of open conflict" (Griffits, 2004, p. 68-69). This new structure created by the US itself has the potential to breed distrust among regional countries and toward the United States. Fear of being a next Iraq is spreading all over the region. Even in Turkey, one of the closest allies of the United States in the Middle East, a fiction titled *Metal Storm*, which envisaged Turkey's invasion by the United States, became one of the best selling books.

Another US policy objective called the Greater Middle East Project also fanned fire in many Middle Eastern countries. For many in the Arab world, the project and the ensuing G8-Greater Middle East Partnership showed the arrogant mentality of the Bush Administration in respect of the rest of the world, which causes it to behave as if it can decide the fate of states and peoples (Achcar, 2004). Furthermore, the hegemonic bias toward the regional countries in terms of democratic transformation also produces an image of the United States as hypocritical and not sincere in that endeavor. Garfinkle puts it very clearly that a campaign for democracy in the Arab world does "presuppose either a major shift in US attitudes toward the undemocratic ruling classes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and others that we have long called our friends; or a permanent condition of blatant democratic hypocrisy" (Garfinkle, 2002). US policies in

the past did not show any sign of sincerity for democratization in the entire Middle East and thus enforced the existing prejudices about the US hypocrisy. Even in Iraq, democratic transformation is impaired by sectarian and ethnic conflicts and by the increasing resistance to US presence there. The US failure in Iraq has created a vicious cycle where violence escalated almost to the level of a civil war in the country, which bred more violence.

There are other dangers as well in an American-led crusade for democracy in the Middle East. Viable democracies (except for Turkey and Israel) are virtually unknown in the Middle East. Many countries have few democratic traditions. The main motivation behind US-led democratization is the idea that democratic regimes will inevitably be pro-Western. However, past experiences in Jordan and Algeria and the recent experience in Palestine prove that as soon as those regimes loosened the restraints on political activities and held elections, a surge of support for the groups, which espouse Islamic fundamentalism and anti-Westernism.

Furthermore, there is a widespread conviction in the Middle East that the US is using thesis of democratic evolution as facades to conceal less-savory objectives. The belief that the US initiated war on Saddam because the oil reserves that it has and it was motivated by economic and strategic reasons is being reinforced by the actions of the US.

Finally, the discursive practices of US officials also constructed a social structure that increased suspicions about and, consequently, resentment with US hegemony in the Middle East. The heavy religious tone adapted by the President other US officials first brought to the mind that the US was promoting a clash between the Islamic and Christian civilizations (El-Affendi, 2004). The President's often use of the term 'crusade' is just one example in this regard. Huntington's argument about a potential clash between civilizations has been constantly referred to during the period. As Steve Smith rightly observes that "the social world is something that we constitute by our theories, and that Huntington's language is self-fulfilling since the analysis creates exactly the kinds of identities and ultimately the foreign policy mindsets that bring such world orders into existence" (Smith, 2002, p. 174). The same is true for our discursive practices and actions. Even though the Bush Administration has consistently denied that the conflict is not of a civilizational nature, many in the Middle East believe the opposite. The treatment of Muslims in the United States without any discrimination seems to confirm these allegations. And, this is exactly what Osama Bin Laden wanted: to make the conflict look like a war between Christianity and Islam to recruit more terrorists in the future. This religious tone combined with the US's inexorable support for Israel has the potential to escalate the conflict to the civilizational level.

Today, the Arab Spring can be read from the above arguments. As people in some countries are struggling to make a transition to democracy, they are at the same time facing the danger of falling under another authoritarian regime (as may be the case for Egypt) or Islamic fundamentalism, thus creating further turmoil in the region. The US, in the face of all these crises, is busy with making strategic, self-interested calculations (Atlas, 2012, p. 354), instead of helping these countries in their struggle for democracy.

## Conclusion

The US is the most powerful country in the world. Its immense economic and military resources have elevated the US to a regional hegemon during the Cold War and a world leader in the post-Cold War period. The main place of hegemonic exercise has been the Middle East, which at the same time has very important repercussions for the current and future hegemonic world orders.

The main argument of the paper was hegemony should be defined in more social terms than in material terms. A social hegemony can be defined as the ability of the most powerful state to create a social structure that fosters consent from the international community. In other words, a social hegemon creates a "dominant culture of commonsense" (Bruno, 2008, p. 305) in such a way that other states' role in support of US hegemony is accepted as natural. This analysis puts more emphasis on the 'consent' part of hegemony, which did not get the attention it deserves in the literature.

The US's quick and frequent use of hard power resources in the Middle East carries the dangers of undermining the credibility of the United States it has been gathering since the beginning of the 20th century in

several ways. First, the use of force and the neoconservative imperial project brings with it the danger to overstretch beyond its control. Second, and more important, the US military practices creates both in the Middle East and the world a social structure that breeds a 'Hobbesian culture' where distrust and disorder prevail. The initial reaction to the invasion of Iraq and a possible attack on Iran spread the fear of being the next victim in regional countries. Even though the reaction to US hegemony is limited to terrorist organizations, which grows in numbers, there is no way of knowing what the future will bring. Even though the foreign policy of the Obama Administration seems to be putting more emphasis on less violent means in realizing US objectives in the region, it is still impossible to say it will remain so in the future. Furthermore, it will not be easy to erase the negative effects of the social atmosphere created by the US in the region. These effects carry the potential of forcing the US into another military involvement in the region.

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Notes

1 For some examples of the supporters of American Empire, see Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of American Empire,* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

2 For an analysis of hard and soft power, see Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, (New York: Basic Books, 1990) and "Hard Power, Soft Power and the War on Terrorism," in Held and Koenig-Archibugi (eds.), *American Power in the 21st Century*, pp. 114-133.

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