POLITICAL SCIENCE
US Hegemony in World Politics

After the end of the Cold War, USA emerged as the world’s lone superpower with no serious threat from any country. The era after the Cold War has been described as a period of US dominance or a unipolar world (a world where only one country exercises economic, military and cultural influence).

Beginning of the New World Order

The US hegemony began after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This fact is largely correct, but two main observations here should also be taken into account. These are:

- Some aspects of US hegemony go back to the period after the end of the Second World War.
- The US did not start behaving like a hegemonic power from 1991; it became clear much later that the world was living in a period of hegemony.

Invasion of Iraq

Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. After attempts made by several countries to persuade Iraq to leave Kuwait failed, the UNO decided to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation by using military force. This was a historic decision made by the UNO and was hailed as the emergence of a 'new world order'.

A huge coalition force of 660,000 troops from 34 countries fought against Iraq and defeated it. This war came to be popularly known as the Gulf War. The US outrightly dominated the war because:

- An American General Norman Schwarzkopf led the coalition force and nearly 75% of the coalition forces were Americans.
- Iraqi forces were soon defeated and they were forced to withdraw from Kuwait.
- The Gulf War revealed the military supremacy of the US over other countries.
- The US used 'smart bombs' due to which several observers termed it a 'computer war'.

It is believed that the US may have profited from the war as it received more money from countries such as Japan, Germany and Saudi Arabia than it had spent in the war.

The Clinton Years

William Jefferson (Bill) Clinton won the US Presidential Elections in 1992. He was a democrat who campaigned on domestic rather than foreign issues. He won the elections again in 1996. During the Clinton years, it appeared that the US has been focusing more on its internal affairs. Regarding foreign policy, the Clinton government tended to focus on 'soft issues' like promotion...
of democracy, world trade and climate change rather than on ‘hard politics’ like military power and security.

However, the US did show its willingness to use military might on more than one occasion. These were

### US bombarding of Yugoslavia

- In 1999, the US bombed Yugoslavia because of the latter's actions against the Albanian population in Kosovo
- It resulted in the downfall of the Milosevic government and the stationing of NATO forces in Yugoslavia

### Operation Infinite Reach

- America launched a series of cruise missile attacks on Al-Qaeda terrorist targets in Sudan and Afghanistan
- It was because Al-Qaeda had bombed the US embassy in Nairobi, Kenya and Tanzania
- It has been alleged that even the civilian population was attacked in Sudan and Afghanistan in the name of hitting terrorist camps

### 9/11 and the Global War on Terror

On 11 September 2001, 19 hijackers from Arab countries hijacked American commercial aircraft and attacked the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center in New York. These attacks have come to be known as the ‘9/11’ attacks. Nearly three thousand people were killed. The response of the US to 9/11 was ferocious. It took the following measures:

- It launched ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ against suspects who were behind the attacks.
- Taliban and Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan were attacked
- The two regimes were easily overthrown, but they attacked a number of centres in Western Europe thereafter.
- The US forces made arrests all over the world even without informing the governments of the person arrested. These were detained in secret prisons.
- Some of the arrested were imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay, a US naval base in Cuba where prisoners did not enjoy any protection of international law.
**Invasion of Iraq, 2003**  
On 19 March 2003, the US invaded Iraq on the pretext that it is developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD). More than 40 other countries also joined US in its invasion of Iraq. However, no WMD were found there and since then it has been speculated that the invasion of Iraq was motivated by the US desire of controlling Iraqi oil fields and to install a US-friendly regime in the country. Some effects of US invasion of Iraq were

- Although the Saddam Husain government fell, the US has not been able to pacify Iraq.
- Instead, a full-fledged insurgency against US occupation started in Iraq.
- While the US lost over 3,000 military personnel in the war, the Iraqi casualties were much higher. About 50,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed since the US-led invasion.
- The US invasion of Iraq has been a political and military failure.

**US Hegemony in the World**  
Leadership or dominance, especially by one state or social group, over the others is known as hegemony.
In case of the US, hegemony takes three main forms:

**Hegemony as Hard Power**
This notion of hegemony refers to relations, patterns and balances of military capability among states. Military supremacy is central to US hegemony as a hard power in the world today. The US is powerful mainly because of its superior military dominance. Some features of US hegemony as a hard power are:

- Weapons of USA can reach any part of the world accurately and lethally. It can cause maximum damage to its enemies, while its own forces are sheltered to the maximum from enemy’s attacks.
- No country in the world can even think of matching the military might of the US.
- It not only has superior military weapons but also spends substantially on military research and development.

However, the US invasion of Iraq has revealed several American vulnerabilities:

- It has not been able to force the Iraqis to submit themselves to the US-led coalition.
- The Iraqi invasion shows that though the US has the power to conquer, deter and punish, it lacks in policing an occupied territory.

**Hegemony as Structural Power**
A hegemon has structural power if it supports the creation and existence of a world economy. The US is a hegemonic structural power because:

- The US has played a great role in providing global public goods. Public goods are goods which are used by one person without reducing the amount of goods available for someone else.
- Fresh air and roads are some examples of public goods. In the world economy, sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) are used by merchant ships. Free trade in an open world economy would not be possible without open SLOCs.
• After the Second World War, the US has emerged as an important naval power and has ensured the freedom of navigation in international waters.
• The Internet is another example of global public good. It has been a direct outcome of a US military research project which began in 1950. Today, the Internet relies on a global network of satellites, most of which are owned by the US government.
• The US is present in all sectors of the world economy. Its share of the world economy is a whopping 28%, and it accounts for 15% of world trade.

Economic preparedness of the US makes it a structural power as it has the power to shape the global economy. Bretton Woods institutions such as the World Bank and IMF are dominated by the US. One example of the structural power of the US is the academic degree called the Master's in Business Administration (MBA). The first business school in the world was opened in the US in 1881 (Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania). It was as late as 1950 that the first MBA course was established outside the US. Today, MBA is considered a prestigious academic degree all over the world.

Hegemony as Soft Power
When a country establishes its cultural supremacy in the world in various defined forms, it becomes a soft power. Hegemony in this sense is created when a state or country wins the consent of dominated classes to view the world in which it (hegemon) wants it to be viewed. A dominant power not only uses its military and economic power but also its ideological resources to shape the behaviour of lesser or competing powers. The US has emerged as a hegemonic soft power with the following dimensions:
• The US is not only militarily and economically but also culturally dominant today.
• Dreams of people and societies are influenced by practices of 20th century America.
• America is the most powerful culture on the Earth and thus is called 'soft power' as it can persuade rather than coerce.

During the Cold War, the US found it difficult to score victories against the Soviet Union. However, it scored notable victories in the realm of structural and soft power. Even during the Cold War, the world’s economy remained a capitalist economy. As a soft power, the jeans (cultural product) manufactured in the US was able to create a generation divide in society.
Constraints on US Power

- Division of powers between three branches of the American government
- Other two branches (legislative and judiciary) can place a brake on military power of the executive wing

- American mass media has a deep scepticism regarding the methods of the government in American political culture

- NATO can moderate or put some kind of restrictions on the exercise of US hegemony

India’s Relationship with the US

During the Cold War era, India was friendlier towards the USSR. After the collapse of USSR, India gradually began to improve ties with the US. Two new factors have emerged in Indo-US relations in recent years—the technological dimension and the role of the Indian-American diaspora. This can be proved from the following figures:

- The US absorbs about 65% of India’s total software programmes and services.
- 35% of the technical staff at Boeing is of Indian origin.
- 300,000 Indians work in Silicon Valley.
- 15% of all high-tech startups are by Indian Americans.

However, certain debates are taking place in the country regarding the India-America relationship. These are

- It is believed by some Indian analysts that India should maintain its aloofness from Washington and should work towards increasing its own national power.
- Another set of policy analysts believe India should build close relations with US and should take advantage of US hegemony.
- Another group of analysts feel that India should take a lead in establishing a coalition of countries from the developing world which may wean the hegemonic powers of the US in the world.
How to Overcome Hegemony

As of now there is no single power which can balance the US military. Several thoughts have emerged from various schools of writers on US hegemony and measures of how to overcome it. Some dimensions to this are

- Big nations such as Russia, China and India have the capability to challenge the US military. However, differences among these nations make it highly unlikely.

- It has been argued that it is more reasonable to take advantage of US hegemony in the world. Raising economic growth and increasing trade and technology transfers could be best achieved while working with the hegemon. Thus, instead of engaging in activities opposed to the hegemonic power, it is beneficial to extract benefits of working within the hegemonic system. This is called 'bandwagon strategy'.

- Another way to overcome hegemony is to stay far away from the dominant power. However, such strategy is not viable for mega countries such as China, India and Russia.

- Many analysts are of the opinion that other nations may not be able to confront the US; however, its hegemony can be defeated by non-state actors—sections of media, intellectuals, artists and writers by criticising and resisting US policies.