

Introduction

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Over the last half century, the United States has been a dominating presence in East Asia. In the shadow of the Cold War, a regional order took shape organized around an array of bilateral alliances and an open trade system – all tied to the United States. In this American-led regional hegemonic order, the United States provided security through security agreements and the forward deployment of its forces while it supported the expansion and integration of East Asian countries in the context of an open multilateral world economy. The United States–Japan alliance was the cornerstone of this regional order. In the background, the East Asian region was nested within the wider Cold War-era American-led Western order. After the Cold War ended, this Pax Americana was extended outward throughout the globe. Alliances, free trade, multilateral institutions, democratic community, and American hegemony all went together.

At various moments since the 1980s, commentators have offered predictions of American hegemonic decline both at the global level and within East Asia. In recent years, various authors have suggested that

the world is entering a ‘post-American’ era.¹ In Asia, the rise of China has added drama to these announcements of the end of American leadership. The balance of power is shifting, trade and economic integration is expanding within East Asia, and new forms of political and economic regionalism are emerging that leave the United States in a less central position. The 2008 financial crisis and subsequent world economic downturn – the most severe since the Great Depression – has also been a blow to the American-led hegemonic system. Unlike past postwar economic crises, this one had its origins in the United States. The repercussions of this economic crisis are complex and still playing out. But it has served to tarnish the American model of liberal capitalism and raised new doubts about the capacities of the United States to act as the global leader in the provision of economic stability and advancement.² The rise of new power centers appears to be occurring with new agendas – and new principles and logics – for the organization of regional and international order. The rise of China is the obvious protagonist in this emerging grand drama (Jacques, 2009).

These visions of American decline are not without their skeptics. The United States has critical advantages as the world’s lone superpower. It alone possesses the three global advantages of a large open market, the world’s reserve currency, and overwhelming military power with global reach.³ The United States is also a stable democracy with extensive ties – cultural, political, and economic – with all regions of the world. It is not just a powerful state. It is a geopolitical ‘hub’ around which many countries and regions are closely connected (Ikenberry, forthcoming). Many people and governments have been critical of America’s recent unipolar foreign policy, particularly as it was manifest in the invasion of Iraq. At the same time, many people and governments around the world do not wish to see American hegemonic leadership disappear (Mandelbaum, 2005). There are deeply rooted constituencies

1 On anticipations of a return to multipolarity and the end of American dominance, see Kupchan (2003), Khannam (2008), Starobin (2009), and Zakaria (2009).

2 For arguments about the impact of the world economic crisis on the American neo-liberal model and Washington’s leadership capacities, see Stiglitz (2010) and Lelong and Cohen (2010).

3 For a recent study that finding a deep structural basis for continuing American dominance, see Norrlof (2010). For an article speculating on the world order during the first quarter of the 21st century along with the entire 20th century, see Inoguchi (2010).

those interests are tied to the American-centered global system. Within East Asia, China's role and influence is expanding rapidly but it is far from rivaling America's. Even within East Asia, the United States continues to enjoy close ties with most of the countries that are arrayed around China. Trade and economic ties are drawing countries closer to China but the overall balance of economic and political relations is complex. Across the region, countries are pursuing a mix of policies that entail both hedging against and engaging a rising China. Regionalism in East Asia is evolving but it is not just a simple story of the waning of American influence and the rise of Chinese influence.

The current moment of regional transition offers an important opportunity to revisit basic ideas about power and influence in East Asia in the context of the old American-led hegemonic presence. How is the region changing? Is the hegemonic order ending or is it simply becoming more negotiated? What would a post-American regional system look like? How do the subsystems of economics and security – currency and alliances – interact and offer alternative narratives of power, influence, and change?

In light of these questions, the editors of this special issue have asked distinguished scholars to offer assessments of regional power, leadership, and organizational logic. In particular, we have asked our authors to look at two of the key instruments of hegemonic orders or empires: global currency relations and global alliance networks. Papers were presented at the plenary sessions of the Annual Convention of the Japan Association of International Relations held on 7–8 November 2009 in Kobe, Japan. G. John Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi were assigned the task of setting up two panels devoted to the twin issues of currency and alliances. Daniel Drezner (Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy), Masayuki Tadokoro (Keio University), and Chung-in Moon and Sang-Young Rhyu (both from Yonsei University) explore the shifting logic of money and economic relations in East Asia. T.J. Pempel (University of California, Berkeley), Motoshi Suzuki (Kyoto University), and Xuefeng Sun (Qinghua University) focus on political and security relations. The three articles on currency and economic relations are mildly sanguine about the future of the US dollar. The three alliance articles are focused on their national angles and on their part in the alliance network. The Japanese paper in the alliance panel speculates on the range of foreign policy directions Japan might be able to consider.

Looking back to the period when the papers were presented, autumn 2009, and watching the events as they have unfolded since, we are impressed by one commonality of the papers. This is their general view that shifts in the security and economic domains of the East Asian region are evolutionary. We are not confronted with visions of sharp geopolitical or economic disjunctures. The region is changing but in gradual ways which retain features of the old American-led arrangements. Drezner sees a growing interest in alternatives to the dollar but not a radical shift in actual policy preferences. This is partly because the current system does have advantages for many countries in the region and also because of the absence of good alternatives. Tadokoro explores the role of the dollar in the international monetary system and the recent calls for its replacement as the key currency. He finds that the special role of the dollar is intricately tied to American political roles in the region and around the world. The international role of the dollar is likely to continue although Tadokoro sees the evolution of the monetary order hinging on the choices of states in the region as they make broad geopolitical calculations. Moon and Rhyu also see important connections between economic and security realms. South Korea continues to operate within the economic and alliance system that has been organized by the United States. But the authors see South Korea less willing than in the past to accept this system without question. South Korea will seek a reformed and more balanced regional order even as it holds on to its alliance ties and commitment to economic openness.

In the security realm, the region is also shifting but it is still holding onto important aspects of the American-led security order. Pempel focuses on the wide array of regional institutions that are vying for primacy. He shows the growth and complexity of regional security groupings that move beyond the old alliance system. Pempel argues that these newer institutional arrangements are responsive to new power realities and emerging security conflicts. At the same time, these newer institutions do not pose absolute challenges to the American-led alliance system. The United States may lose some capacity for unilateral dominance, but it will remain a security leader in the region. Suzuki looks closely at the United States–Japan alliance and he sees a new divergence in how the two partners see regional threats and the tasks before the alliance. Nonetheless, Suzuki argues that the alliance remains important to the United States and Japan because it provides a framework for the two

states to coordinate and adjust to their more complex and diverging views of security. Sun looks at the shifting patterns of American and Chinese influence in the regional multilateral settings over the last decade. Even though China's influence has grown, Sun sees its capacity to influence multilateral outcomes still dependent on the United States and its allies. China's influence is greatest when it pursues integration strategies with other states in the region.

Together, these papers suggest both continuity and change in the East Asian region. The United States role is not ending nor it is eroding sharply. But it is evolving. What is emerging is not best seen as a 'changing of the guard' in the region in which the United States retreats and China advances. Something more complex and evolutionary is happening. The American hegemonic presence will remain for some time to come but it will be a more negotiated system. This 'negotiated hegemonic' order will entail a more pluralistic organization of power and influence. Countries will increasingly pursue a mix of policies that involve both engagement and hedging, integration and balancing, cooperation and resistance. At some point in the future, the notion of hegemony may simply not be appropriate to describe the logic of East Asian order. But for now, the changes and adaptations underway leave us with a rich set of relations that are still a mix of old and new.

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