

Conference: A Hegemonic Transition? Reconfigurations of Global Economic and Security Orders in the Age of Trump

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Heidelberg Center for American Studies (HCA), University of Heidelberg

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Conference Outline and Call for Papers

The emergence of a multipolar global order and the relative economic decline of the West have been discussed among scholars at least since the 1980s. Yet, recent developments in world affairs spark new attention to the possibility of a hegemonic transition. In particular, the US under Donald Trump seems to abandon its traditional role as a global hegemon. Such a development would be interpreted as a source of instability by theorists such as Charles P. Kindleberger, while Robert Keohane, for example, highlighted the resilience of multilateral institutions.

Trump's "America First" policy has created conflict, insecurity and distrust among allies, calling into question some of the cornerstones of the traditional "liberal order" of the West, such as free trade, human rights promotion, and multilateral institutions. Among other factors, rising inequality, economic crises, and economic insecurity have contributed to undermine liberal democracies from within. At the same time, in terms of economic and military resources, China (re-)emerged from a regional to a global actor and asserts its power in the realm of Asia-Pacific security as well as regarding economic relations towards Europe or Africa. In addition to US-Chinese competition, other powers, such as India, Russia, Saudi-Arabia, Turkey, Iran or Brazil, are eager to pursue their military interests and ambitions and are able to exert influence over regional and partly global affairs. In the economic sphere, for the first time since the Industrial Revolution emerging economies and developing countries have been able to join in large numbers the global "Convergence Club".

These developments raise a set of questions pertaining to global hegemony and hegemonic transition, e.g. how the new global order will be configured, which powers will be able to exercise a leading role, what the main cleavages in global politics will be and—maybe most

importantly—whether and how new norms and institutions will be developed to govern salient issues such as economic globalization, security policy or climate change.

Against this backdrop, the conference seeks to provide answers to four broader sets of topics:

- 1) On a theoretical and conceptional level, the term “hegemony” needs critical scrutiny. What are the dimensions of global hegemony relating to functional sub-systems, such as the economy or the field of security, but also regarding the distinction between soft and hard power? How is the role of a hegemonic leader ascribed to a specific state or group of states in these different realms? In what way does legitimacy or trust matter for the consolidation (or brake-down) of a hegemonic order? In that regard, we are seeking to update traditional approaches of Hegemonic Stability Theory, as discussed by Charles Kindleberger, Robert Keohane, and others.
- 2) To what extent is Western hegemony in decline? What are the symptoms of crisis in contrast to the resilience of the old order? What are the sources of this crisis in view of internal developments in Europe and the US (e.g. the rise of populism, growing inequality) and external challenges (e.g. rise of authoritarian regimes). This might yield different conclusions depending on the specific dimension of hegemony, for example in the realm of security versus the economy. Furthermore, it is expedient to set the current developments into perspective with past instances of hegemonic transitions. What are the differences and similarities and what does a historical comparison tell us about the future of the global order?
- 3) If the diagnosis of a crisis of Western hegemony is (at least partially) correct, then the question is how other actors react to these shifting patterns of global order. Is there a consistent path of adaptation across regions and policy fields? Or do we see distinct reactions regarding economic issues while there is more continuity among aspects of global security?
- 4) The traditional Western order led by the US was built on specific institutions and aimed at promoting liberal norms, which in turn served to uphold Western hegemony. If Western hegemony is in decline as the material configuration of power shifts and the community of liberal democracy disintegrates, do rising powers, such as China, seek to implement new norms and institutions or rather adapt conventional Western “rules of the game”?

Our conference invites contributions from scholars of various disciplines and is not limited to specific theories or methodological approaches. To the contrary, we are looking for cross-disciplinary answers to a topic of relevance for students of political science, economics, history, sociology, and international law.

If interested in contributing to this project, please send a (working) title, an abstract and a short bio to fboeller@hca.uni-heidelberg.de by November 15, 2018. The goal is to submit a collection of papers to a peer-reviewed journal for a special issue or to a relevant academic publisher for an edited volume.