The Decline of American Hegemony: The Rise of China and the Impasse in the Arab and Islamic East



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The rivalry between the United States and China has become the most prominent aspect of 21st¯century geopolitics. As American global dominance weakens after thirty years of unilateral action and worldwide leadership, China's ongoing rise as an economic, military, and soft power indicates a major shift in the global order.

Meanwhile, the United States continues to get involved in regional conflicts, especially in the Middle East, where it no longer gains strategic advantages for its empire. Instead, it worsens the global view of its decline.

This is clear in the strong American support for the Zionist entity, especially the Al¯Aqsa Flood of October 7, 2023, which could mark a turning point in the global public opinion's view of American dominance and the Zionist project.

Strategic Patience and China's Ascendance

Since the end of the Cold War, China has employed a long¯term strategy called "strategic patience," which involves a multi¯dimensional approach focused on economic growth, military modernization, and international engagement. The Belt and Road Initiative is the most notable part of this strategy, aiming to build a network of infrastructure, trade, and investment across Eurasia, Africa, and Latin America. This project has secured crucial

resources and shaped global trade routes. It has also enabled China to promote its development model, bypassing traditional international institutions dominated by Western powers.

Chinese economic growth over the past thirty years has been remarkable. In 1992, China's GDP was only 6% of the United States' ($367 billion compared to $6.52 trillion). Today, it has surpassed 65% ($20 trillion versus $30 trillion). This extraordinary growth has funded an equally impressive military modernization program.

Although China has not yet overtaken the United States as the world's dominant military power, it has started to assert its growing regional influence, especially in the South and East China Seas. By focusing its military strategy on building anti-access/area denial capabilities for foreign powers, or what it calls "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD), China aims to prevent or restrict American intervention near its borders as a key step toward regional dominance in East Asia.

At the same time, China has actively helped create alternative international organizations that challenge Western dominance, such as the BRICS group, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and new financial systems like the New Development Bank. This shows its goal of a multipolar world order that questions the leadership of the US-led liberal system.

Washington's Grand Strategy: Global Hegemony and Regional Control

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became the world's only superpower, a position it aimed to keep. Since 1991, American strategy has focused on preventing any emerging powers, especially in key regions like East Asia, Europe, and the Arabian Gulf/Middle East.

The core idea was that if no regional or major power could dominate its own area, it would not be able to challenge American supremacy or hegemony worldwide.

To conduct this strategy, the United States implemented two policies in Europe and East Asia aimed at weakening its potential adversaries, but both ultimately failed.

The first in Europe was NATO's eastward expansion, increasing from 16 members in 1991 to 32 today, in an effort to contain, influence, or alter Russia's political system. This policy involved integrating European countries previously under Soviet influence by supporting and mobilizing pro-Western movements in these societies, such as the Color Revolutions.

However, this policy sparked a violent response from Russia, as Moscow saw NATO expansion as an existential threat, prompting it to reassert itself. This led to the 2022 war on Ukraine, a conflict now tilted in Moscow's favor despite strong Western military, economic, and political support for Kyiv.

In East Asia, the United States adopted a policy of engagement and communication with China, believing that China's economic growth would eventually bring about the "liberalization" (from liberalism) of its political system, meaning its liberalization and integration into the American-led capitalist world order. As a result, China was admitted to the World Trade Organization in 2001, becoming a hub for American and global investment.

However, China did not become a liberal democracy. Instead, it kept its centralized authoritarian government while building significant economic and technological strength. This, in turn, allowed for higher military spending and

the projection of regional power, something Washington hoped to prevent.

The Middle East: Resource Control and Imperial Expansion

The third strategic area of American hegemony was in the Arabian Gulf and the wider Middle East. Control over this oil-rich region has long been a key focus of American strategic plans and a top priority for its core interests, not only for reasons related to managing energy resources through building alliances and influence zones but also to maintain the dominance of the US dollar.

Since the dollar's de-pegging from gold in 1971, its role as a global reserve currency has depended on the recycling of petrodollars. Guarantees of oil sales in dollars with major oil-exporting countries, and the maintenance and protection of regional regimes under the US umbrella, were crucial to establishing this dominance.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, US foreign policy in the region shifted toward ambitious goals through a strategy of reengineering societies. The United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq under the slogans of "democracy," "regime change," and "achieving global security and regional stability."

General Wesley Clark revealed in a 2003 interview that, after the September 11 attacks, the Pentagon planned to overthrow seven regimes within five years: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran. However, these ambitious plans failed in the deserts and mountains of the Arab and Islamic East.

America was defeated in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite its enormous military spending and the deaths of thousands of soldiers. The spread of chaos, violence, and failure shattered the dream of "reshaping" the region along the American model.

Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at the United Nations in September 2003, two weeks before the Al-Aqsa Intifada, reflected this vision. The Israeli entity's expansionist ambitions (Associated Press)

The Israeli entity: From a strategic ally to a strategic burden

Supporting the Zionist entity has been a key part of American policy toward the Middle East. Since the entity's victory over three Arab states in 1967 and its control of large territories, including all of historic Palestine, Washington and its ruling elites have viewed it as a vital strategic ally supporting the goals of the American empire.

However, the Israeli issue and the future of the entity are not just foreign matters; they have become an internal American issue because of the strong influence of the Zionist lobby. With the rise of neoconservatives in the early 2000s, such as Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, Scooter Libby, Elliott Abrams, and Richard Perle, the alignment between American strategic goals and Zionist interests in controlling and dominating the region has grown.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at the United Nations in September 2023, two weeks before the Al-Aqsa Intifada, embodied this: The entity's ambitions, as it promoted the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), as a project that would establish Israel as a regional hub for global trade and infrastructure, completely ignoring the Palestinian issue and the suffering of its people.

This discourse reflected the entity's pursuit of regional dominance and its effort to normalize relations with Arab and Islamic countries, especially Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Perhaps this neglect was one of the main factors that led to the October 7 operation conducted by Hamas, an event that reversed the situation, exposed the fragility of the Zionist entity, and caused a series of strategic setbacks for the Zionist project.

Operation "Al¯Aqsa Flood" marked a historic turning point in the regional balance of power (Qassam Brigades' Military Media).

The Strategic Collapse of the Zionist Entity Following "Al¯Aqsa Flood"

Operation "Al¯Aqsa Flood" marked a historic turning point in the regional balance of power. Despite having one of the strongest armies and most advanced intelligence agencies, the Zionist entity failed miserably to predict or counter the operation. The operation also exposed weaknesses in its deterrence system, military doctrine, and internal cohesion.

In response, the entity launched a brutal campaign of genocide, among the most destructive in modern history. It ¯thoroughly destroyed the civilian infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, killed tens of thousands of its residents—two thirds of whom are women and children—wounded many more, and displaced the rest.

Yet, despite over 21 months of bombardment, siege, destruction, and massacres, the Palestinian resistance remains resilient, fighting a relentless war of attrition and engaging in indirect negotiations with the Zionist aggressor from a position of strength. So far, the entity's main military goal of "absolute victory" or the elimination of Hamas and the dismantling of its organizational structure has not been achieved.

Most experts believe that after the Al¯Aqsa Flood, the Zionist entity is experiencing a strategic crisis. The deterrence theory, which relies on inflicting overwhelming punishment to force enemies into surrender and submission, has failed. Israel's reputation as a regional power has weakened, and the credibility of its security institutions has been undermined. Social cohesion within the entity has broken down due to war and the economic crisis, further damaging military morale and leading thousands of Israelis to emigrate out of fear for their future.

Internationally, the story of Jewish victimhood has fallen apart. Social media has captured the massacres, famine, and destruction in Gaza, causing a major change in global public opinion.

International institutions, such as the International Court of Justice, have issued warnings of genocide, and the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for senior Zionist leaders, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense, as war criminals. This comes alongside widespread calls for boycotts and sanctions, a decline in tourism and the economy, and the start of a reverse migration wave that threatens the entity's future demographic balance.

Divergent Goals: America vs. Israel

Although Washington and Tel Aviv agree on strategic goals, such as crushing and ending the Palestinian resistance,

weakening or containing Iran and the axis of resistance, and maintaining regional dominance, their interim goals and tactics vary.

Israel aims to dominate the region according to its idea of "Greater Israel." This is clear in the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, led by extremist Minister Bezalel Smotrich, and in provocative plans to build a temple on the Temple Mount, led by another extremist, Itamar Ben-Gvir, who seeks to impose spatial and temporal division on the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque.

-Additionally, the destruction of Gaza and the increase in settler terrorism in the West Bank aim to force the large scale displacement of Palestinians to address the "demographic problem" and prevent a permanent apartheid regime, which Israel is often accused of. Regarding the United States, its policy seeks to maintain "controllable regional stability" by weakening, besieging, and deterring Iran and its allies in the Axis of Resistance, controlling energy markets, limiting Chinese and Russian influence in the region, and upholding a pro-US security framework through the "Twin Pillar" strategy. This approach involves securing American security, economic, and strategic interests in the region by supporting two key allies: the Zionist entity and Saudi Arabia.

Therefore, Washington's top priority now, after the failure of the Israeli military approach to secure absolute victory, the surrender of the resistance, and the release of prisoners without cost, is to end the war of extermination in Gaza through negotiations and political pressure, while keeping the US-dominated regional order intact without fundamental change.

Towards a New World Order: The Path to Renaissance for the Arab and Islamic World

The failure of American strategies worldwide and regionally, the loss of credibility of the international system led by the United States since World War II, the spread of Washington's chauvinism and unilateralism, Trump's dominance with his racist and unilateral policies over domestic politics and institutions, China's rise with its substantial economic progress and political influence, and the weakening of the Zionist entity's power amid its ongoing wars—all these global developments pave the way for a major reorientation and the creation of a new international system.

The world is currently at a pivotal point that could bring significant changes to the global order. This offers the Arab and Islamic world a historic chance to focus on freeing themselves from foreign domination and Zionist influence.

The existing international system—led by the United States and the Western countries—has shown its inability and refusal to hold the Zionist entity accountable for its serious crimes, despite unmistakable evidence of its wage of genocide against a defenseless people in besieged Gaza, and its commission of war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and massacres.

This system has insisted on adopting a policy that claims force determines legitimacy and maintains the status quo. Therefore, the core interest of the Arab and Islamic peoples is in rejecting and transforming this system into a multipolar world order that embodies the values of justice, independence, sovereignty, and dignity.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand that the main struggle for all peoples today, which they must unite around, is to eliminate foreign and Zionist influence and dominance. No effort toward a civilizational rebirth, a democratic system, economic growth, scientific advancement, or an Islamic society can succeed under foreign control and

Zionist dominance, maintained through ongoing and unlimited American military, political, and financial backing.

This fundamental reason is that the entity sees all these accomplishments sought by living peoples as an existential threat that must be fought and thwarted. Therefore, the purpose of this foreign influence and Zionist hegemony is to prevent any efforts by the peoples to achieve independence, unity, or renaissance.

This foreign hegemony has now become an iron wall blocking the future of any people seeking independence, liberation, and progress.

Therefore, these colonial and exploitative systems must be dismantled for a true renaissance to occur in the Arab and Islamic world. Independence, sovereignty, self-determination, and regional cooperation cannot happen as long as the Arab-Islamic system remains divided, weak, subservient, and occupied.

In short, this battle must be a top priority, not just a slogan, but a key strategic and existential necessity.

The End of America's Moment of Exclusivity

American hegemony may not collapse all at once, but its decline is evident. Its blind bias toward criminal and extremist Zionism could spark a new wave of uprisings in the region, a new Arab Spring targeting not only authoritarian regimes but also a powerful popular movement aimed at dismantling Zionist influence and American dominance in the area.

At this critical moment, Arab and Islamic peoples must forge a new path to assert their will, gain independence, reclaim sovereignty, redefine their roles, and shape their future in a new, just, and multipolar world order that is still developing formation.

Source: Al Jazeera