

Hegel: The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history

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Unipolar Moments Never Last More Than a Moment

American leaders, politicians, policymakers and pundits are fond of talking about the “Unipolar Moment” and “Hyper Power” position that they imagine the United States enjoys in the world. Totally lacking from this fantasy are any inconvenient historical facts.

The US Unipolar Moment (insofar as it existed at all) lasted less than a decade from the break-up of the Soviet Union at the end of December 1991 to June 15, 2001. The US “moment” barely made it into the 21st Century.

On that epochal day of June 15, 2001, two major events happened. First, US President George W. Bush gave a speech in Warsaw pledging to integrate the three tiny Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into NATO as a prime strategic goal of the United States.

That very same day, Russia and China created with four Central Asian nations the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): The most populous and powerful international security organization in history.

This year, the SCO doubled in population by adding India and Pakistan at the same time – two major nuclear powers with a combined population of 1.5 billion people. That means the SCO now includes more than 3 billion people, around 40 percent of the human race.

From the moment the SCO was created – dedicated from its inception to preserve and protect a multipolar world from the domination of any one power, the US unipolar moment was dead and gone.

This reality was confirmed less than three months later when al-Qaeda’s terror attacks of September 11, 2001 killed almost 3,000 people. More Americans died that day than in the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

George W. Bush should have been impeached for his gross incompetence. Instead his popularity soared. Imagining the Unipolar Moment (or Era) to be still in full flood he invaded Afghanistan later that year and Iraq less than two years later. The United States is still endlessly stuck in those unending wars.

The patterns of history – totally ignored by the US media, pundit-ocracy and political world – in fact teach this lesson consistently. Over the past half a millennium, there have been several unipolar moments for great powers seeking to reign supreme over the world and they all collapsed after only a few years.

When Habsburg Spain and its allies decisively defeated the huge fleet of the mighty Ottoman Empire at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, Spain’s imperial domination over Europe seemed assured. But in

fact Spain was already embroiled in a Dutch revolt that started in 1568. Over the following decades, it became even more exhausting than the current US deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq.

King Philip II of Spain's dream of domination was totally buried only 17 years after Lepanto with the destruction of his giant Armada fleet to conquer England in 1588.

France rose next. Its domination over Europe appeared to be sealed with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. But by the mid-1660s, glory-crazed Louis XIV, the so-called "Sun King" had already repeated the Spanish mistake and bogged his country down in half a century of endless wars in what is now Belgium, the Netherlands and southern Germany. France's unipolar moment lasted less than 20 years.

The British came next. Even after winning the Napoleonic Wars against France, they knew they could not rule the world alone and were forced to share it with the far more conservative major monarchies of Europe – Russia, Austria-Hungary and Prussia.

Finally in 1848, the kings of France, Austria-Hungary and Prussia were all rocked or topped by liberal popular revolutions. The British thought then, as the Americans did in 1989-91, that their Unipolar Moment had finally come and would last for eternity. The whole world would look to London for guidance and wisdom.

It didn't: By 1871, Prussia under its Iron Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had united Germany, smashed France, by then Britain's ally and humiliatingly swept the British out of any continental pretensions of power and influence.

When asked what he would do if the tiny British Army ever invaded North Germany, Bismarck replied that he would send the police to arrest it.

After the defeat of Imperial Germany in World War I, Britain seemed to enjoy another hyper-power moment. The isolationist United States and the Soviet Union both temporarily withdrew from the world stage.

However, that British fantasy did not even last until the rise of Hitler in 1933. Two years earlier in 1931, Imperial Japan had occupied Manchuria – a huge chunk of Northeastern China: British military leaders were forced to admit to Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald there was nothing they could do about it. Britain's unipolar moment had lasted only 12 years – from 1919 to 1931.

Once these historical facts are understood, it is easy to see why the US Unipolar Moment only lasted even less time than Britain's 20th century one had – less than a decade.

Since 2001, the United States has bankrupted and exhausted itself, just as Habsburg Spain, Bourbon France and post-Victorian Britain did before it in futile, doomed and ludicrous attempts to deny and roll back the inevitable tides of history.

That should come as no surprise: As Friedrich Hegel warned us, "The only thing that we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history."

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