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POST COVID-19 WORLD ORDER: ARE WE WITNESSING A CHANGE IN HEGEMONIC LEADERSHIP?

Abstract

Current global pandemic, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is the most severe challenge to the global community since the Great Depression in 1929. Spread of this disease revealed the fragile health care system of all countries including the most powerful one. The US, the only superpower who has remained top of the table since the Potsdam, is intensely self-centered as the virus rips through its population and economy. China, on the contrary, has been playing a big role to combat and control this highly infectious disease. The ongoing pandemic is reshaping the geo-politics. And more importantly, escalating tension between the US and China is the immediate outcome of the COVID-19. Undoubtedly, the US-led liberal international order has been passing a testing time. But is the US-led global order coming to an end? The paper analyses the hegemonic stability theory and power transition theory to assess whether the world is heading towards a new order in near future.

Keywords: International Order, World Order, Power Transition, Hegemonic Power, COVID- 19, Pandemic, Liberal International Order.

1. Introduction

“The thing about a crisis-a real one, rather than a concocted one is that it exposes realities for what they are, as opposed to how the political class would wish to present them, either to their own people or the world at large”.¹ The former Australian Prime Minister’s remark flags that the recent global pandemic Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has already revealed many truths about the contemporary world. The biggest truth is the fragility of the health sector in all countries, be it large or small, strong or weak. The absence of timely and consensus-based decision making by major global powers not only aggravated the situation but also made it clear that the global community would have to face a semi-synchronous public health as well as the economic crisis. Amidst the pandemic, national and global responses to the coronavirus and subsequent economic activities often appear to be late, tepid and disjointed. It has shaken the whole global community irrespective of race, religion,

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¹ Kevin Rudd, “Kevin Rudd on America, China and Saving the WHO”, *The Economist*, 15 April 2020.

geographical position, sex or age. In fact, the outbreak of COVID-19 has disturbed the economic, social, political and religious structures of the whole world. The global community is trying to cope with new normal practices in everyday life. The political impact of the ongoing pandemic is already visible. Almost all European countries have been weakened, national borders were closed overnight, countries like China and Russia have extended support to Europe and elsewhere. However, the United States (US) mostly remained silent in this crisis time. The US and China have been engaged in an intense tug of war blaming each other for the outbreak. The Trump administration took the decision of defunding and cutting off its relationship with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and on the contrary, China pledged to support the global health body.

Current global hegemon, the US, is severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly, the US' healthcare system and economy have become the worst victims of the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 on the US' economic health can be understood by the following scenario. Consumption makes 70 per cent of the US' gross domestic product (GDP), however, that has slumped to a great extent as businesses close and purchases decrease as people worry about their jobs and finances. Businesses constitute 20 per cent of the US' GDP, but major businesses are putting off investment as they want to clarify on the total cost of COVID-19. Manufacturing makes up about 11 per cent of America's GDP, but much of the sector will also be disrupted because the global supply chain has been severely affected by the pandemic. For example, because of reduced demand General Motors, and Ford have announced temporary closures of production. The major risk of the US economy is the health crisis accompanied by a financial crisis. Even the impact of COVID-19 can be far more detrimental than the subprime crisis of 2008.² According to another source, after the attack of coronavirus to the US, in four weeks, about 22 million citizens filed for unemployment benefits. Also, the Small Business Administration which takes care of US entrepreneurs with funding and loans, has already run out of money for its paycheck protection programme. In addition to that, technical glitches have prevented millions of US citizens from receiving their stimulus check from the US Department of Treasury.³

China, on the contrary, has been playing a big role to combat and control a highly infectious disease like the COVID-19. Health systems of China like any other place, encountered an enormous challenge to cope with the disease. However, from

² Chris Miller, "The Effect of COVID 19 on the U.S. Economy", Foreign Policy Research Institute, 30 March 2020.

³ "Covid-19's Historic Economic Impact, In the U.S. and Abroad", *HUB (Johns Hopkins Magazine)*, 17 April 2020, available at <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/04/16/coronavirus-impact-on-european-american-economies/>, accessed on 14 May 2020.

the time when the first case was confirmed in China in December 2019, WHO has been jointly working with Chinese government on combating the disease.⁴ There are some key features in China's actions against COVID-19. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, the country has put in place a coordinated effort under which the central authorities exercise overall planning and command and the local authorities work following the instructions, perform their respective duties and cooperate with each other. While closing all outbound routes, the authority of Wuhan carried out two rounds of mass screening of the city's 4.21 million households, leaving no household unchecked and ruled out all potential sources.⁵ Till date, it appears that China has become quite successful in controlling the COVID-19 transmission. The WHO-China Joint Mission consisting of 25 experts produced a report on the disease in China where it was mentioned that "China's rather unique and unprecedented public health response reversed the escalating cases in Hubei and beyond."⁶

The coronavirus outbreak has drawn national and international attention, spawning debates and discussions on the trajectory of the future global order. While the general discussion on the virus' impact on a host is being discussed, discussion on US-China relationship is receiving even more attention is that between the two most powerful countries of the world: the US and China. The rise of India and Russia is also very significant in contemporary international relations. However, when international order is concerned, the rise of China receives the utmost importance. Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on the rise of China and its relationship with the US. Although for the past few years, rise of China and decay of American power were in discussion, the COVID-19 added a twist to this discussion. Notably, the Sino-US relation has been passing a dramatic phase in past few years. During the Obama administration (2009-2016), the bilateral relation between the two countries reached a new height. According to Barack Obama, "the relationship between the United States and China is the most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century."⁷ In fact, after 44 years of establishing diplomatic relations, the two greatest economic powers forged unprecedented closed ties. However, the situation started to change when president Trump came into power of the US and Xi Jinping became

⁴ World Health Organisation, "China Shows COVID 19 Responses Must Be Tailored to the Local Context", 04 April 2020, Available at <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/4/china-shows-covid-19-responses-must-be-tailored-to-the-local-context>, accessed on 27 June 2020.

⁵ "Fighting COVID 19: China in Action", *Xinhuanet.com*, 07 June 2020, available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-06/07/c_139120424.htm, accessed on 29 June 2020.

⁶ "China Provides Vital Lessons of COVID-19 Containment for Global Response: WHO", *United News of Bangladesh*, 01 March 2020, available at <https://unb.com.bd/category/World/china-provides-vital-lessons-of-covid-19-containment-for-global-response-who/45719>, accessed on 29 June 2020.

⁷ Cheng Li, "Assessing U.S.-China Relations Under Obama Administration", *BROOKINGS*, 30 August 2016, Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/assessing-u-s-china-relations-under-the-obama-administration/>, accessed on 28 June 2020.

the President of China. In recent years, the US-China relationship is changing in some core areas. Currently, the two countries are engaged in one of the costly and intensive trade wars. Even if they can resolve it through extensive negotiations, there is no guarantee that it will provide long-term stability in their relationship. Major structural forces are affecting Sino-US bilateral relations and fierce competition has been increasing in the arena of economics, security, technology, artificial intelligence and ideas about governance. It is evident that longstanding source of competition in the field of security and economics is intensifying and simultaneously new areas of competition such as governance and technology are emerging.⁸

The rise of China in global affairs is not a recent incident, when President Xi Jinping came to power and everything started to change at a rapid pace. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of President Xi is interpreted by many as China's explicit march to become a global power. Some scholars argue that China took the stage of Beijing Olympic (2008) and specially, the inaugural ceremony of the event as the platform to showcase the new reality. Some also believe that creation of a new bank like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as opposed to the Bretton Woods system (the World Bank and IMF) in 2015 was the new beginning.⁹ Notably, about 62 years ago, A.F.K. Organski in his book first predicted the possible rise of China and its impacts in the global order. He foretold that the possible rise of China would be spectacular and "the power of China ought to eventually become greater" and the "western powers" will find that the most serious threat to their supremacy comes from China".¹⁰ Some international relations and security experts claim that an apparent power transition between the two countries has begun. This change was set in motion by China's profound and phenomenal economic growth over the past two or three decades.

In international relations, stable world order if not a myth is a very rare thing. And when it comes, it arises after a great disruption that creates both the desire and conditions for something new.¹¹ A stable global order requires equal distribution of power and a broad acceptance of the rules that operates the new system. Skilled statecraft is another component of a stable world order, since an order has to be made, not born naturally. And no matter how smooth the order is at the initial stage, maintaining it requires innovative diplomacy, functioning institutions as well as effective leadership and actions to adjust with critical circumstances. Eventually, the

⁸ Evan S. Medeiros, "The Changing Fundamentals of US-China Relations", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No.3, 2019, pp. 93-119.

⁹ Manuel Manonelles, "Hegemon Shifts in Times of Covid 19", Inter Press Service News Agency, 08 May 2020.

¹⁰ A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics*, Second Edition, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968, p. 361.

¹¹ Richard Haass, "How a World Order Ends and What Comes in Its Wake", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2019.

best managed order comes to an end, the balance of power underpinning the system becomes imbalanced and the institutions supporting the system fail to adapt to new circumstances.¹² As China has been rising economically and militarily, an emerging question in international relations is whether the power transition between the US and China is going to occur soon.

Notably, there are international relations theories, namely, the hegemonic stability theory and power transition theory which can assist in understanding possible hegemonic power shifts. The above-mentioned theories explain the connection between hegemonic and rising power, international public goods, the causes of war during hegemonic transitions as well as the stability of global orders.¹³ The two theories provide venerable frameworks for understanding issues related to sustainability of global order. In fact, they comprise members of a broader family of theories in understanding hegemonic order. And if discussions and analyses on power transition are substantiated by theories, then it become more interesting and meaningful.

In this backdrop, the objective of this paper is to view whether the ongoing COVID-19 is going to change the global power structure. To that end, key research questions of this paper are: What are the takeaways of hegemonic stability theory and power transition theory regarding recent global changes? Has the US-led liberal international order come to an end? What is the impact of COVID-19 on contemporary world order?

To find out answers to those questions, the paper is divided into five sections including introduction and conclusion. The second section is a theoretical analysis of the Sino-US power transition. Section three shed lights on whether the US-led liberal international order has come to an end. And section four focuses on the COVID-19 and the prospect for a new global leadership.

This is a qualitative research work based on secondary sources including books, journals, newspapers, magazines, policy papers, issues briefs, seminar papers, blogs, official websites of different stakeholders, etc.

2. Sino-US Power Transition from Theoretical Perspectives

In international relations, rise and fall of states is a common phenomenon. In the course of time, some states emerge as the superpower and even hegemon of their age, while others drop out of the top ranks and even face challenges in their

¹² Ibid.

¹³ G. John Ikenberry and Daniel. H. Nexon, "Hegemony Studies 3.0: The Dynamics of Hegemonic Orders", *Security Studies*, Vol. 28, Issue 3, 2019, pp. 395-421.

statehood. Although Spain, Italy, Austria, Hungary and Ottoman Empires failed to secure hegemonic leadership, Germany became successful after the First World War and China appears to do the same. Naturally, the process of changes at the top of international leadership is a topic of significant interest to policymakers as well as scholars. Although it is very difficult to predict the possible pattern or format of power transition, we only can assess the scenario analysing international relations' theories perspectives as well as recent global context. In the next few paragraphs, using two important theories, hegemonic stability theory and power transition, this chapter tries to assess whether China will soon become a hegemonic power.

2.1 Hegemonic Stability Theory

The hegemonic stability theory refers that international economic stability and openness are possible when there is a single dominant state in the system or hegemonic power. The basic connotation of the theory is that the distribution of power among states is the primary attribute of the international economic system.¹⁴ Notably, in the second half of the 20th century, the hegemonic stability theory was introduced by some thinkers including Stephen Krasner, Robert Keohane and Robert Gilpin. Being introduced in the 1970s, the theory was developed primarily to explain the Pax Britannica and Pax Americana. While explaining the theory, Keohane argues that “order in world politics is typically created by a single dominant power and this order is constituted by the formation of regimes and the provision of public goods.”¹⁵ To be considered as a hegemonic power in the global political economy, a country must have access to enough and crucial raw materials, control major sources of capital, control a large market and hold comparative advantages in goods yielding relatively high wages and profits. It also must have a superior position than any other country of the system.¹⁶ Only a hegemonic power has the capability to establish rules or norms which facilitate the orderly exchanges amongst countries and also has the ability to punish the transgressors with predictable penalties. It has therefore the incentive to provide the public goods as it is the strongest actor of the system in perpetuating the existing international order that gives the country an upper hand or dominant position. Only a hegemonic leader can provide the public good because it has the strongest position in terms of economy, military and politics.¹⁷ The theory of hegemonic stability is very important in understanding the stability and instability

¹⁴ Michael C. Webb and Stephen D. Krasner, “Hegemonic Stability Theory: An Empirical Assessment”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 15, pp. 183-198, 1989.

¹⁵ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 31-39.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁷ Mohd. Noor Mat Yazid, “The Theory of Hegemonic Stability, Hegemonic Power and International Political Economic Stability”, *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, Vol. 3, No. 6, December 2015, p. 68.

in the international system. According to this theory, the role of a hegemonic power is crucial in creating stability in international economy and politics. Without a responsible and strong hegemonic power, the creation of a stable international order is quite impossible.

To become a hegemon, a state must have three attributes: the capability to enforce the rules of the system, the will to do so, and a commitment to a system which is beneficial to major states. Realist thinkers and analysts, besides their attributes to power politics, frequently underlined the importance of a hegemonic power for systemic stability. If we take the example of Pax Britannica of the 19th century, Great Britain as the hegemonic leader ensured global balance of power and provided security of international trade and simultaneously, it played the role of conflict resolver of the world in crucial times. Similarly, in the post-war hegemonic order, the US played the role of hegemon ensuring political and economic stability at the global level assisted by the governance architecture formed around the UN system and the Bretton Woods institutions. There were some regional instruments like the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Union (EU) that helped forming the system as well as multilateral platforms like the G20 played an important role for the hegemonic system by facilitating burden sharing mechanisms among important players of the system.

2.2 Power Transition Theory

There is another theory to explain the probable power transition which is the power transition theory. Over the years, this has become one of the most successful structural theories of world politics. There are reasons why the theory continues to generate interest among scholars and policymakers for long. To mention some, the theory offers falsifiable expectations about the future of world politics. For instance, if China continues to grow in terms of different types of power as it has for a couple of decades, there are bright signs that it will surpass the US as the world's dominant power sometime before the first half of this century. Historic instances represent that power transitions among big powers have corresponded with big wars. These two are the most important strategic projections of the 21st Century.¹⁸ These calculations are based on historic instances and are central to the discussions of cooperation, conflict, war and peace among great powers. Power transition theory tends to attack the central issue of global politics-stability among great powers. It posits that the power transition process between China and the US may cause catastrophic war.¹⁹

¹⁸ Douglas Lemke and Ronald L. Tammen, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China", *International Interactions*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2003, p. 270.

¹⁹ Ibid.

A. F. K. Organski, the key proponent of the theory observes there are two fundamental components of the power transition theory. According to him, a country's power originates from its internal development. Since development occurs at a different pace, dissimilarity in terms of relative power is observed among states. Another fundamental characteristic of power transition theory is that the international order is primarily shaped by the dominant nation or hegemon. Power transition usually happens when a rising power overtakes the dominant power. That sometimes may be peaceful when the rising power is satisfied with the global order. In the case of the US overtaking Britain, the power transition was peaceful as the rising power, the US, was satisfied with the then global order. In some instances, power transition may lead to war, as when a dissatisfied emerging power Germany, grew in power vis-à-vis the hegemon, Britain.²⁰ According to Organski, although dissatisfaction is a relative term, there are two ways to view the subject: first, a dissatisfied emerging power cannot be an ally of the dominant power and it does not possess any part in the existing international order. Therefore, the rising power does not feel itself as a part of the existing system and also does not uphold fundamental values of the system and often finds existing international order functioning against its own interest. And when it becomes powerful enough, it tries to alter the system according to its own interests and preferences.²¹

Power transition theory also analyses why a rising power and an established power engage into a conflict or even go to war. According to this theory, if the rising state is a status quo one, the process of power transition is expected to be a peaceful one. If the rising state is a revisionist one, power transition between the rising and dominant state may occur through a major war. Therefore, the two explanatory variables of the theory have become central to the discussion of hegemonic change and major war: relative power and degree of satisfaction with the international system.²² The interaction between these variables is the main cause of war and peace in a global system.²³ However, based on theoretical and empirical studies, Organski and Kugler mention that a power transition between the hegemonic and rising power is a necessary condition but not enough or sufficient condition for major war.²⁴ There are several assumptions of the power transition theory:

²⁰ Woosang Kim and Scott Gates, "Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China", *International Area Studies Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2015, pp. 219-226.

²¹ David Lai, *The United States and China in Power Transition*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, December 2011, p. 18.

²² Weiwei Wang, "How to maintain peaceful Sino-US relations", *Asian Education and Development Studies*, Vol. 5 Issue 3, 2016, pp. 278-287.

²³ Jonathan M. DiCicco and Jack S. Levy, "Power Shifts and Problem Shifts: The Evolution of the Power Transition Research Program", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 43, No. 6, December 1999, pp. 675-704.

²⁴ A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The war Ledger*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

- a) The nature of the international system is primarily hierarchical and is dominated by a single superpower, international norms are generally created by the most dominant country of the system.
- b) The uneven economic growth or difference of economic growth among big powers or particularly between the dominant actor and the challenger may destabilise the system or even slide into war.²⁵
- c) If the challenger is dissatisfied, then it may turn into war. It happens particularly amidst the state of parity.²⁶
- d) Alliances tend to play the central role contributing to national power and international change.²⁷

2.3 Assessing the Current State of Sino-US Power Transition

To understand the format of Sino-US power transition, it is required to analyse some puzzles in the process. The first puzzle in the Sino-US power transition is whether China has the attributes of becoming a global hegemon. According to the hegemonic stability theory, “states can cooperate economically with one another when the hegemonic power holds the ring economically and militarily”.²⁸ As mentioned earlier, Keohane thinks a hegemonic power needs to have access to crucial raw materials, control dominant sources of capital, capability to control a large market and hold comparative advantages in goods, wages and profits. It also must have a superior position than any other country of the system. Notably, for more than a century, the US is the largest economy of the world accounting for over 24 per cent GDP of the world in 2016.²⁹ However, both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) now rate China as the world’s largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP). The centre for Economic and Business Research predicts that in 2029, China’s economy will surpass the US economy in every parameter.³⁰ The following pie-chart will illustrate a comparison between the US and China in various parameters.

²⁵ Weiwei Wang, op. cit.

²⁶ Ronald L. Tammen, “The Organski Legacy: A Fifty-Year Research Program”, *International Interactions*, Vol. 34, Issue 4, 2008, pp. 314-332.

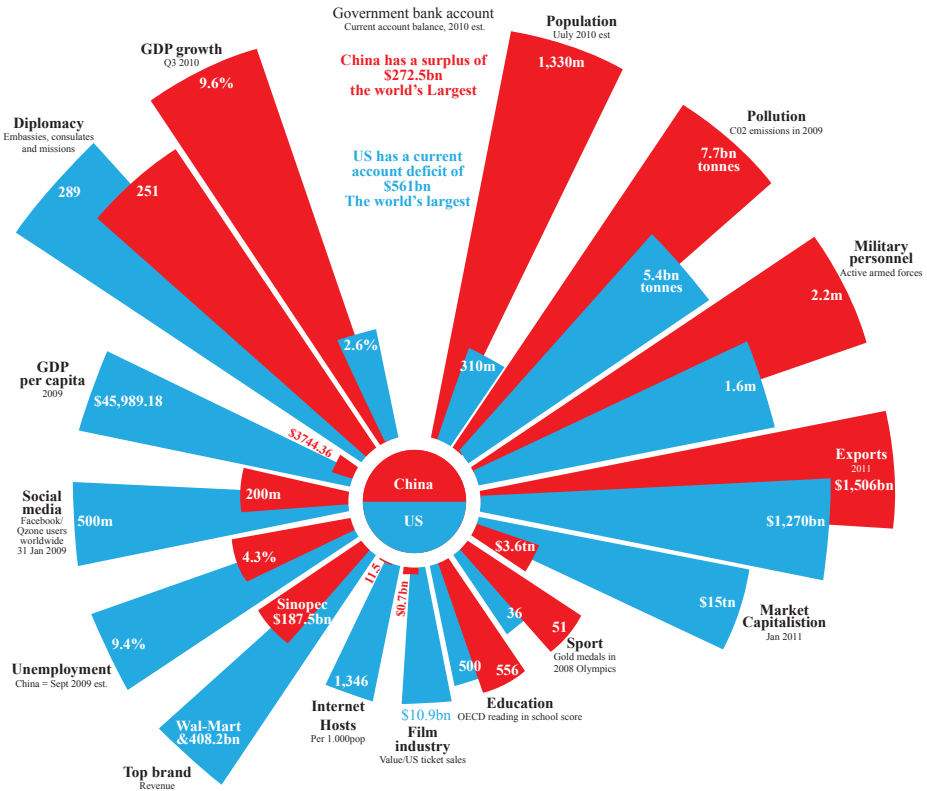
²⁷ Weiwei Wang, op. cit.

²⁸ Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading States: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World*, New York: Basic Books, 1986, p. 55.

²⁹ The World Bank, “Data Catalog”, available at <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/gdp-ranking>, accessed on 13 July 2020.

³⁰ Cebr, “World Economic League Table 2016”, 26 December 2015, available at <https://cebr.com/reports/welt-2016/>, accessed on 13 July 2020.

Figure 1: Comparison between the US and China



Source: "China V the US: How the Superpowers Compare", *The Guardian*, available at https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/jun/The_Guardian, 07 June 2013.

It appears that although the US till date is the only superpower, China in recent years has been growing rapidly. Particularly in some core areas like population, GDP growth, military personnel and exports, it is well ahead of the US. In addition to that, according to the International Energy Agency, China's share of the global renewable energy supply stands at 15.6 per cent compared with approximately 4.2 per cent in the hands of the US.³¹

The scenario presented in the pie-chart mainly contains the 2009-2010 data. However, more recent data (2015) can illustrate the scenario.

³¹ "China V the US: How the Superpowers Compare", *The Guardian*, available at https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/jun/The_Guardian, 07/china-us-how-superpowers-compare-datablog, accessed on 21 June 2020/2013.

Table 1: Comparison between the US and China (2015)

Parameters	United States	China	World's #3
Size of economy in 2015 (GDP in USD billions)	18,037	11,065	4,383 (Japan)
Military Budget in 2015 (in USD billions)	611	216	69 (Russia)
US-China Trade Balance in 2016 (in USD billions)	Exports: 169 Imports: 479 Deficit: 310	Exports: 479 Imports: 169 Surplus: 310	N/A

Source: Andreas Boje Forsby, “Striking a New Balance? US-China Relations Under Trump”, *DIIS Report, No. 2017:07*, ISBN 978-87-7605-877-7.

The pie-chart and the table refer that in terms of economy, China is quite close to the US and in some parameters, has already surpassed the US. However, in some important areas, it is lagging far behind the US. The size of the US economy and its expenditure in defense sector are far ahead than those of China. The country is still lagging behind the US in terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flow to the country. Its high-tech exports are four times less than those of the US.³² In different other sectors like market capitalisation, social media, diplomacy and GDP per capita, it is also clearly lagging behind the US. With the same token, it also falls short of a distinct characteristic of a hegemon that the country is yet to achieve a superior position than any other country of the system. It, therefore, lacks the power of norm setting for a new global order.

The second question is whether China is willing to take the hegemonic leadership. To assess the intention of China, the country’s global vision needs to be discussed. China claims that it has a peaceful global vision as maintaining world peace is one of the core foreign policy objectives of the country. The basic objectives of Chinese foreign policy is centered on “safeguarding national independence and state sovereignty, and creating an international environment favorable to its reform, opening and modernisation efforts, as well as maintaining world peace and promoting common development.”³³ China’s global vision and foreign policy goals can further be assessed by the speech of a high ranked policymaker of the country where he noted that to make a peaceful global order, the country’s foreign policy would aim to firmly uphold multilateralism and free trade, enhance high quality belt and road

³² Andrea Willige, “The World’s Top Economy: The US Vs China in Five Charts”, World Economic Forum, 05 December 2016, available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/12/the-world-s-top-economy-the-us-vs-china-in-five-charts/>, accessed on 15 July 2020.

³³ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, “Main Characteristics of China’s Foreign Policy”, available at <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/zgwjzc/t35077.htm>, accessed on 25 June 2020.

cooperation, usher a new era of China-Russia relations, work more closely with Europe in addressing global challenges, enhance efforts to build a community with shared future with neighbouring countries, further elevate south-south cooperation and actively promote the hotspot issues.³⁴

The noble principles of China's foreign policy indicate that China has the peaceful global vision and currently the country has no intention to become a global hegemon. However, according to many, the Belt and Road initiative and consolidation of power by President Xi Jinping raises suspicion among many about the real intention of China. Cheng Li notes that President Xi Jinping has repositioned himself as a populist leader in China targeting China's rise as a global power.³⁵ China's aspiration of global leadership becomes evident in the 19th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress Report which is China's most authoritative document. In that document, for the first time in known history, Beijing expressed its intention to contend for global leader. In the document, states that by mid-twenty first century, China aspires to "become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence".³⁶ In recent years, Beijing is trying to enhance its image before the global community through increased participation in global governance. Currently, the country is the highest contributor in the UN peacekeeping operations.³⁷ In 2020, China funded 12 per cent of the total UN budget³⁸ while in the 2000s, it contributed only 1 per cent.³⁹ In addition to the budget, China heads four of the 15 specialised agencies of the UN: the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). Based on these instances, it appears that China has aspiration to become a hegemonic leader, if not now, in future.

And one of the most important questions is whether the power transition between China and the US will be peaceful or not. There are different viewpoints regarding the nature (peaceful or conflicting) and timeframe of the power transition. Another question

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China's Foreign Policy in a First Changing World: Mission and Responsibility-Speech by Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng at the Lunch Meeting of the Eighth World Peace Forum", 08 July 2019, available at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1679454.shtml, accessed on 25 June 2020.

³⁵ Tarun Chhabra and Ryan Hass, "Global China: Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy", *Brookings*, September 2019, Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/global-china-domestic-politics-and-foreign-policy/>, accessed on 29 June 2020.

³⁶ "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress", *Xinhua*, 04 November 2017, Available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm, accessed on 26 June 2020.

³⁷ "Is China Contributing to the United Nations' Mission", *China Power*, available at: <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-un-mission/>, accessed on 28 June 2020.

³⁸ Joseph A. Klein, "China's Hollow Complaints About Late U.S. Payments to the UN", *Canada Free Press*, available at <https://canadafreepress.com/article/chinas-hollow-complaints-about-late-u.s.-payments-to-the-un1>, accessed on 28 June 2020.

³⁹ "Is China Contributing to the United Nations' Mission", op. cit.

that comes to the forefront is, whether the possible power transition between the US and China will occur through conflicts or it will be a peaceful one. Although this paper primarily does not focus on the possibility of conflict while power transitions between the two countries, it will briefly shed light on the issue. Research in the field reveals that conflict while power transition depends on some variables and two of which are relative power and satisfaction of the rising power.⁴⁰ Gilpin opposes the ‘balance of power’ or balancing theory. He argues that the system naturally goes toward equilibrium. And to create a new system, global war or hegemonic war is required. After a global war a new hegemon will create the new system of the world according to its own preferences. He further argues that the more decisive a victory in the hegemonic war, the more durable the new system will be.⁴¹ Organski also notes that the equilibrium or relatively equal distribution of power among the actors is one of two major indicators that are responsible to increase the probability of war.⁴² As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the US and China are not in the dangerous position of power parity, it can be argued that there is the least possibility of war between them in near future. The next chapter will discuss whether we have come to an end of the US-led liberal international order.

3. The End of the US-led Liberal International Order?

For more than seven decades, the world has been run and dominated by a western liberal order. After the end of the Second World War, the US and its western allies built an international order based on liberal values such as economic openness, market based economic system, multilateral institutions etc. However, the notion that a system with many great powers will follow the US as the sole superpower has faded to a great extent.⁴³ Currently, the liberal international system is facing an unprecedented challenge as the US president Donald Trump as the president who is actively hostile to the system. His statements on alliances, trade, international law, environment, multilateralism, human rights and torture, if acted upon, would effectively bring an end to the America’s leading role in the current liberal international order. Moreover, Britain’s decision to leave the EU has added more pressure to the system.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ray Leonardo, “Assessment of the United States-China Power Transition and the New World Order”, *Real Clear Defense*, 12 September 2017, available at https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/09/12/us-china_power_transition_and_the_new_world_order_112281.html, accessed on 15 June 2020.

⁴¹ Robert Gilpin, “The Theory of Hegemonic War”, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 591-613, 1988.

⁴² Ronald L. Tammen, op. cit.

⁴³ Yan Xuetong, “From a Unipolar to a Bipolar Superpower System: The Future of the Global Power Dynamic”, *Carnegie Tsinghua Center for Global Policy*, 30 December 2011, Available at <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2011/12/30/from-unipolar-to-bipolar-superpower-system-future-of-global-power-dynamic-pub-47688>, accessed on 22 June 2020.

⁴⁴ G. John Ikenberry, “The end of liberal international order?”, *International Affairs*, Volume 94, Issue 1, January 2018, pp. 07–23.

Rising economic insecurity and grievance across western countries are another major concern for the liberal international order. Since the 2008 financial crisis, the fortunes of the middle class and workers have become stagnated in those countries.⁴⁵ The post-war generations who enjoyed various opportunities and rising wages, started feeling unwell amidst the stagnated situation. In fact, the post-Cold War growth in trade and interdependence could not directly advance the incomes and various life opportunities of many segments of the western industrialised countries.⁴⁶ Milanovic described the differential economic growth across the world in the last couple of decades as an ‘elephant curve’. He finds by looking across the global income level that vast amounts of global real per capita income have been made in two different groups. One group comprises workers in countries like India and China who are engaged in low-end manufacturing and service-related jobs with very minimal wages, have experienced dramatic surge, even if the group of people remains at the lower end of the global income spectrum. He mentioned this segment as the hump of the elephant’s back. Another group is the top 1 per cent, and indeed the top 0.01 per cent who have gained massive increases in wealth. This portion he termed as the elephant’s trunk.⁴⁷ Therefore, a sort of stagnation has been created in economic spheres of the western working and middle class, is reinforced by long term shifts in trade patterns, technology, organisation and for manufacturing jobs. Amidst these adverse economic conditions, it is harder today than in the past to view the liberal economic order as a source of economic safety and protection. Gradually, the ‘embedded’ character of the liberal international economic order has eroded to a great extent.⁴⁸

There are some signs which indicate that the US lacks willingness to remain as the global leader. The Trump administration threatened the cohesion of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the most successful military alliance in history. It has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal. Not only that, it also has withdrawn from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia, the UN Human Rights Council, Paris Climate Agreement and World Health Organisation.

Hence, is it possible to say that the US-led liberal international order has come to an end? The answer is very difficult. However, it can be noted that in its 200 years of journey, the liberal international order has established certain norms and created

⁴⁵ Ronald Ingelhart and Pippa Norris, “Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic have-nots and Cultural Backlash, *Working Paper* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School), 19 July 2016.

⁴⁶ G. John Ikenberry, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁷ Branko Milanovic, *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.

⁴⁸ Jeff D. Colgan and Robert O. Keohane, “The Liberal Order Is Rigged: Fix It Now or Watch It Wither”, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017, pp. 36-44.

certain institutions that it will be difficult to terminate the order. Ikenberry finds some reasons behind the order's durability. First, the order is built upon multilateral trade relations among countries. Perhaps this is one of the fundamental characteristics of the liberal international order. The post-war global order was divided into several imperial zones, blocs and spheres of influence. However, the US policymakers gave efforts to open the world economy, build institutions and make partnerships to construct a durable and open international system. They became quite successful in their plan and established a global system where liberal democracies facilitated trade through the Global Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) and later the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Second, the post-war liberal international order was built upon there have been several new and permanent international institutions. Governments in the order would therefore, organise their relations around permanent regional and global institutions. Third, there was a special focus on the relationship among liberal democratic countries. The core norms and principles of the liberal order could be constructed as 'universal'. Thus, principles of multilateralism embedded the post-war global world.⁴⁹ Above all, the system was constructed as a public good where all followers could benefit from the system. As still most countries including China follow the current system, it is very tough to note that these institutions are obsolete and the current international order is coming to an end.

Now, another big question is where does the world now stand in the US-China power transition? To assess the progress of the transition, David Lai's analysis can be referred. Lai divides the US-China power transition in two phases. According to him, the first phase of power transition has already been concluded (1978-2008). It started in 1978 when China first embarked on its modernisation mission. The global community first realised its appearance in the early 1990s and it got accelerated in the early 2000s. During the first phase, a widespread 'China threat' transmitted elsewhere overshadowing China's bilateral relations with the outside world. The rising China refused to accept democratic values and standards and was controlled by an authoritarian party. However, the 'China threat' allegation appeared as an insulting one and China tried to portray that power transition is primarily a western concept and Thucydides Trap should not apply to China's relations with the US.⁵⁰

The second phase of the US-China power transition has started from 2009 stretching more likely to 2050. According to Lai, the most notable thing of this phase is narrowing of the gap between the hegemonic leader and the rising power. He finds that there will be two different types of consequences. First, the leader of the system will start to feel strategic anxiety and uneasiness with the rising power and it will

⁴⁹ G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?", *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, Issue 1, January 2018, pp. 707-23.

⁵⁰ David Lai, "The US-China Power Transition: Stage II, *The Diplomat*, 30 June 2016. (URL needed)

impact the international order. The leader will still try to control the rising power and shape the global order. Similarly, there is a possibility that as the system leader still has much power, it can launch a preemptive strike to derail the rising power. The rising power, on the other hand, has become more confident about its strengths and powers and starts to behave more assertively and uncompromisingly. In the first stage, the rising power had to comply with the system leader in many circumstances, however, in the second phase, the rising power started acting more aggressively.⁵¹ Although the projection appears feasible to some extent, sudden global events like pandemic or financial crisis may accelerate the process and shorten the second phase.

Although it is evident that the US-led liberal international order is facing difficulties, the continuity of the system seems feasible when alternatives are considered. Till date, the alternatives to liberal order are various types of closed systems--a world of blocs, protectionist zones and spheres. There is little room for doubt that so far, there is simply no ideological competitor to a liberal international order. China does not have any model that the rest of the world can follow. Although China created banks like the AIIB or NDB, it could not create institutions alternative to the Bretton Woods system. The interests, values, norms and vulnerabilities of the liberal international system are still appealing to the global community. The system survived 200 years through various turmoil, ups and downs and still can survive at least for a couple more decades. Therefore, it can be argued that China is a rising power which thus far have not acquired the capability to be a global hegemon in reality. When power transition theory is applied to the Sino-US relations, it can be assessed that the relations are in the preliminary or early middle stage of the process. They are not in the dangerous position of power parity. According to one scholar, China and the US are both status quo states and part of the established global order.⁵² However, is any transition going to be witnessed in global leadership due to the ongoing pandemic COVID-19? The next chapter sheds lights on this aspect.

4. COVID-19 and the Prospect for a New Global Leadership

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a major shift in the US' foreign policy. The global community witnessed America alone is fighting the pandemic as per the 'America First' foreign policy. Notably, the National Security Strategy which was adopted during President Trump's first year in office, describes an "America First foreign policy in action". In the introductory note, it was written that "we are prioritising the interests of our citizens and protecting our sovereign rights as a nation". Although some officials tried to explain 'America first would not mean 'America

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Weiwei Wang, op. cit.

alone', in the COVID-19 crisis, this foreign policy revealed its true character. In fact, the global pandemic has posed a real challenge to President Trump.⁵³ The America First foreign policy is not providing enough confidence in the US leadership and also could not provide better service to the American people. Rather than leading from the front and sorting out a coordinated international response, president Trump started blaming first China and then Europe for the spread of the disease. The US diplomacy and soft power faced a big credibility challenge since the outbreak of the disease. Without a prior notice, the US imposed a travel ban on NATO member countries. A virtual meeting of the G-7 countries was held at the initiative of the French President Emanuel Macron and not by President Donald Trump, though the US is chairing that prestigious group of the world's advanced economies. China, on the contrary, played very tactfully the big power's role by being generous to countries unlike the US who was dingy amidst the crisis. The US diplomacy even failed to do easy tasks like transmitting solidarity with countries struggling with COVID-19 outbreak or appreciating countries which became successful in controlling the disease. Kori Schake observed, "in addition to the systemic damage to America's soft power, the president's smug unilateralism has encouraged others to act just as selfishly."⁵⁴ It is an undeniable fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has tarnished the image of the US as a global leader to a great extent. Response of the US to the coronavirus was quite different from any other crisis the country faced in past years. From a theoretical perspective, the US as a hegemonic power and being a global leader, should have taken the responsibility of providing global public goods. However, the US, the 'central actor' of global leadership, does not have capacity or willingness to provide the expected support to fellow countries affected by COVID-19.⁵⁵

Most recently, President Trump announced to cut off the US' relationship with the WHO. He accused the global health body is 'effectively' controlled by Beijing. He noted that the US was terminating its relationship with the WHO, and added that the organisation's more than US\$ 400 million annual contribution of the US would be diverted to other health sectors or groups.⁵⁶ Chinese President Xi Jinping, on the contrary, announced that Beijing would donate US\$ 2 billion toward fighting COVID-19, dispatch doctors and medical services to Africa and other developing countries. Interestingly, the relationship between Beijing and the WHO changed a lot in recent years.⁵⁷ Notably, two decades ago during the SARS crisis, the WHO was pressing China to be frank and come clean on unfolding the pandemic. Even for the

⁵³ Kori Schake, "The Damage The 'America First' Has Done", *The Atlantic*, 20 March 2020. (URL needed)

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Shen Yi, "US Hegemony in Peril Amid COVID-19 Pandemic", *The Global Times*, 11 April 2020.

⁵⁶ David J. Lynch and Emily Rauhala, "Trump Says U.S. to Withdraw from World Health Organisation and Announces New BroadSides against Beijing", *The Washington Post*, 30 May 2020.

⁵⁷ Andrew Jacobs, Michael D. Shear and Edward Wong, "U.S.- China Feud Over Coronavirus Erupts at World Health Assembly", *The New York Times*, 18 May 2020.

first time, they issued the organisation's their first ever advisory on travelling China. Some analysts attribute the turnaround in the relationship between Beijing and WHO is mainly because of China's growing financial contributions to the global health body. Observers of the UN indicate more fundamental reason: a well-articulated Chinese plan to expand its sphere of influence in the multilateral body.⁵⁸

One of the key aspects of the liberal international order is that in this system, democratic countries are independent in nature and interact with each other by free trade, thus free flow of goods and services across borders. In addition to that, in this globalised world, people tend to visit more frequently than before. These characteristics have amplified that the system is awfully favorable to spread of highly contagious disease like the COVID-19. The pandemic is threatening the liberal international order liberal international order in three ways. First, the openness of the order is congenial for proliferation of highly infectious disease. And with the outbreak of the disease, governments started taking about policies which were not consistent with economic and political policies of liberal international order. Second, the health crisis posed by COVID-19 undermines political freedom of people. Particularly, steps like border closures, ethnic differentiation and also biometric surveillance have emanated since the outbreak which are not compatible with the liberal international order. Third, various actions, both coordinated and uncoordinated, have taken to cope with the pandemic put economic freedom of individuals at risk as financial activity declines and economic security policies consistent with economic nationalism start to menace liberal policies.⁵⁹

For the last seven decades, the US has led the international order because it could make the system a public good where the troubled actor received some sort of support. However, probably for the first time in history, it has been solely self-centered. Even it could not appreciate international institutions or non-governmental organisations that are working on the issue and raising money. Rather it has been continuing the blame game and cutting off relations with the institution which is actively engaged in global health issues. Noam Chomsky mentions that the overriding lesson of the COVID-19 pandemic is that the crisis represents "another colossal failure of the neoliberal version of capitalism".⁶⁰ Kishore Mahbubani also has the same feeling about the West's response to COVID-19. He thinks that the West's incompetent response to the coronavirus will hasten the power shift to the East. He noted, "history

⁵⁸ C. Raja Mohan, "COVID 19 has Sharpened US-China Conflict. WHO is Caught in the Crossfire", *The Indian Express*, 24 March 2020.

⁵⁹ Carla Norrlof "COVID 19 and the liberal International Order: Exposing Liberal Order's Instabilities and Weaknesses in an Open International System", *FIIA Comment*, April 2020.

⁶⁰ Christina Magdaleno, "Chomsky on COVID-19: the latest massive failure of neoliberalism", *EURACTIV*, 25 April 2020, Available at <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/interview/chomsky-on-covid-19-the-latest-massive-failure-of-neoliberalism/a>, accessed on 20 June 2020.

has turned a corner. The era of western domination is ending. The resurgence of Asia in world affairs and the global economy, which was happening before the emergence of COVID-19, will be cemented in a new world order after the crisis”.⁶¹ Last but not the least, the recently published book by former National Security Adviser John Bolton titled *The Room Where It Happened* reveals controversial facts about Trump. In the book, Bolton wrote that to gain success in the upcoming election, the president overtly linked discussion on tariffs by asking Chinese Premier Xi Jinping to buy American agricultural products to help him win farm states.⁶²

Major global events of the past remind that the role of a global leader is very crucial amidst a crisis time. However, such a leadership role is mostly absent in the COVID-19 pandemic. The disease has spread everywhere; it has attacked the rich as well as the poor, the strong and also the weak. In the past, the US traditionally came forward and offered leadership using its unique economic, military, political power, mobilised resources and spurred international efforts to a common direction. This role was visible in the cases of the South Asian Tsunami, global financial crisis and the outbreak of Ebola in Africa. The US generally viewed such occasions as the opportunity to treat those as positive sum games to navigate those global challenges with China. However, the scenario is quite different in this time of global pandemic of COVID-19.

Arguably, the role of China and the US in response to the COVID-19 pandemic reminds of the US initiated Marshall Plan (1948-51) which helped the recovery process of war ravaged Europe in the post-war period. The global community is witnessing a similar type of role of China in the outbreak. When the pandemic started to spread throughout the world, China started supplying millions of masks and other necessary equipment to struggling governments. With different types of aid, it conveyed broad public statements of goodwill. In a message to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, president Xi Jinping said that “public health crises pose a common challenge for humanity, and solidarity and cooperation are the most powerful weapon to tackle them.”⁶³ Through the AIIB, Beijing sanctioned a \$250 million loan to Bangladesh to support the Bangladesh government’s endeavour to cope with the coronavirus pandemic.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Kishore Mahbubani, “The World After the Covid 19: Kishore Mahbubani on the Dawn of the Asian Century”, *The Economist*, 20 April 2020.

⁶² Peter Baker, “Bolton Says Trump Impeachment Inquiry Missed Other Troubling Episodes”, *The New York Times*, 17 June 2020.

⁶³ Gavin Fernando, “Coronavirus: Why China’s government is offering COVID 19 aid relief to other countries”, news.com.au, 29 March 2020, Available at <https://www.news.com.au/world/coronavirus/global/coronavirus-why-chinas-government-is-offering-covid19-aid-relief-to-other-countries/news-story/5c36ea59b6ff46290cd8304830ce2bca>, accessed on 15 June 2020.

⁶⁴ “China Backed AIIB Approves \$250 Million Loan for Bangladesh’s COVID Response”, *Reuters*, 21 May 2020. (URL needed)

Although amidst the pandemic China articulated a noble gesture of friendship and cooperation, there is a perception that this is not an altruistic gesture on China's part. Rather, they are a part of its effort to reshape the global political structure and portrayal of an image that China is leading the battle to bring the pandemic under control.⁶⁵ It has been observed that amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the country did not fully abandon issues of its core national interest. It is alleged that under cover of COVID-19, China stepped up brinkmanship in the South China Sea. While the US is busy in fighting with the virus, China takes the opportunity to coerce its maritime neighbours to abandon their rights and claims in the South China Sea and irrevocably alter the status quo. Beijing seeks to establish its rights in its alleged nine-dash line, an unrecognised boundary the country has drawn around 85 per cent of the South China Sea, almost all of it in international waters and also controls US\$ 3.4 trillion in shipped goods every year.⁶⁶ China's uncompromising attitude also becomes evident as the country has recently engaged in clashes with India in Sino-Indian border. Therefore, it is still a puzzle whether China is manipulating the situation to exert its sphere of influence in Asia and beyond.

In recent times and more specifically with the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, it has been observed that the US hegemonic leadership is facing paramount difficulties. Its global strategy shifted from maintenance of hegemonic stability to the pursuit of typical power politics in a chaotic as well as poorly managed international system. Under the leadership of Trump, it has started to disregard many global norms, values, traditions and institutions on which the post-war international order had been established from its predecessor. It appears that the US' reluctance to provide public goods such as economic and political stability, regulatory framework and institutional mechanisms for a liberal international order cast grave doubt on sustainability of the contemporary liberal international order and its future. The Trump administration supported by military-industrial complex and ideologically motivated civil society groups, has embarked on social and economic protectionism, trade wars, xenophobia against Hispanic(s), Afro-American, Muslim and migrant communities. In a nutshell, the classical version of American hegemony based on the liberal global order by providing public goods in return for the widespread support and social consent appears to be coming to an end.⁶⁷ The global pandemic dealt the latest blow to the infirm order. And there will be very few people to disagree with the fact that it exposes inherent loopholes, instabilities and enduring weaknesses with open societies connected through an open and liberal international system.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Gavin Fernando, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Robert A. Manning and Patrick M. Crosnin, "Elephants in the Room: Under Cover of Pandemic, China Steps up in Brinkmanship in South China Sea", *Foreign Policy*, 14 May 2020.

⁶⁷ Sadik Unay, "From Hegemonic Stability to Chaotic Power Politics", *Daily Sabah*, 27 August 2018.

⁶⁸ Maria Annala, "Covid-19 and the liberal international order: Exposing instabilities and weaknesses in an open international system", *FIIA Briefing Paper*, 17 April 2020, Available at <https://www.fiaa.fi/en/publication/covid-19-pandemic-threatens-us-elections>, accessed on 15 June 2020.

5. Conclusion

The global community has been passing through a testing time of history. The ongoing pandemic COVID-19 has already terminated the regular course of actions of everyday life. The US, amidst this testing time, has been facing paramount challenges to cope. Although, till date, it is the sole superpower, it has been facing a big challenge from the rising China. It has been observed that the two most powerful countries have already engaged in a tug of war.

It appears that the US-led liberal international order itself is facing a huge challenge in the changing global context. The US on one hand, is falling short of playing the role of hegemonic leader. It has already declared to cut off its relationship with the WHO. It did not or could not lend a hand to other countries in the crisis period. Notably, the country is also severely affected by the disease. China, on the other hand, has been playing a vital role in the COVID-19 pandemic. It has extended support to the WHO and assisted many countries in combating challenges emanating from the pandemic. It has supplied necessary medical assistance to many countries. However, there is also suspicion among many scholars about this apparent noble behaviour of China. Without doubt, it can be noted that the Sino-US relationship is going through significant changes in recent years.

The recent pandemic could have appeared as a chance of better global cooperation between the US and China. They could exchange their best practices to stem the further spread of the disease, develop effective vaccines for coronavirus at the earliest possible time, and take necessary steps for mass production of medicines to supply globally or assist the neediest countries in fighting the disease. However, till date these things did not happen; rather, with the emergence of the highly infectious disease, the global community is witnessing a new type of rhetoric war over causes of the pandemic as well as the apportionment of the disease for global havoc. Undoubtedly, this type of politicisation of the issue is not good for the global community. It is a fact that the unemployment rate is gradually increasing in the US and that might trigger poverty and economic downturn in the future, however, it does not necessarily mean that this superpower has cut off the budget of the WHO because of its fund constraints. The US has declared to terminate its relationships with this global body accusing it of protecting China in this pandemic. This move can further deteriorate management of health sector in many underdeveloped and developing countries.

The study reveals that although the COVID-19 pandemic has brought several changes in contemporary international affairs, there is no conclusive evidence to predict that in the quickest possible time, the world order will change. However, it can be noted that the current pandemic has already affected the US to a great extent which will definitely make an impact in the country's domestic and international

policies. China, on the contrary, has already shown that it has taken drastic measures to tackle the COVID-19 and is ready to play a bigger role in global affairs. The reluctance of President Trump in playing the leadership role and the willingness of President Xi Jinping in playing a bigger role are definitely big signs of change that emanated from the current global pandemic. Although there is some sign of change on the horizon, some recent incidents also can alter the situation, i.e., China's border conflict with India and consequent developments, a hardening attitude against Chinese policies whereby Japan and the US are shifting businesses from China, the apprehension over China's debt trap diplomacy and the uncertainty of BRI's future.

It can therefore, be stated that although in near future China has no capability to surpass the US and become a global leader, by the middle of 21st century, it has the intention and potential to become a global leader. For the time being, a rising China is expected to remain a peaceful country and will follow the norms set by the US. And instead of challenging the hegemon, Beijing will try to constrain the Grand Strategy of Washington for global hegemony and simultaneously, defeat any rising regional power. However, China, the rising power will certainly have a stronger voice in the post-COVID-19 global order. It also can be stated that competition between the two most powerful will be more intense and fiercer in the coming decades. Next big question is whether the future power transition between the two giants will be a peaceful one. Although China has already signaled that it wants to remain as a status-quo power, any drastic move from either side can deteriorate the situation.