Chapter 2
Hegemony and Power in the Global War on Terrorism

Anna Cornelia Beyer

This chapter discusses the role and power of the United States in a world of globalisation and global governance after 9/11, and specifically in the years 2001–2008. Theoretically and empirically, the Global War on Terrorism served as the background to analyze how the United States uses its power in different forms to ‘govern’ the world in a hegemonic manner. While this governance is not comprehensive and all-encompassing, it is important in creating and influencing world affairs; it sets agendas and influences policy-making. Hegemonic governance and the use of a superior unipolar position in the international system are based on both material and ideological power. Both dimensions are needed to govern within the context of the Global War on Terrorism. This chapter will first discuss the interrelated role of ideas and matter generally, and for hegemony specifically. It will then discuss United States hegemony more broadly, and conclude with a presentation of how this hegemony was utilised to achieve participation in the GWOT by the EU and ASEAN. Parts of this chapter have been published in a former version in “Hegemony, Equilibrium and Counterpower”, which appeared in International Relations (Beyer 2009).

Hegemony in Mind and Matter

In this section, I will give an example of theory synthesis, which will serve as the background for the following analysis of US power in a globalised world. Here, a synthetic perspective on unipolar power is discussed and it is argued that a realist and constructivist and critical perspectives have to be combined in order to understand US unipolar power and its application. It is therefore argued that we have to reconcile realist and other approaches if we are to understand the multidimensional...
reality of US predominance (Moravcsik 2003). In my view, the opposition between a focus on ideas or on material factors is an unnecessary one (Keohane 2000): whereas realism argues for ‘reality’ being presented in material terms, such as military strength and economic power, constructivism, for example, highlights the importance and shaping power of ideas, with norms being particularly significant. The opposition between the ‘material’ and the ‘ideational’, however, is a false one: human affairs are structured by both; each is ‘real’, ‘true’ and ‘important’. One can regard the material and the ideational as quite distinct; they are, however, closely interrelated and partly interdependent. Material factors have fundamentally shaped human affairs from the beginnings of our existence. While life historically has been constrained by material natural conditions such as water, mountains, and deserts and so forth, ideas (in particular, norms) also have a constraining power on individuals, societies and states. For material change to occur, ideas have to be expressed in creative or destructive action. Humans therefore act as the creators of ideas and as the mediators between ideas and the material. Regarded by realists as material facts (population) and in constructivism as bearers of ideas (agents), humans operate in both dimensions, able to transform the ideational into the material, and vice versa. On the one hand, ideas can develop in response to the material world (Chirot 2000); modern science, ideologies and arguably even religions refer in one way or other to matter, trying to explain it (through science), change it (through ideology) or transcend it (through religion). Non-natural matter (such as the UN building in New York, weapons arsenals, border fortifications, the means of production or the international transport system), on the other hand, is dependent on ideas, as there is no matter, apart from nature itself, which would exist in its particular realization without ideas. Every non-natural material ‘particle’ of the state and the international world is the outcome of preceding ideas, which have resulted in human actions in order to create these ‘facts’. Non-natural material facts are therefore the accumulated result of ideas. States and institutions can be regarded as material facts, as they only exist so long as they are represented in matter (infrastructure, government buildings, the police, the media and so forth), but they are the result of ideas and continue to exist because of these ideas. The ‘state’, historically, had to be invented (Chirot 2000: 11), and it continues to exist only due to the shared belief in its reality and feasibility. In the words of Alexander Wendt: ‘Sovereignty is an institution, and so it exists only in virtue of certain intersubjective understandings and expectations’ (Wendt 1992: 412). Ideas are needed for creating and changing material facts. The state, the European Union (Parsons 2003), the United Nations, transnational enterprises – none of these would be in existence without preceding ideas. Wars, revolutions (Philpott 2001; Galtung 1978: 298) and even terrorism depend on a preceding ideology, or an idea. Change, therefore, creative and destructive, is first and foremost the result of ideational factors, but it has to be realized by affecting the material. Ideas can also serve as stabilizing factors, such as in the case of national identities, and international and societal norms. The third element which is needed for explaining the interrelated nature of the material and the ideational, and which both realist and constructivist approaches regard as important, is agency (the human factor), which represents a
two-way transmission belt between the material and the ideational. Agency is
directly contemplated by constructivism, in terms of (other-regarding) active and
reactive behavior. In structural realism it is understood indirectly, in the form of
(self-regarding) reactive behavior, in Waltz’s defensive version (Wendt and Waltz
in interview with the author 2007). In the international world, for example, it is to
be found in the processes of exercising policies of conflict and cooperation: internal
and external balancing, diplomacy, economic interaction, the creation of
institutions, or military interventions. Policies are the product of ideas, but material
change only happens after action by the agent, usually involving the use of other
non-natural material elements (such as weapons or the means of production) and
resulting in material change (such as a shift in polarity, the accumulation of wealth,
and the destruction or creation of state entities or institutions) (Dessler 1989). Even
the most appealing idea cannot be realized without successful agency; the latter,
however, is itself dependent on material potential, such as weapons and energy
resources held by states. Wars, revolutions, the creation of new political entities,
and political discourse via the media are all highly dependent on material resources,
and all are realized via agency. For example, violence depends on financial and
energy resources and weaponry, politically creative acts need an economic backing
and an infrastructure, and even political discourse is dependent on media.

It should now be apparent that material and ideational factors are both necessary
for understanding international relations more broadly and the predominant posi-
tion of the United States in the world more specifically. The United States are not
the only great power, but they are the most dominant in both the ideational
dimension (its discourse and ideology) and in the material dimension (its economy,
armaments) which together combine into ‘thick hegemony’. US hegemony, then,
rests on material foundations, but is created and maintained via ideas.

**Unipolarity and Hegemony**

In this section, I will describe the term hegemony to larger extent in order to be able
to discuss the bases of hegemony and how we can understand the United States as a
hegemon. Here, I will try to show how hegemony has been conceptualized in the
past by using the synthesized perspective described above. Both dimensions –
material and ideational – have been used to understand hegemony better. First, I
will discuss how hegemony is essentially being understood in Realist terms as
unipolarity. Then I will discuss the broader hegemony term introduced by Gramsci.

‘Polarity’ as a feature of international relations was brought into the discussion
by Waltz (1979) in his new version of Realism, structural realism. He assumed that
we had to look at the configuration of the ‘international system’ in order to
understand world affairs. This configuration was characterized in terms of the
distribution of power between the states, involving big – or powerful – states
(‘poles’) and medium and minor powers. What then made a state a powerful
state? For Waltz, all one had to count were the capabilities – material markers of
international power such as the economic strength of a country, the size of its military and geographical and population figures. All these criteria are ultimately material in nature, and this is the basis for measuring power for Waltz. Ideological aspects do not feature heavily here. For Waltz, it is only the ‘stuff that one can count’ that matters for describing a polar state.

For describing the configuration of the international system, there are different possibilities. One could imagine a system in which there are many powerful states of more or less equal power, such as in the twentieth century in Europe. The second possible configuration of the international system would be ‘bipolar’. This would be a system as we have observed it in the era of the Cold War with two major states – the US and the USSR – competing for power. Interestingly, Waltz in his *Theory of International Politics* did not think about a third possibility of configuration of the international system, the configuration that most scholars think we live in today: ‘unipolarity’. Unipolarity denotes the situation that within the international system – or a regional framework – one state is the leading state in terms of capabilities, one state therefore in material terms dominates the international system.

The United States in the analyzed period 2001–2008 (Beyer 2010) dominated the international system in material terms. It had the strongest economy on a global scale; it had the only military with truly global reach, for example. Also, its positioning between two oceans makes it less vulnerable to conventional attacks than most other states. And finally, it provides over a large, oftentimes very well educated population. Many scholars have proclaimed the unipolarity of the United States (p.e. Kapstein 1999). Some, however, have doubted it. For example, Mearsheimer (2008) and Huntington (2008) suggested that the United States is just one pole among many and that we are already living in a multipolar world. For them, mainly the BRIC states (Brazil, Russia, India and China) account for powers that need to be counted in, with an economically emergent China and a resource-strong and militarily strong Russia, they would argue, we are already living in a multipolar world where no state solely dominates. They do not consider the European Union as a pole, though. This is interesting, as in economic terms the EU as a whole is similarly strong as the United States. Globally, it is the only match to the United States in economic terms. However, particularly Mearsheimer, being a Realist, probably does not see the EU as a unit or an actor in its own right. For them, the EU rather resembles an alliance, and can therefore not be counted in the systemic distribution of power. The difference between these critical voices and the general opinion, though, in my view is rather one of definition. I doubt that Mearsheimer and Huntington would go as far as arguing that the United States is not the most dominant power in international relations currently. Rather, they want to point out that there are other strong powers present which should not and cannot be ignored. It remains to be seen and is too early to judge yet what the current economic crisis in the United States will bring forward as results for the overall power of the US.

In conclusion, the United States in the time of interest here was the strongest power in terms of capabilities on a global level. It was and is not the only strong power globally, neither in military terms nor economic terms, which are the
main categories for measuring power according to Realists assumptions. But, particularly in military terms they are the strongest power and they dominate all other – weaker – states. Militarily, no state has the chance to challenge the United States.

According to the Realist paradigm, this constellation should also indicate how unipolarity (or hegemony) is exercised: in terms of military and economic power. This perspective excludes other aspects of interaction, such as discourse. Material strength, according to this perspective, is used to control other states for the hegemon’s benefit. This might happen particularly by the use of force or the threat of force, less so by using economic power. A differing perspective here was introduced by Gilpin (1981), who argued that the hegemon would attempt to control the international realm by providing public goods, thereby using its economic power. We will see later on, that the latter aspect seems particularly important for hegemony.

But, as pointed out above, when we speak of power of a state over others, we cannot only regard the pure material point of view and count capabilities. We also have to take other elements into account, for example the exercise of power and soft power issues – such as ideology and ideas. If we regard these as important, we take a more critical or constructivist turn. Here, I would like to focus on the critical scholarship, which has termed the United States a hegemon.

Hegemony derives from the Greek word ‘egemon’, which denotes the domination or leadership of one state over another, and thereby already indicated an interactional dimension. The term has been applied in political science writings early on by Gramsci, who used it in a Marxist perspective to describe the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, and how a hegemony of the working class could be achieved. He described hegemony as ‘a relation, not of domination by means of force, but of consent by means of political and ideological leadership. It is the organisation of consent’ (Simon 1991: 22). Already we see the strong role that ideas and ideology play for hegemony. Consensus is being based on shared understandings and priorities. Later on, Gramsci discussed the issue of force, stating that a dominant relationship which was mainly based on oppression and coercion could not be counted anymore as a hegemony but rather resembled dictatorship, or in our terms imperialism. ‘It is one of the cases in which these groups have the function of “domination” without that of “leadership”: dictatorship without hegemony’ (Cuneo 2007). For him, hegemony needed to be based on a combination of ‘force and consent’ (Engel 2006: 2). This consent is therefore a central feature of hegemony, and it relates the issue of hegemony back to the ideational dimension of international relations which was pointed out in the beginning of this essay. As Gramsci already indicates, hegemony is more than just material predominance. It is the will to exercise the resulting power, first, and the success in acquiring ideological support from the subordinates for this role, second. A social relational aspect is therefore implied.

Gramsci, however, used the term hegemony to analyze and describe relations only within the national state; he did not initially apply the term to international relations and systemic descriptions. This, however, was later on achieved with the neo-Gramscian approach by Cox (1996). Cox transferred the notion of hegemony to
the international level, and applied it to the United States. ‘Cox sees the current global hegemony as an outwards expansion of an American historical bloc, which he labels *pax Americana*. The legitimating ideology of *pax Americana* is, of course, neoliberalism’, and ‘Cox also identified a range of ways in which hegemony is expressed by international organizations as both the products of the hegemonic world order and institutions that facilitate the expansion of the rules of that order, in this case neoliberalism’ (Engel 2008: 162ff). As Cox himself asserts, he used Gramsci’s ideas to describe a leading role of the United States in both material and ideational dimensions: ‘Antonio Gramsci used the concept of hegemony to express a unity between objective material forces and ethico-political ideas – in Marxian terms, a unity of structure and superstructure – in which power based on dominance over production is rationalized through an ideology incorporating compromise or consensus between dominant and subordinate groups’ (Cox 1977: 387).

By bringing in Gramsci’s analysis to the domain of International Relations, Cox again referred to consensus as the important criterion for analyzing hegemony: ‘In the hegemonic consensus, the dominant groups make some concessions to satisfy the subordinate groups, but not such as to endanger their dominance. The language of consensus is a language of common interest expressed in universalist terms, though the structure of power underlying it is skewed in favor of the dominant groups’ (Cox 1977: 387). He thereby criticized the neorealist use of the term as too one-dimensional and lacking soft-power aspects, such as ideology and consensus:

Indeed, in neorealist discourse the term “hegemony” is reduced to the single dimension of dominance, i.e., a physical-capabilities relationship among states. The Gramscian meaning of hegemony which I have used and which is important in distinguishing the *pax britannicana* and *pax Americana* from the other world orders in the sequence suggested above, joins and ideological and intersubjective element to the brute power relationship. In a hegemonic order, the dominant power makes certain concessions or compromises to secure the acquiescence of lesser powers to an order that can be expressed in terms of a general interest. It is important, in appraising a hegemonic order, to know both (a) that it functions mainly by consent in accordance with universalist principles, and (b) that it rests upon a certain structure of power and serves to maintain that structure. The consensual element distinguishes hegemonic from nonhegemonic world orders. (Cox 1996: 55f)

This analysis of the United States as a hegemon in both material and ideational terms was novel at the time and challenged fundamentally the neo-realist understanding of hegemony. However, even Gilpin used in part Gramsci’s ideas when writing about hegemony and empire. For him, it was perceptions and prestige that mattered for hegemons. He concurs with the Gramscian understanding that consensus is important as the basis for hegemony when he writes:

the ruling elites and coalitions of subordinate states frequently form alliances with the dominant powers and identify their values and interests with those of the dominant powers. Empires and dominant states supply public goods . . . that give other states an interest in following their lead. Finally, every dominant state, and particularly an empire, promotes a religion or ideology that justifies the domination over other states in the system. (Gilpin 1981: 30)
However, coming from the Realist perspective, he qualifies this perception on the same page:

Ultimately, however, the hierarchy of prestige in the international system rests on economic and military power. Prestige is the reputation for power, and military power in particular. Whereas power refers to economic, military, and related capabilities of the state, prestige refers primarily to the perceptions of other states with respect to a state’s capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise its power. (Gilpin 1981: 31)

Gramsci’s ideas obviously had influenced Gilpin to a certain degree, even if he still remained in the Realist perspective, describing material power as the dominant element in hegemony.

The Gramscian assumptions on hegemony came back more recently and were particularly presented in Hobson’s work. Hobson (2000) utilized Gramsci to describe a number of criteria for measuring hegemony. A hegemon, according to him, must:

- Be economically and militarily dominant over other states, have preponderant power.
- Be a state committed to liberal principles, ‘because only liberal states have the will to pursue hegemony: authoritarian states prefer imperialism, moreover, liberal states are concerned to create an open and liberal world order’ (Hobson 2000: 39).
- Have a rudimentary consensus among those states which it dominates.
- Pursue a long-term perspective or strategy on setting up regimes, and thereby creating a sort of world order (Hobson 2000: 40).

Therefore, Hobson also mentions that for hegemony not only the dominance in power counts, not only a unipolar position within the world system. Hegemony also needs to be based on consensus of the subordinated.

This consensus, in my and Hobson’s view, is based on ‘soft power’ and what has been called ‘sticky power’, or the application of ideological influence and economic capability. The ideological influence is needed to create the perspectives and images that are necessary to make hegemony appear beneficial and to create an idea of legitimacy. Economic capability is needed to create a functioning world economy, in which many states fare better than they would without the hegemon’s contribution to this economy. This also makes hegemony seem beneficial. Finally, even military power can be used to create consensus, when the hegemon uses the military power – or promises to use it – for the protection of its subordinates. It therefore depends on the way the different capabilities are used if we could term a unipolar state a hegemon. Military and economic power in particular can also be used in quite different ways, to exercise control and to exploit and pressure other states. If this would be the dominant mode of interaction between the unipolar power and the subordinates, we would probably not speak of hegemony, at least not a benign hegemony.

It seems important to me to include these additional aspects into the understanding of hegemony, as the one-dimensional perspective of Realism on unipolarity (and therefore hegemony) does not give us much insights on how domination is
functioning, what social processes it is based on. Calculating power and predicting behavior from establishing polarity-configurations of the system is certainly a minimalist way of understanding international affairs. If we regard ideas and interactions as important, though, we can better explain issues of stability and cooperation, or potentially conflict and change, in a hegemonic international setting. This is what Gilpin sensed when he wrote about war and change under hegemony and discussed interactional and perceptual features.

Power and Its Exercise of the United States

While the past parts introduced the assumption that hegemony in general is based not only on material factors, but on ideational factors as well, this part is testing this assumption at the example of the US hegemony over ASEAN and the EU. The following discussion summarizes the results that have been found in a previous study on US hegemony within the Global War on Terrorism (Beyer 2010). We will see, again, that not only material power counts for US hegemony, but that it is largely dependent on the exercise of soft power and ideological factors underpinning it.

For discussing aspects of power and in order to differentiate between different forms of power, Wartenbergs distinctions are helpful. Wartenberg describes dominance as a situation in which we find ‘not to a single exercise of power but to a relationship between two social agents that is constituted by the existence of a power differential between them’ (1990: 117). Power then, which rests on a dominant position within any system, can be exercised in three different forms: influence, coercion and force. A hegemon, according to the definitions above, will make predominant use of influence in order to create consensus. It might, at times, also use coercion, but will be less inclined to use force.

In my previous study (Beyer 2010), I have argued that the mode of conduct between the United States and two selected regions – namely the EU and ASEAN – in the period 2001–2008 was based predominantly on the exercise of influence and the shaping of discourse, but also on the use of economic and hard power, but in a less controversial way. For this study, I interviewed scholars and practitioners of the EU and ASEAN to single out the reasons for these regions to participate in a US-led Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Participation in the GWOT was understood as cooperation with and as therefore an effect of US hegemony. The causes for participation would therefore indicate the ways in which hegemony was exercised. The interviewees responded to a large extent that the states in the regions went along with what the United States did in part because terrorism is understood to be the, or a, main threat towards the EU and ASEAN. This means that the elites in both regions accepted the dominant discourse promoted by the United States that international terrorism is to be seen the main threat to international security in our times. Without this shared ‘ideology’, I argue that not as much participation in the Global War on Terrorism would have to be observed. Therefore, the leading role of the United
States, and their effect in inspiring participation in global counterterrorism measures, is to be explained partly by the power of discourse, by their ideological influence.

The interviews in the EU and ASEAN were subjected to a textual analysis. Questioning on the international distribution of power, the interviewees were asked if the United States was a dominant power, at least compared to their own region. This would imply that, in accord with the Realist perspective, the materially dominant position of the US in the world could have contributed to participation of the regions in the GWOT. The second set of questions involved the issue of pressure, which would imply that there was diplomatic pressure exercised towards the governments within the region to go along with the United States policies. With regards to economic relations, it was asked if economics played any role in the decisions to participate in the Global War on Terrorism. The confirming answers would indicate that due to economic interdependence the states possibly did cooperate as they were dependent on the US and it would have negative repercussions on them not to comply with its policies. When ‘authority’ was asked for, the question involved if the US was seen as a leading state and as a legitimately leading state. Authority here was understood to be a marker of consensus. With questions involving the perception of threat, finally, influence was measured to account for the basis of this consensus. When threat was confirmed, this implied that the discourse of the United States was accepted, including a perception of a major threat to the world’s states from terrorism. Threat discourse as a measurement of United States hegemony was highlighted by Steger (2005) and Jackson (2004), who both described the dominant terrorism discourse as an element of United States globalism, and a marker of their hegemonic position. While Steger compares this to former discourses on globalization, Jackson particularly analyzed the discourse within the Global War on Terrorism.

For both ASEAN and the EU the dominant power position of the United States, compared to ASEAN and the EU, was confirmed. As we can assume that the EU with its strong economic power is among the major powers in the world, we can take this as an indicator for unipolarity of the United States, or at least great power status. Apart from that, the indicators for both regions differ slightly. For ASEAN, the main motivator for participation in the Global War on Terrorism was the interdependence with the United States. This was mentioned openly in the interviews, with statements such as Ramakrishna’s:

ASEAN governments recognize that if they are seen not to be taking a firm stand against terrorism, there will be a negative political impact, both domestically as in terms of foreign direct investment, and this is very important to ASEAN, especially because it sees itself in competition with other Asian regions and states. So they have to show that they are serious in dealing with terrorism. (Ramakrishna, interview with the author 2006)

It was mentioned that in case of non-compliance there would be important political and economic repercussions, which the ASEAN states feared. Also, the role of the United States as a security provider could be compromised in case of non-cooperation. Therefore, participation was motivated by interdependence, a relationship in which a certain pressure might have been exercised, actively or passively. Some pressure in the relationship was mentioned; some scholars
indicated that pressure was exercised on a bilateral level to make the states go along with the policies of the United States to counter terrorism, but only informally. The leadership role of the United States was not questioned, which indicates that the support for hegemony of the US was still strong. The presence of consensus was confirmed by the majority of interviewees. However, interestingly, the threat of terrorism was not seen as a major one in ASEAN (even though ASEAN is much more affected by terrorism than the EU, for example). This could potentially mean a lack of consensus underlying the US hegemony, as their dominant discourse – that terrorism is the major threat we currently have to counter – was not agreed with. However, as the responses for authority were strong, we can assume that the US hegemony was still supported. This was particularly indicated by some respondents who claimed that the leadership role of the United States was not doubted. Overall, the results indicated that the factors most dominantly influencing participation in the Global War on Terrorism – apart from the US being the dominant state internationally – were dependence on, and influence of, but also authority of the United States. In conclusion, many interviews confirmed that the United States was seen as a leading state, and legitimately so, and that particularly economic repercussions were expected in case of non-participation. On the other hand, there was not a full confirmation of the influence hypothesis for ASEAN, as not all respondents confirmed that ASEAN views international terrorism as a main threat to the region. But most respondents acknowledged that the terrorism discourse was shared to large degree. However, consensus also seems to be present in ASEAN, even if this is not as strongly based on discursive influence as in the case of the EU. It can therefore be argued that while the dominant position of the US materially is the strongest factor for hegemony, other aspects do contribute significantly to hegemony and cannot be ignored. These aspects also challenge the Realist perspective, as unipolar power was not majorly utilized in terms of pressure or open coercion, but rather due to dependence and by the provision of goods. This is probably the basis for US hegemony in ASEAN being accepted as legitimate. As this legitimacy in this case is not based on a strongly shared discourse on terrorism, it could be based on the economic relationship which was observed, meaning that the US is perceived as a benefactor and a security guarantor. In Realist terms, this could be explained by an alliance between the ASEAN states and bandwagoning from their part with the US. However, it can also be interpreted as shedding light on the fact that additional aspects count towards hegemony, such as economic interactions and the perception of the US as legitimately leading, hence consensus. Overall, this would indicate that here we have stronger support for the interpretation of hegemony in Gilpin’s sense, meaning that material power and the provision of goods is most causal for the stability and functioning of hegemony.

For the EU, also a dominant power position of the United States was confirmed, but less so than for ASEAN. Here, however, interdependence did not play a role at all. The interviewees responded that economic interdependence did not contribute to the decisions to participate in the Global War on Terrorism. The EU member states in combination are economically too strong to make interdependence work as a compelling factor for them to cooperate with the US’s policies. On the other hand,
the responses on authority and influence were highly positive. This means the EU did not only see the US as a legitimate leader, it also accepted their version of describing international terrorism as a dominant threat to their security. In particular, the study indicated that the US is understood as exercising a legitimate leadership role, and providing this function as an important role in the world. More importantly even, the discourse promoted by the United States on terrorism was shared in the EU, according to the statements of the interviewees. All of them stated that terrorism was understood as representing the main threat to international security in this period. While the European Union is not obviously a primary target of international terrorist attacks (very few Islamist attacks have been counted, it is unclear, however, how many attacks have been prevented), this indicates that the discourse on the threat is shared among the US and the EU and therefore there is a high level of ideological influence in this relationship to be found. For example, Kuhne argued that it is essentially the factor of a shared threat that compels the EU to participate in the Global War on Terrorism. More than the assumption of the United States as a leading state, and even more than the mere material power of the US, this shared ideology of terrorism as the main threat was cited as contributing to participation of the EU. This form of influence was thereby receiving stronger support from the respondents as a cause for participation than the material dominance of the US, including pressure. Both aspects indicate a hegemonic relationship here, in which the United States makes use of their dominant power, particularly through soft power, particularly discursive power, and is accepted as a legitimate leader, a role which found a relatively strong consensus in the European Union. The findings do not contradict Realist interpretations, as the materially dominant role of the US still is to be understood as being important. Also, the relationship and the cooperation of the EU can be explained in terms of alliance and bandwagoning. However, the internal processes of this relationship and the interactions are interesting, as apparently they are based more on soft power and influence, indicated by the commonality of interest, rather than on threats and power calculations.

Conclusion

This article tried to show that the United States acted – at least in the period of the Global War on Terrorism – as a hegemon in international relations. This hegemony was in part based on its predominant power position within the world, on economic and military capabilities. On the other hand, also interactional and ideological factors contributed to the leading position of the United States as a hegemon. The discourses they promoted brought the world together under common ideas and assumptions about the world, about goods to be pursued and threats to be countered. The case studies mentioned in the third part of this chapter illustrated that the United States can lead by applying ideological power and combining this power with the effects of their unipolar position. In the case of ASEAN, economic power is dominant, but also are the United States believed to be a legitimate leading state.
For the EU, the effects of soft power exercise in hegemony are even stronger, as the EU not only accepts the leading role of the US; it also accepts the US dominated discourse on contemporary security threats, terrorism being the major issue among them.

This implies that indeed the US leads by utilizing both material and ideological aspects of power. They could not lead by military and economic power alone, as then their leadership would have difficulty to create consensus, which hegemony is based on. This consensus, which is created via the promotion of compelling ideas and discourses, is needed to keep hegemony stable. If the domination of the United States would exist without consensus to be based on, probably there would be more opposition towards the leading state and less willingness to comply and go along with their policies.

An interesting fact is the difference in findings for the two case studies: ASEAN being more economically dependent but less under the rhetorical influence of the US, while the EU being not economically dependent but highly under the rhetorical influence of the US. The explanation for this difference most likely lies in the additional factors not researched in the study, such as traditional affiliations, economic strength of the EU, alliances, and a shared culture. It remains an open research question if more generalizable statements about differences of strong and weak actors under hegemony and how they behave towards the hegemon. Could it be that weaker, more dependent actors buy less into the ideological dimension of hegemony? What would that mean, and what kind of implications would it have? It would be interesting to compare further cases of exposure to hegemony and how states and other actors react to it.

Hegemony, however, is not necessarily global. I have discussed hegemony here in abstract terms and looked empirically only at the cases of South-East Asia and Europe. It can be assumed that in other parts of the world, such as China, for example, the hegemonic discourses are perceived in a much different way. How far-reaching hegemony and the consensus-shaping powers of hegemonic discourses really are is hard to discern from these results. More research is needed to determine this. However, it can be assumed that in large parts of the world the United States do indeed make good use of their leading position by creating hegemony and therefore leading the world with surprisingly few opposition. For future research, it will be interesting if the hegemonic role has changed under the new presidency of Obama, in which a new leadership style is to be found, the Global War on Terrorism has been partly abandoned and reframed. Also, the current economic difficulties of the United States might have an impact on the capability of the United States to provide with hegemonic leadership in the future. It, however, is beyond the scope of this article to speculate on this.

References


---

**Interviews with the Author**

Kenneth Waltz (2007, New York)

Alexander Wendt (2007, Ohio)

Kumar Ramakrishna (2006, Singapore)
Power in the 21st Century
International Security and International Political Economy in a Changing World
Fels, E.; Kremer, J.-F.; Kronenberg, K. (Eds.)
2012, XVIII, 322 p., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-3-642-25081-1