

Hegemonism and Small States in the Contemporary International System: A Study of Ukraine

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Abstract: *The contemporary international system comprises dominant and small states that participate in the international politics. Given the varying degrees of development of national powers and differences in both domestic and international tangential powers of states create unequal and asymmetrical economic and political relationship in the international system. The states with developed national powers, high domestic and high international tangential powers tend to dominate and perpetuate hegemonism on the small states-the developing states in the world politics. The state of Ukraine in Europe is under the hegemonism of Russia with threats of losing its territory of Crimea to Russia's hegemonic stance. The study adopts realism as its theoretical framework of analysis in explaining the factors of hegemonism in the international politics. Its methodology is secondary sources of data collection. The study investigates the relationship of Ukraine with hegemonic powers particularly the threats of Russia to annex Ukraine Crimean territory.*

I. Introduction

The modern world system has its root in the culture of western Christendom which, between the fifth and tenth centuries struggled to emerge from its barbaric darkness (Nduba, 1993). The process of evolution of states in Europe became turbulent and equally fierce and epic battle between the papacy and the monarchs in Europe to the preponderant domination and hegemonism of one state over the other. The battle of recognition and the orgy of brutality reached its culmination in the Thirty Years War (1648). At its close much of Central Europe was a wilderness of ruins, drenched with the blood of the slain, rent with agonized cries of torment, looted by mercenaries and traversed by pitiable banks of refugees among whom, mass madness and cannibalism were not infrequent (Schuman, 1969).

The peace accord usually referred to as the peace of Westphalia (1648) was the very grand settlements which incorporated the verdict into public law of Europe. At the end of the prolonged and tedious peace conference which opened in 1642, three treaties were concluded: one was signed at Munster, January 30, 1648 between Spain and the Dutch; a second at Munster, October 24, 1648, between the French Empire and the German Princes; and a third on the same date, signed at Osnabruck, between the Empire and Sweden (Nduba, 1993). The Treaty of Westphalia saw to the emergence of modern state system in the international system. The emerged states following the Treaty of Westphalia in Europe engaged in the titanic struggle on who takes dominance and power in Europe. The Westphalia Treaty for the first time recognized the independence and sovereignty of several European political entities. These units emerged largely as a result of the related supersession of central government over feudal decentralization and state autonomy over transcendent religious and secular authority in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries generally, and during the Thirty Years War in particular (Puchhala, 1971). It was historical that while the modern state system emerged in Europe, it was concomitant that states were emerging at different pace in the world. In Africa, the states of Nubia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Maghreb, Oyo Empire, Benin Empire and the Igbo Republican Societies had emerged politically strong and viable, with varying social and political institutions (see Rodney, 1972). These states maintained the status of international relation prior to the advent of colonialism, which altered the character of very many evolving nations in the world politics. The orgy of colonialism and imperialism increased the tempo of hegemonism and dominance of Super powers over the weak states or emerging states in the International Community or society.

A cursory look at the International System from the point of Westphalia depicts an arena of economic, military, social and political dominations of one state over another. The fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed). Domination is not simply imposed from above, but has to be won through the subordinated groups' spontaneous consent to the cultural domination, which they believe will serve their interests (Gramsci, 1971). It was on this basis that colonialism and imperialism ensued in Africa and other parts of the world. Under this circumstance, three types of imperialism emerged in the international system: military, economic, and cultural imperialism. Goals of imperialism included establishing

world, continental and local preponderance (Morgenthau, 2012). These three forms have transformed themselves to neo colonialism or post-neo-dependency (Offiong 2001).

Since the end of World War II, the United States of America and the former Soviet Union were identified as superpowers. The concept, superpower is a way of distinguishing the type power possessed by the former Soviet Union and those of the United States from other similarly powerful countries in Europe such as Britain, France and Germany and others in Asia such as China and Japan (Nduba, 1993). The emergence of superpowers following the end of the 2nd World War were the United States of America and the former Soviet Union as the major players in the international system. The balance of power system tilted between the United States of America and former Union from 1945 to 1991, when the former Soviet collapsed under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. The period from 1945 to 1991 witnessed the cold war confrontation between the two blocs- United States of America and the former Soviet Union. The third world maintained non alignment status during the cold war period, while the two superpowers were scavenging for ideological controls of various states in Africa and the rest of the third world. It was on this platform that the struggle for power was staged in the 20th century. In studying hegemonism, the study sets out to examine the contemporary hegemonism as it affects Ukraine in the international system.

II. Theoretical Tradition

Several theoretical traditions inundate the realm of political Science and International Relations making efforts to explain issues and phenomenon within the domain. Some of these theories include; Marxism, Realism, critical theory, constructivism, liberalism and green theory within the domain of international relations. These theories make efforts to ensure that justice and freedom is obtained within the current structure of the international system. This study adopts realist tradition in the explanation of the issues of dominance and hegemonism by the hegemonic powers that shape the international system. From the beginning of modern system paying attention to the particular event of 1648, the questions of balance of power and counter-hegemonic stance became a paramount issue in the international system.

The realist perspective captures the total behaviour of statesmen in the international system with regards to their interest. The major proponents of realist perspective include. Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Thucydides etc. Its contemporary proponents are Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, Karl Deutch, Kaplan and Morton Deutch. Their works are concrete in international relation bordering on realist traditions. Realist believes that competitive processes between actors, primarily defined as states, is the natural expression of conflict by parties engaged in the pursuit of scarce and competitive interest (Deutch, 1973). Realism as a conceptual approach to the study of international relations can be distinguished by its emphasis on the need for scholars in the discipline to focus on the real world in their analysis, rather than the imaginary that could result if all men were reasonable and behaved according to the enlightened self and human interest. Realism can simply be conceived as a pessimistic world view that argues that because men are by nature selfish, self centred and mostly disposed to pursue their own selfish interest, the greatest responsibility of the statesman is to protect the interest of his own nation by seeking for and maintaining adequate power to resist the aggressive tendencies of other states (Odock, 2012).

It is important to note that various strands of realism have emerged such as structural realism and neo realism as evidenced in the classical works of Kenneth Waltz and other scholars in the contemporary international relations. It is necessary that we keep in focus some of the common and basic assumptions that tend to unify all the adherents of these conceptions of international relations and politics. These are as follows:

- (a) A pessimistic view of human nature;
- (b) A conviction that international relations are necessarily conflictual and those most international conflicts are ultimately resolved by war;
- (c) A high regard for the value of national interest and state security,
- (d) A basic scepticism that there can be progress in international politics that is comparable to that in domestic political life (Jackson & Sorensen, 2003).

It is natural that such basic assumptions led the realists especially (the most celebrated of the realists), to seek to identify universal laws that would guide statesmen as they face the challenges of protecting their national interests against other states (Odock, 2012). As noted by Vasquez (1998), the capacity of Morgenthau and his associates to convince other scholars in the discipline to accept his postulations about nation- states and their decision makers as being the most important actors in international, the sharp distinction between domestic politics and international politics, as well as the fact that international relations is the struggle for power and peace, constituted revolutions in the study of international relations.

The convictions of these realist scholars tend to explain indeed the present character of international relations and international politics respectively. This defines the character of states with high domestic

tangential power pursue and maximize their national interest in the arena where states lack international tangential powers attesting to the fact that the international system is purely anarchical and devoid of central coercive authority akin to the domestic political environment. In sum, while states have high domestic international tangential powers to conduct their foreign policy free from international constraints or the ability to buck the logic of anarchy (John, 2001). When a situation results in the international relations as depicted in the seminal works of John Hobson above statesmen resort to maximize interest of their states thereby orchestrating hegemonism against weaker states, those which are always deficient in domestic tangential powers with minimal influence in the international politics. This is made manifest in the relations between Ukraine, which was formerly part of the Soviet Union, and the hegemonic threats from the Republic of Russia. The conflict that broke out between Russia and Ukraine became another hegemonic threat from Russia after that of Georgia all in Europe.

In as much as selfish and national interest govern statesmen in the conduct of international relations; the question of hegemonism will ever remain current in the politics among nations. Third world and developing nations are under the threats of hegemonic powers. African states among the developing nation are facing the great challenges of cultural imperialism and postneodependency today. A number of issues predispose their world states to hegemonism include: failure of leadership, lack of viable indexes of national powers and fragility of these states. As noted by Eke (2011), the conflict in the Middle-East and North African (MENA) countries, suggests leadership failure as the reason for making the regions the cockpit of great power rivalries in the guise of modernization. This is the logic of global leadership in interdependent state system. The US government's intervention, mostly under humanitarian services, in developing states find easier route in flourishing democratic oppositions, for instance, in Sudan, Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Cote D'Ivoire, Somalia, Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Iran, Syria, Libya, etc, among other African countries that had their elections between 2010 and 2011 (The Nation, 2010a). Juxtaposing the political events in the MENA, and the very experience of Ukraine in the recent time, attest to the fact that those hegemonisms guided by the super-interest of statesmen dominate the international politics.

III. Hegemonic Powers In The Contemporary International System

The international system right from the time of Westphalia has been enmeshed with factor of one country dominating the other. Following the emergence of state system, jostling European powers came to dominate the international system culturally, politically and economically over other autochthonous states in Africa (Aro, and Otu, 2014). In view of emergence of European powers in the world system between 16th and 19th century, the issue of balance of power came to counter hegemonic powers particularly of European extraction. Hegemonic powers manifested in the process of colonialism and imperialism occasioned by the domestic economic contradictions in the metro poles (see Ake, 1981).

By hegemony, we mean to say: dominance or leadership of one nation over others. By hegemonic power, therefore, it implies that a nation with leadership or dominant power (hegemon) should ensure stability of the international system paying the costs associated with counteracting problems. It could be sub regional, regional or global, as in the case of the United States in the World system (Eke, 2011). The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as "'intellectual and moral leadership'" and "The 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent," Gramsci (1977). Balaam and Veset (2008) also held that the US uses ideas, values, norms and tradition (cultural hegemony) in a combination of military and political coercion and consent through education and the communication to mould ideology or world view that supports and legitimizes its global interest as the leader of the dominant class to keep the subordinate class in line. The pursuit of these ideas coupled with economic interests of the hegemonic powers drives them exercising dominance over weak countries in the international community. This is why the realist traditions illuminate the practices of statesmen today in the international politics.

The history of world politics has been replete with hegemonism, which this paper attempted in presenting the chronicles of rampaging nature of hegemonism with diverse historical manifestations. In the Greco-Roman world of 5th-century BCE European Classical antiquity, the city-state of Sparta was the hegemon of the Peloponnesian League (6th to 4th centuries BCE) and King Philip II of Macedon was the hegemon of the League of Corinth in 337 BCE (a kingship he willed to his son, Alexander the Great). Likewise, the role of Athens within the short-lived Delian League (478-404 BCE) was that of a "hegemon. Ancient historians such as Xenophon and Ephorus were the first who used the term in its modern sense (Wickersham, 1994)

Writing in *The Politics of International Political Economy*, Jayantha (2014) averred that "If we consider the Western dominated global system from as early as the 15th century, there have been several hegemonic powers and contenders that have attempted to create the world order in their own images". He lists several contenders for historical hegemony

- Portugal 1494 to 1580 (end of Italian Wars to Spanish invasion of Portugal) based on Portugal's dominance in navigation;
- Holland 1580 to 1688 (1579 Treaty of Utrecht marks the foundation of the Dutch Republic to William of Orange's arrival in England) based on Dutch control of credit and money;
- Britain 1688 to 1792 (Glorious Revolution to Napoleonic Wars) based on British textiles and command of the high seas;
- Britain 1815 to 1914 (Congress of Vienna to World War I) based on British industrial supremacy and railroads.

The early 20th century, like the late 19th century was characterized by multiple Great Powers but no global hegemon. World War I weakened the strongest of the Imperial Powers, Great Britain, but also strengthened the United States and, to a lesser extent, Japan. Both of these state's governments pursued policies to expand their regional spheres of influence, the U.S in Latin America and Japan in East Asia. France, the U.K, Italy, Soviet Russia and later Nazi Germany (1933-1945) all either maintained imperialist policies based on spheres of influence or attempted to conquer territory but none achieved the status of a global hegemonic power.

After the Second World War, the United Nations was established and the five strongest global powers (China, France, the UK, the USA and the USSR) were given permanent seats on the U.N. Security Council, the organization's most powerful decision making body. Following the war, the USA and the USSR were the two strongest global powers and this created a non-aligned bi-polar power dynamic in international affairs, commonly referred to as the Cold War. The hegemonic conflict was ideological, between communism and capitalism, as well as geopolitical, between the Warsaw Pact countries (1955-1991) and NATO/SEATO/CENTO countries (1949-present). During the Cold War both hegemons competed against each other directly (during the arms race) and indirectly (via proxy wars). The result was that many countries, no matter how remote, were drawn into the conflict when it was suspected that their governments' policies might destabilize the balance of power. Reinhardt Hildebrandt calls this a period of "dual-hegemony", where "Two dominant states have been stabilizing their European spheres of influence against and alongside each other." (Hildebrandt, 2009). Proxy wars became battle grounds between forces supported either directly or indirectly by the hegemonic powers and included the Korean War, the Laotian Civil War, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Vietnam War, the Afghan War, the Angolan Civil War, and the Central American Civil Wars (Mumford, 2013).

The period of cold war was also characterized by the exertion of hegemonism between United States of America and the former Soviet Union in the world politics. The United States of America was invading many weak countries of the world that were opposed to her policy stance. In December, 1989 the United States had invaded Panama and seized its President, General Antonio Manuel Noriega and brought him to the United States to answer for drug charges. In 1983, Grenada was also invaded under Ronald Reagan administration, and in 1986 engaged in air strike against Libya (Echezona, 1993). The threats of domination by the United States of America continued to threaten the world and engaged in unwholesome acts of war in Iraq in 1991, and 2003 against the president Hussein of Iraq leading to his eventual dethronement and subsequent killing in 2006. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States was the world's sole hegemonic power, a position it has maintained in spite of the emerging power multipolarity in which, China, Japan and other powers are exerting influence in the international politics. The covert support of the United States of America to the dethronement of regimes in the Middle-East and North African countries in the recent time lent credence to its hegemonic grip in the world politics. Hegemonism which its origin in Europe continues to manifest today as in Russia's to annex Crimea, a part of Ukraine to its autonomous empire.

IV. The Socio-Political History Of Ukraine

Ukraine is a country in Eastern Europe. It has an area of 603,628 km² (233,062 sq mi), making it the largest country entirely within Europe. Ukraine borders Russia to the east and northeast, Belarus to the northwest, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary to the west, Romania and Moldova to the southwest, and the Black Sea and Sea of Azov to the south and southeast, respectively.

In the middle Ages, the area became the key center of East Slavic culture, as epitomized by the powerful state of Kievan Rus'. Following its fragmentation in the 13th century, the territory of the present day Ukraine was contested, ruled and divided by a variety of powers, including Lithuania, Poland, Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungary, and Russia. A Cossack republic emerged and prospered during the 17th and 18th centuries, but Ukraine remained otherwise divided until its consolidation into a Soviet republic in the 20th century, becoming an independent state only in 1991. Crimea was conquered by Catherine the Great in 1783. It was a part of Taurida Oblast belonging to the Russian Empire between 1784 and 1917. During the Russian Civil War (1917-1921) Crimea changed hands numerous times and finally became a part of Soviet Russia in 1921, when it was granted the status of an autonomous republic. During World War II, in 1944, Soviet authorities deported the

Crimean Tatars for alleged collaboration with the Nazi occupation regime and after the war stripped the region of its autonomy. In 1954, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union transferred the region to Ukraine. The Crimean Tatars were allowed to return to Crimea in the mid-1980s under perestroika.

Ukraine restored Crimea's autonomous status in 1991. Crimea's autonomous status was further reiterated in 1996 with the ratification of Ukraine's current constitution, which declared Crimea to be the "Autonomous Republic of Crimea", but also an "inseparable constituent part of Ukraine in 1991) continues to generate tension in the region as power against Russia and this culminated in the 2014 Crimean crisis. The 2014 Crimea crisis is a test of pragmatic realism and hegemonic display by the Russian federation.

V. Ukraine And Onslaught Of Modern Hegemonism

Following the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, this weakened Russia as a counterweight to the preponderant place of the United of America during and after the cold war. From the debris of the abysmal collapse of the former Soviet emerged so many states, principal among them is Ukraine state. Consequent upon this, Ukraine emerged robust with largest landmark in Europe, Ukraine is one of the largest countries in Europe, is a unitary semi-presidential republic, having achieved its independence with the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991(New York Time, 25 Dec. 2014). While at independence, Crimea became part of Ukraine republic, and so Russia tend to view Ukraine with Crimea to have enough fungibility of powers to challenge Russia's hegemonic stance in the region. The conflict on who controls' and own the Crimea Peninsula became apparent between Russia and Ukraine in 2014.

The Crimean crisis is a frozen conflict resulting from an international crisis in 2014 involving Russia and Ukraine over the control of the Crimean Peninsula, which culminated in its annexation by Russia. The crisis is part of the wider 2014 Russian military intervention in Ukraine which also includes the Donbass region of Ukraine. The current international status of Crimea and Sevastopol as federal subjects of the Russian Federation is only explicitly recognized by five UN member states, including Russia. All other countries recognize Crimea as part of Ukraine. One will see that condemnation did not follow the invasion and annexation of Crimea compared to international condemnation that trailed the invasion of Kuwait. This jolted the third world around the area and the palpable fear was to put Iraq in check. The international outrage that trailed Iraq action provoked the Gulf war superintended over by the United States of America and her allied forces in 1991. The reason is obvious that the arena of the international system is anarchical enthroning the philosophy of might is right. This is the gross application of realist theoretical tradition where states with Grand National strategy prevail in conflict. This is a situation where a critical perspective takes a swipe and calls for justice, equity and fair play in comity of nations. If this situation is left unchecked, the poor countries of the world will continue to experience hegemonism, which amounts to human rights abuse in the international system. According to Human Rights Watch "Russia has violated multiple obligations it has as an occupying power under international humanitarian law – in particular in relation to the protection of civilians' rights. Iraq was invaded in violation of international law by the United States and her allied forces, but who interrogates Russia over annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. The answer lies in the fact that the individual and collective interests of the bourgeois states condition and influence behaviour towards the third world states in the international community. Crimea's territory was lost to Russia because there was no power to fight for Ukraine, and so was left at its own mercy.

A critical look at the process leading to Crimea crisis and the referendum questions, which formed the basis for Russia's action, was poorly conducted without neutral international body as observer. An analysis of the referendum will prove this point below. On March 16, 2014, according to statements of organizers of Crimean status referendum, a large majority (reported as 96. 77% of the 81.36% of the population of Crimea who voted) voted in favour of independence of Crimea from Ukraine and joining Russia as a federal subject. The referendum was not recognized by the international community and the reported results were disputed by numerous independent observers. BBC reported that most of the Crimean Tatars that they interviewed were boycotting the vote. Reports from the UN criticized the circumstances surrounding the referendum, especially the presence of paramilitaries, self-defence groups and unidentifiable soldiers. The European Union, Canada, Japan and the United States condemned the vote as illegal. It is indeed ridiculous that the condemnation by the European Union, Canada, Japan and the United States of illegal referendum was never backed up with force and threat of sanction. This depicts taciturn support to Russia's action over Crimea region by the big powers of the world. This also indicates collaborations of global powers in perpetuating hegemonism on global scale. The recognition of Crimea by five member states of the United Nations speaks volume of complicity and conspiracy of big power against emerging state in the International system. In the event of many countries of the world recognizing Crimea as part and parcel of Ukraine call for a reorganization of the permanent members of the Security Council; so that the voices of the disadvantaged could be heard, and issues of international concern will be determined by simple majority of the members of the United Nations.

VI. Conclusions And Recommendations

The international system is the arena of conflicts of interest and powers leading to who controls the world resources. The contest among the nation states over economic resources generates the question of hegemonism in the world politics. In the words of the German scholar Karl Marx, the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in simple terms, the oppressor and the oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes (Marx, 1990). The assertions of Karl Marx aptly fit and define the character and nature of the contemporary international relations that is capitalist structured in inequality and class domination.

The powerful states in the contemporary international order are strategically poised to dominate and maintain hegemonism over burgeoning states. The maintenance of hegemonism is done to ensure the class character of the international system. In the words of Ake, the state is a specific modality of class domination, in which class domination is mediated by commodity exchange so that the system of institutional mechanisms of domination is differentiated and dissociated from the ruling class and even the society, and appears as objective force standing alongside society (Ake, 1985). The states in international order bear the imprint of class domination, and those of the European and American extrapolations ensure the class character of world politics. This is made manifest through the structure of United Nations tailored along the interest of the bourgeois states. So hegemonism is a typology of class domination in the international politics.

The history of hegemonism span through the history of European domination, and manifested in the entrenchment of colonialism and imperialism. At the expirations of colonialism and imperialism, it has transformed into the modern day neo-imperialism embodying hegemonism. Since 1945, the world politics is dominated by United States of America and the former Soviet Union until the ruin of Russia in 1991. Following the ruin of Russia, Ukraine emerged from the debris as the largest country in Europe. Crimea remains an integral part of Ukraine at independence, but Russia continues to threaten to annex it back to its territory. In 2013, Russia instigated Crimea citizens to raise nationalist question on whether they belong to Ukraine or Russia. Public protest demanding closer ties with EU and resignation of President Viktor Yanukovich began in late 2013, leading to widespread civil unrest, and ultimately, revolution in 2014. Russia prompted by counter-revolutionary sentiment in the Crimea Peninsula, staged a military intervention, and subsequently annexed the region in a move largely condemned by the international community. Fighting between government forces and pro-Russian separatists has continued despite domestic and international efforts to de-escalate the crisis (New York Time, 25 Dec. 2014). It is discernable that Russian incursion and subsequent annexation of Crimea from Ukraine amounted to hegemonism, and so international community should go beyond condemnation to taking action to forestall such act of abuse of domestic sovereignty of burgeoning states like Ukraine and the host third world states.

The study therefore makes the following recommendation in order to safeguard the interest of the emerging nations in International Relations:

- i. International relations should be modeled in a manner that the interest of all member states be protected under international law.
- ii. That the permanent seats in the Security Council of the United Nations should be abolished to pave way for all member states to decide issues of international concern on simple majority of votes. This will take the rascality of permanent members of the UN Security Council in terms of unbridled drive for hegemonism and domination of small states in world politics. The rascality attendant to decision making in United Nations by permanent members of the Security Council appropriate the much revered organization to themselves.
- iii. That all members of the United Nations should rise through a collective action mobilize a standing army against violation of sovereignty of states in the comity of nations. This calls for strict application of Collective Security and preventive diplomacy in the management of international conflicts.
- iv. That international issue should be appreciated on broad interest of nation states, and not driven by selfish interest of the big powers in the international system. Applying these recommendations will help to shape the behaviour of statesmen and reposition the conduct of international relations by statesmen.

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