

# Post-Hegemonic Regionalism in Eurasia and Latin America: Comparing Organizations and Geopolitical Challenges

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## Abstract

Securing regional legitimacy is an important precondition for the creation of post-hegemonic world order by new aspirants of global power and multipolar international system. New regional organizations such as ALBA, SCO and BRICS were established in regions of Eurasia and Latin America to create a post-hegemonic multipolar world. These organizations innovated institutional mechanisms, vocabulary, development model and political programs to challenge the US led neo-liberal economic order. However, they could not completely replace the capitalist international system and US led international regimes. Internal challenges and political rivalry within these counter-hegemonic alliances incapacitated them from manifesting their post-hegemonic agendas. Anti-imperialism became the weak thread to sustain the spirit of unity among key players in the post-hegemonic world. Compared to Latin America, regional organizations in Eurasia had comparatively less urge to replace the neo-liberal economic order and vocabulary. They tried to find enough spaces for economic growth within the US dominated neo-liberal institutions and regimes. Both regions could not find common political, economic and ideological spheres to cooperate in establishing inter-regional institutional mechanisms while attempting to create a post-hegemonic multipolar international system. These post-hegemonic regional organisations also failed to come out of the neo-liberal order and provide viable alternatives to US led international regimes despite their efforts to challenge their norms and imperial nature.

**Key Words:** Post-hegemony, Regionalism, Eurasia, Latin America,

## Introduction

Post-hegemony is a situation in which unipolar world order is challenged by the plurality of actors. It is important to note that the period of post-hegemony is not the complete replacement of hegemon by the multipolar world rather it is a transition period in which the super power suffers challenges to its unipolarity. Originally the term post-hegemony stands for 'heterodox political-economic' practices that challenge neo-liberalism (Gürcan, 2019). This original proposition of 'post-hegemony' was confined to the Latin American context in which the neo-liberal order of US was challenged. Ideologically, it stands for a counter-hegemony in which capitalist international order was challenged by aspirants of egalitarian economic order. Different terms were used to describe this new world order –'multipolar', 'polycentric', 'nonpolar', 'apolar', 'G-zero' etc. (Acharya, 2014).

The attrition of US hegemony with the end of Cold War generated power vacuum in the Latin American and Eurasian regions. These regions also witnessed the emergence of new global power aspirants such as China, India, Brazil etc. As US hegemony loses its grip, world witnesses a multipolar order with the rise of South-South cooperation and regionalism (Gürcan, 2019). However, we can hardly see any direct conflict with these emerging global power aspirants with US hegemony, except the case of China. The confrontation between US and emerging nation-states in Global South is neither purely ideological nor militaristic. This plurality of states against the US hegemony is also characterised by coexistence as well as competition among them. Acharya (2014) argued that this new political situation is characterised by the decline of American world order, not that of US.

The primary challenge by post-hegemonic global power aspirants was towards the unipolar international economic governance by US. However, this challenge to unipolar governance cannot be treated as a definitive enmity towards US. These states in South have strategic bilateral relation with US and her allies. They also continue to be part of US led international regimes despite their urge to reform these institutions. It is also important to note that the period of 'post-hegemony' is not a complete departure from hegemonic relations. US continue to claim that it has special roles in shaping global power relations. In fact, US also strives maintain peripheral position of developing societies. Biden wrote in *Americas Quarterly*(2018), "We need to ensure U.S. leadership continues to be a driving force for positive regional change that will enable all of our countries to prosper and

grow. We must pursue the opportunities afforded by greater energy integration, continue to combat the scourge of corruption and share the benefits of trade more broadly, enhance our shared security and rebuild multilateral cooperation in the hemisphere.” The US continue to perceive itself as the net provider of security, stability and development of the region of Latin America. The COVID-19 pandemic proved that this claim was disingenuous (Shifter & Binetti, 2022). There is always a gap between rhetoric and action towards Latin America by US. This gap is not confined to the realm of economic relations. US also lacks credibility on political issues of democracy and rule of law (Shifter & Binetti, 2022). US often maintains unholy nexus with authoritarian regimes in the region despite its call for democratisation of the region. Like its economic policy towards the region, political and administrative models it proposes are ethnocentric in nature. These policies exclude the experiences of non-western world. Most of the developing societies across the world are outside the purview of liberal world order imagined by US (Acharya, 2017). Hence, the non-western challenge in post-hegemonic era is not only the urge to create a multipolar power hub but also a multi-value world order.

New economic powers such as China and India suffer from various constraints to emerge as an unquestionable global player in their march towards post-hegemonic world order. Acharya (2017) calls this new trend as ‘multiplexity, not multipolarity’. In this situation of multiplexity US is no longer a unipolar hegemon. However, its hegemonic powers are not completely eroded. US is compelled to accommodate new aspirants of global power to sustain its claim to maintain a liberal world order. For the new key players in the post-hegemonic world order, securing regional legitimacy was an important precondition for the manifestation of their global power aspirations.

### **Post-hegemonic Regionalism in Eurasia and Latin America**

Both the regions of Eurasia and Latin America share a common post-hegemonic agenda of governance (Gürcan, 2019). In the case of Latin America, rise of left-leaning political movements strengthened post-hegemonic agendas. Their anti-imperialist ideology against capitalist states and neo-liberal agenda in the region reflected in the emergence of new regional alliances. The rise and fall of left politics was parallel to ebb and flow of popularity of post-hegemonic movements in the region. The fall of US influence in the region changed the nature of bilateral relationship between Latin American countries and other global powers like China and Russia. These states, hitherto considered as

passive actors in US 'backyard', began to espouse 'socialism for 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Farah, 2015). The new political, economic and ideological aspirations of Latin American states have been manifested through regional organizations in the post-hegemonic world.

Bolivian Alliance for Our America or ALBA (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América), founded in 2004, is a regional organization aimed for socio-political and economic organization of Latin America and the Caribbean. Its member countries include Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Venezuela. It promotes socio-economic reforms as alternative paths to US led neo-liberal growth strategies. It also created a regional bank – ALBA Bank – in Caracas to fund its own development projects and regional integration. It introduced digital currency in 2009 to challenge the dominance of US dollar in the region. Member countries also formed a united military force, arbitration court, and literacy and healthcare programs to propagate alternatives to neo-liberal world order.

ALBA and its regionalism symbolise the history of struggle and tradition of Latin America against imperialism. The name of the alliance – Bolivian Alliance for Our America – ignites the memories of Simon Bolivar whose dream was uniting the Spanish-speaking Americas and the acronym – ALBA – means 'dawn' (Gürçan, 2019). Latin America's anti-imperialism finds strongest expression in the formation of this regional organization. There are also clear semiotic shifts in the structure and organization principles in order to question and challenge the neo-liberal agendas of US. It is more apparent in its educational and health policies. It also created financial, educational, and media institutions and networks as alternatives to hegemonic institutions. For instance, the objective of ALBA Bank is to provide alternative mechanisms to US led World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The formation of People's Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP) was an alternative to US led Free Trade Agreement and other trade relations. It used anti-imperialist language and sought options outside neo-liberal framework (Brutto, Salazar, & Olavarria, 2015).

Alternative development models were also formulated by member states as part of their larger project of anti-imperialism. For instance, Cuba and Venezuela pioneered new forms of socialist multinational enterprises to enable states to directly engage with globalization (Backer, 2010). The alternative model which was articulated through *concepto grannacional* gave primacy to State as agent of commercial activity. They also introduced *sucre* which was an alternative to dollar

dominated currency system. The gradual acceptance of the virtual currency was an important step towards the financial sovereignty of the region (Brutto, Salazar, & Olavarria, 2015). However, this symbolic expression of post-hegemonic economic ideology hardly reflected in the actual policies of most of the member states. They tend to engage with multinational corporations and neo-liberal policies. Like ALBA, Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) was created in 2008 for regional integration and to strengthen post-hegemonic regional governance. Although both organizations have similar founding principles, they diverged on their strategies and leadership. Unlike ALBA, UNASUR had limited applications of neo-liberal agenda (Tahsin, 2018). However, both organizations advanced a 'post-neo-liberal development agenda' (Bilotta, 2018).

There was similar post-hegemonic regionalism in the region of Eurasia. One of the earlier expressions of anti-hegemonic regionalism in Asia was Nehru's initiative of Bandung conference – an Afro-Asian gathering in 1955. The newly independent states in Africa and Asia had the common visions of decolonisation and alternative model of economic development. The strong sense of anti-imperialism united them into a single political unit. Although this multilateral cooperation was manifested through Non-Aligned Movement, it could not sustain as a significant player in cold war politics. It lost its political significance in the post-cold war international politics. Anti-imperialism became the thinnest thread to secure the political unity of large number of post-colonial states in Asia and Africa.

One of the strongest manifestations of post-hegemonic regionalism in Eurasian region is Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an intergovernmental organization established in 2001 by Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan and the Uzbekistan. India, Pakistan and Iran entered into the organization later. It aims to promote a new democratic, fair and rational international political and economic order. It jointly strives to maintain peace, security and stability in the region. It is predominantly a China led regional organization to challenge the US hegemony. Primarily, the organization challenge US hegemony in the security sphere. SCO provided an organizational opportunity to provide a Sino-Russian collaboration to soft balance US despite the inability to counter the US hegemony by member states completely (Kocamaz, 2019). After initial suspicion, SCO emerged primarily as a security organization in the region to tackle the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism (Aris, 2009).

The innovations of SCO to counter the hegemony of US include business councils, energy clubs, university network etc. These mechanisms aimed to address the challenges of energy security, financial and capital investments, infrastructure etc. China as a leading member, established Confucius Institute to spread its cultural attributes in Central Asia. Apart from this, the organization established institutions for multilateral cultural engagements. Like ALBA, educational cooperation is one of the primary objectives of SCO. It brings together universities and research institutes to promote cooperation at all levels. SCO has a loose university network instead of a single institute of higher education for the organization. Russia led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) – established in 2015 – also had the same vision of regional integration.

BRICS which is a grouping of emerging economies – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – formally established in 2006. It brings together fastest growing economies in Eurasia, Latin America and Africa. BRICS countries come together to deliberate on important issues like security, economic, cultural and people to people exchange. It is primarily an organization for the economic integration of major emerging economies. It aims to collectively dominate global growth in the future multipolar world. It seeks to deepen economic cooperation between member states and stimulate the firms and investors for foreign expansion. To balance the traditional western influence in the global economy was one of the underlying founding principles of BRICS. In the Fortaleza summit of 2014, member states signed an agreement to establish New Development Bank (NDB). While creating NDB, BRICS publicly announced that its mission was to establish a multilateral world development bank controlled by emerging economies (Prado & Salles, 2014). It also established a contingent reserve arrangement in the same year to forestall balance of payment pressures. The financial mechanisms of BRICS primarily aim to secure mutual support and strengthen financial stability of member states. It plans to expand the ambit of the organization by inviting new emerging economies in South America, Africa and Middle East such as Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and UAE. In sum, both regions of Latin America and Eurasia witnessed emergence a number of regional organizations in the post-hegemonic world. These organizations had the common vision of creating a multipolar world and challenge the US led economic order. However, they differed in institutional mechanisms and norms in implementing this mission of creating a post-hegemonic economic and political order. Nevertheless, the motivation of counter-hegemony united them despite their incapacity to completely erode US hegemony and establish an alternative to neo-liberal economic model.

## **Challenges to Counter-hegemony**

Critics argue that ALBA is not a real anti-hegemonic integration rather it is merely a simple mechanism for cooperation (Linares, 2011). There are several hurdles in the integration of region in the post-hegemonic world. Some countries have preponderant role in each regional organizations in Latin America. Venezuela and Brazil dominate ALBA and UNASUR respectively. The unequal distribution of resources and unbalanced power relation among countries in Latin America is the source of this challenge. It poses serious threat to the common aspirations of the region in the post-hegemonic world. There is a tendency for hegemony within the post-hegemonic alliances. For instance, one of the concealed objectives of China in forming the regional alliance was to demilitarise the region and fill the power vacuum created by the disintegration of USSR. China sees SCO as an effective foreign policy instrument (Panda, 2012). SCO was perceived by China as a first and foremost instrument to implement its interests in Central Asia (Huasheng, 2013). Russia also considers SCO as a tool to challenge US influence in the region (Katz, 2008). There is power rivalry between member states within the post-hegemonic regional organizations. China, India and Russia have conflicting military, cultural and political aspirations in SCO and BRICS. These competing aspirations weaken the post-hegemonic agendas of these organizations.

Asia's ability to lead the multipolar world would depend not only on the impressive growth rates of nation-states like India, China or Japan. Rather it depends on the ability of these states to overcome internal rivalries and cooperate to address transnational challenges (Acharya, 2008). In order to emerge as key players in post-hegemonic multilateral world order, these states need to get rid of mutual suspicion and should settle territorial and political issues. This pipe dream can be achieved only at the cost of projected national interest of new global power aspirants. Nevertheless, they can minimize their conflicting aspirations and maximise mutual interest to operationalize the post-hegemonic agendas amidst competing multiplexity.

The struggle between national sovereignty and regional aspirations or between national interest and collective interest of the region. For instance, common interest in creating a multipolar world and antipathy towards US by emerging economies are not enough to make BRICS a coherent and relevant international actor (Käkönen, 2014). The interests of individual member states are in direct conflict with each other and it eventually it may weaken the collective goal. However, it is true that

BRICS could project itself in an alternative role in global economic governance, especially after financial crisis of 2007-08 (Bijarnia, 2013). BRICS also lacks ideological and political motivations to challenge the existing economic order. Unlike other post-hegemonic regional organizations, the institutional initiatives of BRICS are not backed by the sufficient anti-hegemonic ideology. In other words, its aspirations are confined to the mission of dominating global growth within the existing neo-liberal world order, not necessarily challenging hegemonic order by providing alternative economic models. It makes BRICS incapable of becoming a viable alternative in a post-hegemonic world order.

It is also ironical that emerging players in Eurasia like China attempts to create new dependency in Latin America where same post-hegemonic agenda flourishes. Instead of finding spheres of mutual cooperation and benefit, the hegemons within the post-hegemonic multilateral players search to fill the power vacuum created by the attrition of US hegemony. This perceived threat at 'US backyard' further strengthens its status of net security provider. It may create a new dependency in Latin America. The unequal relations between them have potential to create suspicion among developing societies. US also perceives threat from China in its 'backyard'.

One of the serious challenges to alternative mechanisms provided by post-hegemonic regional organization was their inability to depart completely from the neo-liberal economic order. They formulated institutions and networks to integrate their economies to globalized capitalist economy while maintaining their claims for creating post-hegemonic order. These efforts created ambiguity and conflict between the predominant neo-liberal institutions and alternative mechanisms pioneered by post-hegemonic regional organizations. For instance, *grannacional* project of ALBA states was in direct conflict with the trade and financial policies of international economic regimes.

## **Conclusion**

With the fall of US influence in the post-cold war international politics, new regional organizations emerged in Latin America and Eurasia. These organizations strived to create a post-hegemonic economic and political order and challenged the dominance of US in all fields in order to erect a multipolar world. Anti-imperialism was the common ideology united the new aspirants of global power in both regions. A number of regional organizations were established to counter the hegemonic role of US in post-cold war international politics. These organizations differed in their

approach, language, institutions and norms in implementing their post-hegemonic agendas. Regional organisations in Latin America like ALBA had strong sense of anti-imperialism. It innovated new institutional mechanisms to counter the neo-liberal world order preached by US. They formulated new vocabulary, politics and development models to come out of the US led capitalist order. However, these organizations lacked resources and institutional mechanisms to challenge the US led international regimes. Member states also failed to find more spaces of common interest to question the hegemonic authority. On the contrary, regional organizations in Eurasia had comparatively less urge to replace the neo-liberal economic order and vocabulary. They tried to find enough spaces for economic growth within the US dominated neo-liberal institutions and regimes. They hardly popularised a new vocabulary to challenge the neo-liberal order. They lost the unifying spirit of anti-imperialism ignited by erstwhile Afro-Asian conferences and Non-Aligned Movement. New organizations like SCO and BRICS became instruments of emerging economies in the region to advance their national interest. These states prioritised the soft balance to US over the actions motivated by counter-hegemony. Compared to organisations in Latin America, Eurasian mechanisms for regional integration could succeed in advancing the economies of major players. Nevertheless, both regions could not find spheres of ideological and political cooperation in an attempt to formulate post-hegemonic multipolar world order. Attempts to create new hegemony in Latin America by aspirants of global power like China make the inter-regional cooperation a pipe dream.

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