PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION UPSC 2023 · 15 marks

Discuss the various constraints on American hegemony today. Which of these are likely to become more prominent in the future?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — *how the answer moves*

INTRO ROUTES

R1 hegemony ≠ military dominance alone → realist material base + Gramscian consent through ideas/institutions → both foundations under strain → spine: foundational constraints, not flashpoints, will grow

R2 start from the record: Iraq, Afghanistan 2021, Ukraine → force no longer enforces outcomes → so the real constraints sit in the material base and in consent → same spine

BODY FLOW

material constraint: China (technology, markets, value chains, since 2008) + Russia (Eastern Europe, Middle East) → limits of force (Iraq / Afghanistan / Ukraine) → economic constraint: **Gilpin's** fragility (dollar, MNCs, nuclear weapons) → deficit spending + instability → de-dollarisation (China, Russia, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia) → institutional constraint: AIIB, NDB vs Bretton Woods → China's weight in the UN system → ideational constraint: liberal order's appeal weakened → **Rapp-Hooper's** "alliance deficit"

COUNTER-VIEW

not collapse → **Ilhan**: American pullback creates a "false perception" of multipolarity → neither Russia nor China is yet a peer competitor

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 what grows is what touches the foundations: technology and supply chains, de-dollarisation, institutional competition → Taiwan and the Indian Ocean test the hegemon; a peer competitor can replace it

R2 constraints limit, they do not dismantle → adaptation, not collapse, settles the outcome (**Zakaria**)

MODEL ANSWER

Hegemony is not only military dominance. Realists measure it in material resources; Antonio Gramsci and the neo-Gramscians show that a hegemon also rules by consent, through ideas and institutions.

The material constraint is China: an autonomous competitor for technology, markets and value chains since 2008, while Russia presses in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Iraq, the 2021 exit from Afghanistan and the inability to prevent the Ukraine war expose a hegemon unable to enforce outcomes.

Robert Gilpin held that American hegemony is fragile because it rests on the dollar, MNCs and Nuclear Weapons. Deficit spending and instability in the US-led economy weaken that base, and China, Russia, India, Iran & Saudi Arabia now pursue de-dollarisation.

Mira Rapp-Hooper identifies an "alliance deficit": Beijing courts partners while transactional American leadership strains its own.

Bekir Ilhan calls the American pullback as creating a "false perception" of multipolarity: neither Russia nor China is yet a peer competitor.

Technology and supply-chain rivalry with China, de-dollarisation, institutional competition. Taiwan and the Indian Ocean stay dangerous, but a flashpoint tests a hegemon; a peer competitor in technology and economics can replace it.

Whether they prove decisive depends, as Fareed Zakaria suggests, on America's capacity to adapt.