

# **Organic Crisis and Residual Hegemony: A Complex Gramscian Examination of United States' Hegemony during the Obama Administration**

Rashad Seedeem

Master of International Relations, Monash University

Master of Arts: Communications, Monash University

Graduate Diploma in Education, University of Melbourne

Bachelor of Arts, La Trobe University

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School of Humanities and Social Sciences  
La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia

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# Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the condition of US hegemony during the Obama Administration by examining its responses to global crises afflicting international relations. It will employ a ‘complex-Gramscian’ approach – which combines a Gramscian framework with the main features of complexity theory – to provide an account of the ‘organic crisis’ of United States’ hegemony in security, environmental, and economic issue-areas. By ‘organic crisis’ I refer to a systemic crisis of a hegemonic order that involves the disintegration of the organic links or networks between the hegemon, allies and subordinate actors. The central argument is that during the Obama Administration the United States can be characterised as exercising only a residual form of hegemony.

Specifically, the thesis argues that the presence of a residual form of hegemony is demonstrated by:

- (i) A decline of moral and intellectual leadership to the point that international action predominantly relies on coercion, and overt consent is limited in time and space.
- (ii) Complex networks of social relations that support hegemony disintegrate to the extent that oppositional social forces overtly challenge the hegemonic system.
- (iii) The hegemon is unwilling and/or incapable of leadership within international organisations or reforming them to adequately respond to global problems.

In order to substantiate this, the thesis examines three case-studies of global crisis: the 2011 Libyan Intervention; the 2009 Copenhagen Conference; and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. These cases reveal that the hegemonic responses of the United States were undermined by overt challenges from emerging state and non-state actors, globally complex transnational flows that escaped hegemonic control, as well as domestic limitations within the United States which undermined its capacity to address global crises through multilateral institutions. Nevertheless, the United States retained a central role in responding to these crises with a form of residual hegemony that defined its global role during the Obama period.

# **Statement of Authorship**

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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A personal thanks must be extended to my family and friends. First-generation migrants in Western societies gain unique social experiences simply by existing in multiple worlds simultaneously. I am a Canadian-born Sri-Lankan, raised in the south-east outer suburbs of Melbourne. Growing up with other migrant children (a number of whom had fled war-ravaged countries including East Timor, the former-Yugoslavia, Vietnam and Lebanon) I had the privilege to learn of their experiences, which motivated me from an early age to educate myself on world affairs. I am deeply grateful for their ongoing friendship. I have enjoyed endless love from my family, including my parents, Nizam and Charmaine, my siblings Shane and Dana, along with their respective partners, Hazel and Paul, as well as their children Kai, Lennox, Kade and Charlotte. I must also acknowledge the kindness, love and interest that I have treasured from my parents-in-law, Chris and Julie Stempel. Without doubt my most profound gratitude must be extended to my wife, Bronwyn. To accomplish this mammoth task, she has provided me with more support, love, patience and time than I ever needed. I will forever be in her debt and will never stop adoring her. Our two children, Zain and Griffin, have given us more work and joy than we could ever imagine and in many ways, they were the catalyst for this project. I dearly hope they will witness the other end of this organic crisis, where a new and more democratic world order emerges.

This book is dedicated to my loving and incredibly supportive wife, Bronwyn and our two children, Zain and Griffin.

In loving memory of my dear friend Luke Sharkey (1980 – 2001), who would have been an enthusiastic supporter of this work.

# Abbreviations

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
AFRICOM	African Command
ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
AQIM	al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
AWG-KP	<i>Ad Hoc</i> Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol
AWG-LCA	<i>Ad Hoc</i> Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the UNFCCC
B20	Business 20 of the G20
BASIC	Brazil, South Africa, India and China bloc
BINGOs	Business and Industry NGO lobby groups
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa bloc
C20	Civil 20 of the G20
CDS	Credit Default Swaps
COP	Conference of the Parties
EPA	Environment Protection Agency
ETS	Emission Trade System
EU	European Union
FSB	Financial Stability Board
FSF	Financial Stability Forum
G2	Group of 2: United States and China
G20	Group of 20
G7	Group of 7



G77+	Group of 77 plus
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
GHG	Greenhouse Gas emissions
GNC	General National Congress of Libya
G-SIFIs	Global systemically-important financial institutions
HOR	House of Representatives of Libya
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
ICISS	International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty
IETA	International Emissions Trading Association
ILEO	International liberal economic order
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPCC	International Panel on Climate Change
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LAS	League of Arab States or the Arab League
LDC	Less Developed Country
MAP	Mutual Assessment Process
MENA	Middle East North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDC	Nationally determined commitments
NRA	National Rifle Association
NTC	Transitional National Council
NYSE	New York Stock Exchange
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-Operation and Development

OPEC	Organisation of Petrol Exporting Countries
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SAP	Structural Adjustment Plan
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation

# Introduction

On 10 December 2009, President Barack Obama accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway. It was his freshman year as president and many, including several his supporters, thought the prize was misplaced and premature. The Nobel Committee's press release did not mention any examples of Obama's work in the United States or in global organisations, but instead vaguely highlighted his efforts to 'create a new climate in international politics'. The press release celebrated Obama for his message promoting 'multilateral diplomacy', the returned prominence of intergovernmental organisations like the UN, and his role in 'giving hope for a better future'. Never in the Nobel Peace Prize's history had someone been awarded the prize based solely on their rhetoric promoting a positive and more inclusive future. Geir Lundestad, the non-voting secretary of the Nobel Prize Committee, acknowledged in his memoir that awarding Obama the Peace Prize was a mistake. It was the committee's hope that the award would bolster Obama's global leadership and encourage him to follow a path towards more peaceful resolutions in international relations (BBC, 2015). Only weeks earlier, Obama had authorised an increase of 30,000 troops in Afghanistan; and during that same year drone attacks in Pakistan alone accounted for between 473 – 756 deaths (Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2020). In his acceptance speech, Obama did not shy away from his role as military commander-in-chief, arguing that 'the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace' (Crook, 2009).

This brief historical illustration provides a unique window into the dual path that Obama and his administration attempted to tread during his years in office: the global leader and darling of the international community, but also the president of a hegemonic power in crisis, using coercive means to maintain dominance in geo-political zones of interest. Obama's presidency remains a unique moment in American and world history – especially considering the two presidencies that bookend his own. Obama, before and during his presidency, attempted to present himself as a departure from past presidents, especially his direct predecessor. However, as will be outlined in this thesis, the Obama Administration faced a number of challenges and limitations that it struggled to overcome in revitalising the United States' role and standing in the world.

When we rewind to the beginning of the twenty-first century, we see the United States attempt ‘unilateral’ forms of dominance in international relations under the leadership of George Bush II. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in New York and Washington – resulting in over 3,000 deaths in a single day – Bush II initiated his ‘War on Terror’, declaring war in Afghanistan and Iraq while also overseeing a massive torture program in Guantanamo Bay and in other foreign locations. Bush II also flatly rejected any international laws aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. His administration’s relaxed regulation of US financial markets facilitated the emergence of the sub-prime mortgage crisis and Global Financial Crisis of 2008.

In this context, Barack Obama emerged as a Democrat nominee who premised his election campaign upon a message of ‘hope’ and a plan to repair the damage of the previous administration. A central part of this plan was to make the US a more cooperative and inclusive world leader. In his 2008 campaign, Obama promised to end the war in Iraq, close Guantanamo Bay, regulate Wall Street, and even take bold action on climate change. Such grand promises were encapsulated by the idealistic yet vague slogan of ‘hope’. During his campaign on 24 July 2008, Obama made a short visit to Germany and addressed a festival crowd of mainly young people. His speech gave clear indications of what kind of president he wanted to be when he promised to leave aside unilateralism and return to a multilateral approach to international relations. In his speech, he listed a number of global crises and emphatically stated that: ‘No one nation, no matter how large or powerful can defeat such challenges alone’. He followed this by declaring that this was the time to ‘reject torture’, ‘secure the peace of the world without nuclear arms’, and on climate change argued that ‘this was the moment we must come together to save the planet’ (Obama, 2008). These broad claims were not accompanied with a plan of action, but it was a very public signal to the rest of the world that Obama intended to be a world leader who would act multilaterally to address global crises.

Obama presented his vision for US foreign policy in *Foreign Affairs*, the publication of the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) and the most widely available international relations journal in the world. Obama’s (2007) ‘Renewing American Leadership’ outlined how he sought to be the direct opposite to Bush II. He framed his narrative in a global humanist vision of the world sharing a ‘common security and a common humanity’. He committed to unravelling all of Bush II’s most contentious foreign policies. He promised

to evacuate troops from Iraq, stop the practice of torture in distant countries and the use of secret prisons, and tackle nuclear proliferation. He actively promoted inclusiveness and multilateralism in approaching a wide range of issue-areas from international security and UN reform, to combating climate change and addressing the challenges of transnational terrorism. Notably, he also made reference to intervening in African conflicts to prevent mass atrocities and potential genocide. He stuck to this vision for the rest of the campaign and when he won the presidency the world warmly welcomed his victory.

However, not long after Obama won the November 2008 election, the realities of a United States in decline became all too stark. Obama was well aware of the immediate challenges that he inherited from his predecessor. But judging from his foreign policy commitments before and early in his presidency, the extent to which the hegemony of the United States was in crisis and the associated limitations on its capacities appeared to be beyond Obama's comprehension. Consider the challenges faced by the declining hegemon: The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq threw up new threats that required US boots to remain on the ground. Other conflicts emerged in Libya and then Syria that prompted hard decisions about the nature and scope of military intervention. Domestic politics soon compromised Obama's ability to be a global climate leader. And the aftermath of the global financial crisis threatened ongoing American prosperity and raised serious questions about the neo-liberal growth model promoted by successive administrations. How the Obama Administration responded to these crises provides important evidence for understanding the nature of US hegemony in this period.

From this angle, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the condition of US hegemony during the Obama Administration by examining its responses to a number of serious global crises that profoundly shaped international relations. It will employ a 'complex-Gramscian' approach that rejects the premises of neo-realist, neo-liberal institutionalist and world-system analysis approaches to hegemony. That is, a Gramscian framework will be elaborated, which incorporates the main analytical features of complexity theory, to provide an interpretation of how hegemony is networked through global social relations between actors that are far from equilibrium in their material capabilities. This framework will be used to elucidate the organic crisis of United States' hegemony during the Obama Administration. By 'organic crisis' I refer to a systemic crisis of a hegemonic order that

involves the disintegration of the organic links or networks between the hegemon, allies and subordinate actors (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

The Obama Administration is a revealing context for this thesis on US hegemony because the administration attempted to present itself as a rejuvenated or reformed global leader that was capable of once again leading through multilateral cooperation and building widespread consent to US action. Obama looked set to rebuild and strengthen the organic links of the US hegemonic order and much of the world welcomed such a project. In addition to his Nobel Peace Prize, in September 2009 Obama was warmly welcomed by the UN, especially when he promised to leave behind the days of unilateralism. Obama also sought to work with other state actors to address climate change and resolve conflicts around the world through global cooperation. Yet the extent of United States' decline vis-à-vis other actors, the challenge of managing globally complex transnational flows, and the internal struggle within the United States severely limited the capacity of Obama to achieve such lofty ambitions. Consequently, the manner in which the Obama Administration responded to crises provides an important measure of how US hegemony has changed in recent decades.

Indeed, as will be argued in this thesis, the constraints on US responses to these crises reveals a fractured and degraded hegemony that was only present in a 'residual' form. Between 1945 and 1968, the US and its allies established and maintained an order within its sphere of influence based on a capitalist economy and financial architecture and a complex form of multilateral diplomacy infused with a liberal ideology and buttressed by unsurpassed economic and military capabilities. From 1968 onwards, however, United States hegemony increasingly faced varied and complex challenges. The defeat in the Vietnam War proved to be both financially costly for the United States and questioned the capacity for the US to exercise military superiority. The centre of gravity in the world economy shifted dramatically as competing economic zones emerged centred in Germany and Japan. The dissolution of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s brought a sense of triumph and new wave of neo-liberal globalisation, but since the beginning of the twenty first century, the centre of economic gravity has shifted to China. Multifaceted counter-hegemonic social movements have arisen, faded and even evolved into new movements, including the anti-war movement, the anti-nuclear movement, the World Social Forum and even the global Salafi jihadist movement. These social forces have in

their own ways challenged and undermined US hegemony. Drawn out wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have further highlighted US decline. As will be outlined below, during the Obama period this has forced the United States to increase its use of coercion and dominance in multilateral organisations. In short, the United States was in a stage of residual hegemony during the Obama Administration, unevenly and inconsistently applying mechanisms of coercion to maintain its primacy.

### **Approaches to Hegemony and US Decline in IR Theory**

In order to situate this project in the scholarly discourse, it is necessary to consider the arguments and shortcomings of leading theoretical approaches in IR that are used to understand US hegemony. Before delving into their specific arguments, there are some important points of agreement. Despite much dispute on the issue of American decline, even the most ardent advocates of US supremacy have acknowledged its *relative decline*. Joseph Nye (2015), for example, argues that despite a relative decline in its power the United States will continue to be the global hegemon, as all other challengers remain inadequate. According to Nye (2015, p. 96), ‘a degree of relative decline is not the same as the end of the American era’. Evidence of relative decline is presented in a number of crucial areas as other states expand their military budgets and modernise their armed forces (eg. China), enhance their missile capabilities (eg. North Korea), and quickly grow their national economies and consequent capacity to exert economic influence (eg. again, China). It is also generally acknowledged that advancements in technology and the globalisation of economic relations over the past few decades have driven the emergence of international organisations, non-state actors and transnational corporations with power and authority that further complicate the exercise of global hegemony.

But perhaps most importantly, despite much debate amongst scholars on the definition of hegemony, there is general agreement that hegemony is premised on an order of stable hierarchical relations between key political, economic and social actors through a system of agreed norms, rules and laws. Whether that system is benevolent (Ikenberry, 2001), exploitative (Johnson, 2003), derived from the sole agency of the hegemon (Kindleberger, 1986), through international regimes (Keohane, 1984), or a system of class-based relations (Wallerstein, 1984; 2000), the concept of hegemony has been exhaustively

applied to describe the post-WW2 period of US primacy. Neo-realists such as Charles Kindleberger (1986), Robert Gilpin (1987) and Stephen Krasner (1976) provide interpretations of hegemony that are grounded in a dominant benevolent state actor which provides 'public goods' for mutually beneficial returns in areas like market access and financial stability. Neo-liberal institutionalists like Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1989) and John Ikenberry (2011) agree with realists on a number of fronts, but focus their analysis on the capacity for liberal international institutions to maintain a hegemonic world order after the hegemon has declined or no longer actively contributes to providing public goods. Marxist interpretations of world-systems like Wallerstein (1984) are founded upon the lens of class conflict, stratification and hegemonic forms of exploitation in the world economy. The following critical survey of these approaches to hegemony highlights their limitations and the benefits of applying a Gramscian theoretical framework.

According to neo-realists, hegemony involves imposing peace by creating and maintaining an inter-state system that simultaneously satisfies the self-interests of the most dominant and, to a lesser extent, weaker states in the world system. A state will only emerge as a hegemon through both a preponderance of material capabilities (primarily in military strength, production and finance) and a willingness to provide leadership (Kindleberger, 1986). Indeed, for neo-realists hegemony is perceived as a form of domination in a world of competitive relations between states. In relation to the world economy, neo-realist interpretations of hegemony are premised on providing a stable economic system that directly benefits the hegemon, as well as satisfying other states to varying degrees in order to maintain the system. Neo-realists posit that states, led by the hegemon, must be interventionists in the world economy in order to protect and advance national self-interest. If a stable economic system is not maintained, the potential for war becomes more pronounced, either through the disruptions of erratic world markets and/or through intensifying competition for resources. Imposing hegemony is a costly practice and the state that chooses to assume this level of responsibility only does so to create networks that are mutually beneficial in order to safeguard the system (Gilpin, 1987; Kindleberger, 1986).

Charles Kindleberger's (1986) seminal 'Hegemonic Stability Theory' (HST) remains the dominant neo-realist understanding of the way in which this system operates. HST is



theoretically premised on the most materially superior state actor providing a stable system for other state actors as it has mutually beneficial payoffs. The world leader's chief responsibility is to provide 'public goods' to ensure the ongoing functioning of the global liberal economic order. Other states are in varying degrees 'free riders' who enjoy the public goods that the hegemon provides. Despite the appeal of HST's premises, it has a number of important theoretical and empirical limitations. It is an ahistorical theory and therefore limited in its interpretation of the nuances of the evolving nature of social relations. For instance, despite Kindleberger's assertion, the United States was not prepared to assume global leadership from the United Kingdom nor was the UK willing to cede it to the US until after World War 2 (Arrighi, 2010, pp. 301-304). Importantly for this thesis, it also lacks an appreciation of the hegemon's structural power in times of material decline (Strange, 1987). Specifically, the world order maintained by the hegemon and supporting actors can continue under the strain of relative material decline while other key actors are willing to participate, reproduce hegemonic institutions and retain consent to the hegemonic leadership. HST demonstrates a limited understanding of the unequal exchanges with the periphery in which public goods are actually either private or exploitative for the benefit of the core. Consequently, HST emphasises the stability created by hegemony rather than the contestation within it. As Gramsci would put it, hegemony of the core is maintained by hierarchical relations, but in a state of 'passive revolution' in the periphery where leadership is tolerated but not internalised by the subaltern groups.

Neo-liberal institutionalism has presented itself as the leading counter-point to neo-realism. It is premised on applying a liberal-democratic lens to inter-state relations. These relations are bound by the laws, rules, norms and principles of the capitalist free market, administered through international, and, now, global institutions. According to neo-liberal institutionalists, global institutions are led by states but supported and influenced by other key non-state actors like transnational corporations and economic and cultural elites (individuals like Bill Gates, George Soros, Mark Zuckerberg and Warren Buffet who can shape policy through their lobbying, speeches and commentary) and civil society actors (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other NGOs) that have all played key roles in liberal institutions. For neo-liberal institutionalists, the hegemon provides leadership through international regimes that create the legal and normative

framework through which states diplomatically engage with each other to solve common problems.

Keohane's 'After Hegemony' (1984) thesis is the epitome of neo-liberal institutionalist theory. Here, he posits that following the relative decline of the United States, the institutions introduced and maintained by the hegemon will remain due to the ideological rigour of these liberal institutions, and active participation and interdependence of state and non-state actors. Neo-liberal scholars like Keohane reject the neo-realist premise that states exist in a Hobbesian state of nature where security interests motivate all actions, but rather contend that states can peacefully coexist through the mutual benefits from cooperation and the perpetual economic growth model of free markets. Thus, international organisations and the maintenance of the free market system provides the political order necessary to avoid war. The hegemon is the lead-architect in establishing international organisations like the United Nations and must invest capital and personnel into international regimes like the IMF and the WTO in attempts to guide behaviour through its rules and norms.

Even though neo-realists and neo-liberal institutionalists would consider themselves to be intellectual combatants, they actually have much in common. Ontologically, their world is premised on an ahistorical system where state and non-state actors are driven by self-interest. Neo-realists may give primacy to state actors and militarism compared to neo-liberals who place greater explanatory value on the markets and institutions, but ultimately these scholars all live in the same theoretical world of rational, unitary state actors. Their similarity lies in the fact that the liberal order established through American-led hegemony after World War 2 is the platform through which both schools elaborate their interpretative framework. Neo-realists dismiss liberal moral universality in inter-state relations, but their analysis is intrinsically bound to a Western-centric liberal model as the basic platform on which actors operate in the inter-state system. Their interpretation of hegemony is based on an individual state's capacity to demonstrate material superiority vis-à-vis other states in the inter-state system. Anarchy in the world creates an environment where the strongest thrive and impose their will. Neo-realists assume a market logic in which state actors compete and make rational choices that only serve self-interest and survival. Such an interpretative framework does not take into consideration the historical contexts of these asymmetrical state relationships.

Similarly, neo-liberals harness this market logic yet see a tendency towards peaceful co-operative relations based on multilateralism, the free market and the (liberal) rule of law. Both neo-realists and neo-liberals situate their analysis of actors through rational-choice models that do not capture a world that is continually evolving with new dynamics and processes, which are shaped by actors with a diverse range of cultures, personalities and actions that are not necessarily guided by self-interest. In this sense, Richard Falk (2007, p. 37) characterises liberalism as realism with a human face: ‘liberalism has become a “gentler realism,” offering a pale, pacified, and generally contained “other,” whether liberalism’s gloss on realism is formulated by reference to human rights or support for some-what stronger international institutions’.

It is against this theoretical background that the ontological shortcomings of these approaches are evident to Gramscian scholars. As Cox (1983) and Gill (1986; 2003) have argued, perceiving the world under such terms is misleading and narrow. Neo-liberal rationalists assume that all states throughout time will act based on self-interest driven by a need for both self-defence and prosperity. Furthermore, the means by which they explore this perspective is based on the state remaining the primary unit of analysis. Even if neo-liberal institutionalists take into consideration multilateral organisations and the behaviour and functional effects on states, they still consider state apparatuses to be the driving forces behind the capacity for IGOs to be successful. This may in fact be true in some cases, but it does not take into consideration the historical evolution of the state or consider the evolution of historical structures as an inter-relational platform with other actors.

Furthermore, by grounding international relations in such narrow premises of Western liberalism, these scholars act more as defenders of US hegemony rather than objective analysts. Many assume that the United States is inherently a force for good in the world. Even though neo-realists avoid applying explicit moral frameworks upon their interpretations, their scholarship is primarily directed towards providing practical measures to ensure that the US maintains their position of superiority within the inter-state system as it is fundamentally preferable compared to any alternative. Neo-liberal institutionalists do not even pretend: they are more explicit defenders of the United States’

liberal hegemonic order and the inherent good it can bring the world in relation to peace, cooperation and prosperity (Ikenberry, 2001).

From a Gramscian perspective, it is here that we find the chief flaw of the shared ontology of neo-realist and neo-liberal interpretations of hegemony: the gross contradictions of the promise of universal liberalism. The hegemon's public goods, advocated by neo-realist and neo-liberal institutionalist scholars alike, are simply the continuation of unequal exchanges between the core and the periphery, rather than the false reality of mutual benefit to all states and their peoples. For example, the application of Structural Adjustment Plans (SAPs) and 'conditional loans' from the IMF has completely debilitated periphery economies (Harvey, 2009, pp. 162 - 163), and the deregulation of trade barriers in the periphery through the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has decimated local industries by competition from transnational corporations (Chang, 2009). Security in the core, mostly geographically located in the West and the global North, has historically been often produced through forms of military domination in the periphery. Examples include the First Indo-China War (1946-1954), the Iranian coup d'état (1953), the Second Indo-China War (1955-1975), the assassination of Congo's Patrice Lumumba (1961), the Chilean coup d'état (1973) and most recently the War on Terror (2001 to present day), which has involved military invasions and subsequent occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the use of drone assassinations, and other forms of violence. The 'public goods' of the hegemon serve the interests of the core, often to the detriment of the periphery. The maintenance of liberal peace and prosperity in the core is produced through forms of domination and exploitation in the periphery.

In short, both neo-liberals and neo-realists apply an ahistorical and, therefore limited interpretation of hegemony and international relations. They may indeed premise their conclusions on a close reading of history, yet they assume that actors are individualised atoms that exist in a timeless order, be it anarchic or based on liberal institutions. Such a system is not immutable, nor do such interpretations provide comprehensive explanatory frameworks within which to understand the current changes in the world. Amitav Acharya (2015) provides a succinct lesson for IR rationalists: 'A practical danger of viewing world order in excessively American-centric terms is that one loses sight of the other actors, instruments, and modalities of global peace and prosperity' (Acharya, 2015, p. 116). It is quite presumptuous to assume that the liberal institutional order or the inter-

state system would not be fundamentally redefined by changes like the relative material decline of the US and the rise of other state actors, especially ones outside of the West such as China, India and Brazil. Neo-realists have argued that the 'rise of the rest' will not be any different to the power realignments of the past, in that states outside of the West also maintain the same interests as all states (Gilpin, 2001; Krasner, 1985). Neo-liberals have countered that the liberal institutional order is so robust that any challenge from either states or non-state actors will be absorbed and not fundamentally change the framework of rules, norms and liberal democratic institutions (Ikenberry, 2011; Nye, 2015).

To be sure, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) have historically demonstrated similar interests to that of their Western counterparts and non-state actors have not fundamentally changed the liberal order despite a growing presence in organisations like the United Nations. Yet this is largely related to the residual lingering of US hegemony, which is occurring while ideological reproduction has been destabilised and a new hegemon is absent. As global crises have wider and deeper consequences, the prospects of maintaining US ideological leadership has deteriorated. Counter-hegemonic social forces have emerged – most notably the rise of a global Salafi jihadist movement, with associated organisations that use terrorism as a means for challenging the dominance of the liberal hegemonic order. As Gill (2003) notes, 'any attempt to construct a hegemonic system of rule will tend to generate, dialectically, a set of counter-hegemonic forces, which may or may not be progressive' (Gill, 2003, p. 37). Neo-realists and neo-liberal institutionalists do not take into consideration the role of ideology and the capacity for the logic of the liberal hegemonic order to be critically internalised or challenged by subaltern actors. Their interpretations are primarily based on the assumption of the superiority of liberalism and that alternative visions are inherently weak and inferior. Without measuring the degree to which ideology has been internalised by other actors, neo-realists and neo-liberals lack an ability to identify and explain key factors that affect hegemonic reproduction.

Given this critique, world-systems analysis would appear to be a better candidate for analysing US hegemony. This approach is based on Marxist analysis which attempts to encapsulate interactions between people through the interpretative framework of class conflict. Christopher Chase-Dunn and Peter Grimes describe it thus:

The world-system is all of the economic, political, social, and cultural relations among the people of the earth. Thus, the world-system is not just 'international relations' or the 'world market'. It is the whole interactive system, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (Chase-Dunn and Grimes, 1995, p.389).

One of the earliest proponents of world-systems analysis, Immanuel Wallerstein (1984, pp. 38-39) identifies hegemony as occurring when 'one power can largely impose its rules and its wishes (at the very least by effective veto power) in the economic, political, military, diplomatic and even cultural areas'. This does not mean that other states are enslaved to the rule of the hegemon, but rather that the hegemon is so superior to other allied-states that they essentially function as what Wallerstein describes as '*de facto* client states' (his italics) and other competitor states are severely alienated and hostile. Hegemony is not a static situation and is just one end of the inter-state competition spectrum.

According to world-system analysts, the means by which hegemony arises follows a set logic where a core state gains dominance in the three economic fields of production, commerce and finance. The new hegemon establishes a 'global liberal' system as this is the ideal framework for capital accumulation and political relations, yet this also lays the groundwork for greater rivalry from competitors due to the spread of advanced forms of technology and from the growing incomes of local workers. The hegemon then enters a stage of decline as the rivalry becomes more intense and the legitimacy of global liberalism becomes undermined (Wallerstein, 1984, pp. 43-45). Wallerstein's focus on economic dominance and global spread of liberalism is largely based on his interpretation of the world economy as a driver of inter-state competition. Economic dominance allows the hegemon to intervene in the market on behalf of domestic firms for the dual purpose of advantaging local transnational corporations and directly disadvantaging non-local competitor corporations. The promotion of global liberalism pushes open markets to the hegemon's local firms that are organisationally and technologically superior to their competitors. Therefore, somewhat like the neo-realist view, Wallerstein argues that the hegemon's relationship with other states is based on securing economic dominance, not the benevolent sharing out of public goods.

Conversely, Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver (1999) argue that hegemony is the fulfilment of two criteria: (i) inter-state coordination by the hegemon to the extent that smaller states internalise the general interests presented by the hegemon and thereby consent to surrogate global governance; and (ii) the new hegemon provides comprehensive global solutions so as to legitimate the role of surrogate global government. According to Arrighi and Silver (1999a, pp. 28 – 35), the rise of the hegemon is the product of a partnership between the forces of capital and territorial states addressing the chaotic conditions associated with the decline of the previous hegemon. Essentially, Arrighi and Silver focuses more closely on the evolving nature of ‘cycles of accumulation’ and the corresponding political and social frameworks to accommodate this new form of economic exchange. The new hegemon emerges to provide system-wide reorganisation which is accompanied by emulation from other weaker states and leads to systemic expansion. This expansion deepens the legitimacy of the reorganisation as these evolved, or even new, divisions of labour and economic exchanges are adopted widely, yet as this process takes root greater competition from rival states emerges (Arrighi and Silver, 1999a, pp. 32 - 34). Here, Arrighi and Silver applies the historical research of Braudel (1984) to posit that hegemonic crisis is associated with the emergence of intensified inter-state and inter-enterprise competition, social conflicts and new power configurations underpinned by the spread of financialisation.

Hegemony in world-systems analysis is placed within a class-conflict paradigm rather than one of global leadership. Therefore, the hegemon is the lead-core state that establishes an unequal network of exploitative exchanges between the core and the periphery. However, the means by which this dominance is perpetuated is the essential question of world-systems analysis. Hegemonic stability theory’s discussion of public goods is irrelevant as the establishment of these collective goods is really just a platform for the network of unequal exchange and capital accumulation throughout the world-system. Furthermore, the hegemon does not provide stability to the world-system in the same way that many of the hegemonic stability theorists argue. World-system analysts argue that the hegemon limits the likelihood of inter-core conflict during the height of the hegemon’s economic, political, cultural and technological preponderance. With the decline (or ascent of a new hegemon) the likelihood of inter-core conflict becomes more evident. Consequently, the processes by which the hegemon interacts with the world

economy is the more necessary focus as that will determine the stability, or rather, the varying degrees of instability in the world-system.

Even though world-systems analysis provides great insight into the intense competition that exists within the inter-state system, as well as the world economy, it has a number of limitations. World-systems theorists apply a mechanical form of Marxism and, ultimately, a reductionist interpretative framework, to explaining the very complex and historically unique processes characterising the transitions taking shape within the world. By applying pre-determined schemas upon primarily state and economic actors, world-system analysts impose theory upon history. World-system scholars do not give enough weight to the role of social forces nor to the critical role of periphery resistance in their struggles to challenge the unequal exchanges established by the core. Even within the elite of periphery states (that may in fact share the same ideological position of the liberal hegemonic order) there are numerous examples of opposition and resistance to the imposition of neo-liberal policies, such as in WTO negotiations (eg. China and India) or in rejecting Structural Adjustment Plans (eg. Malaysia following the Asian Financial Crisis). Arrighi's (2010) analysis of financialisation has been an important contribution to understanding the processes that depict the instability brought on by such a transformation, but serious questions remain about how such a system is adopted and internalised ideologically by follower states and the subaltern classes. The expansiveness, the sheer complexity and vulnerabilities of the transformations brought on by hegemonic decline and the organic crisis of the United States' hegemony cannot be adequately explained through the reified systems that world-systems scholars apply.

Furthermore, the cyclical nature of world systems analysis is incredibly problematic in that scholars are forced to fit their analysis into a set process that is not pre-determined. By applying cycles, even evolving cycles, does not allow adequate opportunities to consider other ideological factors that influence and characterise hegemonic systems. The ideological influence and leadership that the United States does maintain cannot be explained by world system scholars. Instead they have chosen to exaggerate the depth of the US decline in class terms. World-systems scholars have not given adequate attention to the social forces that have further supported the hegemony of the United States', nor have they sufficiently considered the role of counter-hegemonic forces, be it from grass-roots leftist movements or from populist far-right movements like global jihadism or neo-



nationalism. Even though world-systems scholars do provide great insight into the role of the world economy and the transition to financialisation it is still very much lacking in its ability to adequately explain the nuances, complexities and contestation that exists within US hegemony over time.

### **Theoretical Approach and Argument**

Using this critical survey of IR theories as its point of departure, this project will adopt a critical theory approach based on Gramscianism and complexity theory to elucidate how United States' hegemony was in 'organic crisis' and had declined into a 'residual' form during the Obama Presidency.

Gramscianism is based on the theoretical interpretations of hegemony developed by the Italian communist, Antonio Gramsci, during the rise of 1920s fascism. It provides a historical, dialectical approach that focuses on how orders emerge, reproduce and transform through engagements between social forces and historical structures. According to Gramsci, hegemony develops from relations between private social forces and the political society of governance to form a state *organism* of consent and coercion. Consent is derived from the ideological harmony between the hegemon and social relations with allies and supportive subaltern masses. This is reproduced by the 'prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function' (Gramsci, 2012, p. 12). Coercion is necessary to liquidate challenges and impose 'discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively' which involves actively imposing dominion over ideology or the 'ideological terrain' (Gramsci, 2012, p. 12). The conquering of the ideological terrain leads to a 'reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge' within society that deepens connections and integration until the ideological perspective of the hegemon is organically fused, or becomes 'common sense' (Gramsci, 2012, p. 365). Gramsci uses the term 'organic' to refer to processes of integration and the connections that exist through the complex social relations that take place within a given hegemonic order. Robert W. Cox (1983, p. 169), furthermore, describes the Gramscian application of 'organic' to mean 'structural, long-term or relatively permanent'. Indeed, this process of ideological integration and the active and conscious engagement of private social forces determines the level of *organic*

integration of all social relations, which is uneven and in a continual process of challenge, change and evolution.

Gramscian IR attempts to account for the role of state actors from above and civil society actors from below in producing a world order, thereby avoiding dominant interpretations in IR that relied solely on inter-state relations. Cox (1983) was the first to apply the theoretical frameworks of Gramsci as an alternative to neo-realism and neo-liberal institutionalism and has been joined by others, including Stephen Gill (1986), Kees van der Pijl (1989), Mark Rupert (1995) and Enrico Augelli and Charles N. Murphy (1989) in understanding how hegemony is exercised and reproduced in multilateral institutions and non-state organisations. Gill has written extensively on inter-state relations and hegemony (2003, 1988 with David Law), and has also provided an in-depth profile on the Tri-Lateral Commission in its role in reproducing hegemony (1991). Van der Pijl has explored the ‘nomadic’ nature of elitist social forces in historical structures (2012), but has also examined how global rivalries have shaped global institutions (2006). Rupert (1995) has provided an insightful class-based analysis of union movements in reproducing United States hegemony in the post-war era. Augelli and Murphy (1989) have critically examined the evolution of US hegemony in the United Nations and how that has developed into a form of supremacy.

Following a Gramscian interpretative framework, I argue that hegemonic order is a historical structure reproduced by the state and the extended state (non-state actors or social forces) as a structural fit of economic, political and social institutions that are organically linked through ideology. Hegemony is exercised through consent and coercion managed by the conscious actions of the state and supportive civil society actors, or what Gramsci called ‘organic intellectuals’. Organic intellectuals are the members of society that link themselves with the hegemonic social class and ideologically defend and promote the hegemon in civil society. Ideology underpins the Sorelian myths that ‘educate’ behaviour and a worldview that is internalised as ‘common sense’. Institutions and modes of production emerge to serve the hegemonic order and are therefore defined and bound by the ideological drive of the hegemon. As Cox (1983, pp. 171-172) states: ‘World hegemony is describable as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot be simply one of these things but must be all three.’ It is

within these platforms that organic intellectuals educate and integrate other actors into the ideological framework and mode of production of the hegemonic order.

Where I depart from other Gramscians is that I place greater weight on the contested nature of the reproduction of hegemony and thereby also examine in greater detail the tensions within the hegemonic networks in building moral and intellectual leadership (discussed in Chapter 2). By moral and intellectual leadership, I mean the capacity to build consensus amongst allies and subordinate groups through communicating an ideological logic that is internalised by followers and presents a narrative of a common good – be it a local, regional or global. Moral and intellectual leadership is first produced by an ascendancy in economics, politics and social institutions. This ascendancy creates a reverence or prestige for the hegemon and a will to follow, adopt and emulate its ideological frameworks. This production of hegemony is layered through multi-nodal networks that attempt to spread and embed shared ideological values within the constitutional framework of *all* social relations. Moral and intellectual leadership is threatened when consensus building is disrupted by challenges to the centrality and primacy of the hegemon. What I will argue in the following chapters is that a condition of organic crisis was present during the Obama Administration that disrupted both the ideological legitimacy and organisational capacity of the US to reproduce hegemony.

In so doing, I harness complexity theory as an analytical framework that takes into account the ways in which actors create and work within dynamic transnational networks that undermine the ‘solid modernity’ of inter-state relations. In a world beset by ever-evolving forms of engagement and exchange, non-state actors can act as significant disruptors to inter-state relations and therefore need to be examined within the context of US hegemony. Complexity theory applies an approach based on ‘relationality’, where all interactions are simultaneously connected and converging as part of a greater whole. As John Urry (2003, p. 122) has argued, global complexity is the ‘metaphor of connections. Such connections are to be viewed as more or less intense, more or less mobile, more or less social’. The US hegemonic order is based upon a network that is reproduced and challenged by non-linear social relations where the theoretical constructs of ‘above’ and ‘below’ cannot be viewed as distinct entities. As hegemonic relations are challenged and contested by various social forces, a condition of organic crisis appears where parts of the layered network are disrupted and disconnected, threatening the entire hegemonic system.

From this perspective, complexity theory shifts our understanding of US hegemony from one of steady, linear decline to an account focussed on the ways in which crises permanently disrupt and disconnect the network of hegemonic relations.

This has been occurring in a context of globalisation that is usefully conceptualised by complexity theory. Fluid forms of financialisation, terrorist organisations like al Qaeda and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), independent media groups like WikiLeaks and social media platforms such as YouTube and Twitter have created a form of modernity that Zygmunt Bauman (2001, pp. 140-141) describes as 'liquid', suggesting that time and space now moves sideways in unpredictable movements that transcend the supposed 'hard' borders of the nation-state. As Urry has noted:

The fluid and turbulent nature of global complexity means that states have to adapt and co-evolve in relation to enormously different sets of global networks and fluids that transform the space beyond each state. States thus co-evolve as the legal, economic and social regulators, or gamekeepers, of systems of networks and fluids generated through the often unpredictable consequences of many other systems (Urry, 2005, p. 248).

Most notably, loosely regulated financial practices have been the leading factor in creating economic crises across the world, indiscriminately wreaking havoc in global markets. Global security concerns can no longer be confined to inter-state war as 'new wars' within states proliferate and transnational terrorist organisations move to exploit opportunities for their own agenda. Climate change has exposed the global interconnectedness of our biosphere and demands a global response from states, motivated and buttressed by a global environmental movement. Such problems have fundamentally changed the means by which global politics operates. Under these conditions, state-based governance structures are enduring stress due to competing agendas of state actors and the demands of transnational elites and non-state actors.

The theoretical framework of my project will combine these approaches under the label of 'complex-Gramscianism'. Adopting this framework, the central research question for this thesis is:

What do the Obama Administration's responses to global crises reveal about the condition of US hegemony in this period?

An important element of applying a complex-Gramscian approach to this question involves recognising the capacity for transformation which occurs through the tensions and cleavages that emerge from an 'organic crisis'. Gill (2010) describes the global organic crisis as a 'political impasse' where the long-term sustainability of the current world order is doubtful. The organic nature of hegemony is premised on the integration of the ideological relations between the hegemon and subordinates, or what Gramsci calls 'subaltern' actors. The organic crisis is the disintegration of these organic links or networks. As these disruptions become more acute and challenging to the hegemon, the systemic crisis of the hegemonic order becomes more entrenched. Furthermore, this process of disintegration leads to disconnected forms of 'residual hegemony'. By residual I mean that the hegemon retains forms of structural advantage due its centrality and material capabilities in certain places, but it is primarily using mechanisms of coercion to accomplish hegemonic agenda-goals in key parts of its network.

Furthermore, in order to answer this question, I will identify a global organic crisis and the presence of residual hegemony through three inter-related propositions:

- (i) Residual hegemony is indicated by a decline of moral and intellectual leadership to the point that international action predominantly relies on coercion and overt consent is limited in time and space.
- (ii) Complex networks of social relations that support hegemony disintegrate to the extent that oppositional social forces overtly challenge the hegemonic system.
- (iii) The hegemon is unwilling and/or incapable of leading international organisations or reforming them to adequately respond to global problems.

Using this framework, the central argument of this project is that during the Obama administration the United States can be characterised as exercising only residual hegemony in which challenges from emergent state actors, non-state actors and globally complex transnational flows have created a condition of organic crisis. In order to identify these features, I focus on the actions of the Obama Administration in responding to global crises through multilateral institutions. This period reveals that the moral and intellectual leadership of the United States has been undermined by the challenges of global crises that beset the disintegrating hegemonic order. However, the US remained in a position to

reproduce residual forms of hegemony. The United States remained the most powerful state actor in the world in terms of its military, economic and diplomatic capabilities. Furthermore, as the chief architect of the post-war world order, the US has been situated in a pivotal position to exercise significant influence in global institutions. At the time of Obama's election, multilateralism was undergoing a significant global test. Ultimately, Obama was not able to halt the disintegration of the US' hegemonic network as demonstrated by its continued relative decline in power vis-à-vis other state actors, its declining ability to direct the flows and processes of globalisation (especially in relation to security, the environment and the global economy), and by the increasing influence of dynamic non-state actors that undermined its hegemonic position.

Gramsci's (2012, p. 276) characterisation of organic crisis as the 'old is dying and the new cannot be born' has never been more apparent. Emergent state actors such as China and India are challenging American/Western centrality in multilateral institutions, yet have not shown any clear willingness to supplant core actors to provide new leadership or to dramatically reshape multilateral institutions. Non-state actors from a diverse field ranging from non-governmental organisations like Amnesty International to terrorist networks like Islamic State continue to expose the contradictions of the liberal world order and accentuate tensions in social relations. Global complexity and ongoing tensions within multilateral organisations indicate that the institutional structures established by the United States after World War 2 lack the organisational capacity to bring stability and order to the multiplicity of challenges facing the world. The organic crisis, as revealed in the Obama Presidency, placed the world in an uncertain and politically contentious situation that remains today: the old structures and institutions of United States' hegemony are ill-equipped to respond to global crises, yet newly emergent social forces are in such infancy that an alternative global hegemon is not apparent. Consequently, despite the challenges that it faces, the US remains a residually vital player in responding to global crises.

### **The Methodological Strategy of Complex-Gramscianism**

Having outlined the main research question and central argument, in this section I address epistemological and ontological considerations in order to outline the methodological strategy of this project. As argued above, neo-realist and neo-liberal institutionalist

interpretations have provided limited explanatory insight because of the weaknesses in their epistemological approaches and ontological claims. Neo-realism's epistemology is one based upon the premise of an ahistorical structure that adopts a universal positivism that behaviourally infers relations between self-interested state actors. Such an interpretation is limited in not being able to account for any structural change. Neo-liberal institutionalist interpretations are reduced to moral universalism and positivist rational-choice models, lacking in a critical historical analysis and thereby taking for granted the system that currently exists. World-systems analysis' epistemological focus on the 'structural-functional' processes and cyclical patterns of hierarchical exchanges between dominant and subordinate economic and state actors is prone to reification, in that it imposes a mechanical reasoning upon these processes that limits the capacity for social transformation.

Given these shortcomings, Gramsci's approach to investigating hegemony and understanding social relations is the methodological basis through which this research is undertaken. Gramsci provides an intellectual methodology that is deeply situated in history, incorporates an understanding of the ensemble of social forces, structures and other actors that reproduces the totality of the order. In his *Prison Notebooks* (2012), Gramsci outlines a methodology and research agenda that focuses on examining how social structures are reproduced, shaped and transformed by human agency:

The ways in which the single individual enters into relation with nature are many and complex, since by technique one should understand not only the *ensemble*...but also the 'mental' instruments, philosophical knowledge...It is necessary to elaborate a doctrine in which these relations are seen as active in movement, establishing quite clearly that the source of this activity is the consciousness of the individual man (Gramsci, 2012, pp. 353 – 354, italics in the original).

Gramsci puts forth an argument that the study of human activity must be subjective in that it can only be understood through individuals and the ensemble of societies engaging with the material conditions of nature, culture, social entities and economic forces that have the capacity to evolve, change and transform. In the pursuit of examining human activity, the application of Gramsci can bring about important insights in relation to the tensions and relationality between different groups within the context of historic blocs (Jubas, 2010, p. 229).

Such an epistemological premise overcomes the dualism between subjective interpretations and positivist ahistorical accounts. The social world is a product of human endeavour but it is a reality that is self-reproducing. Murphy describes how Gramscianism provides an ontology that is 'historical yet agent-centred' in that it accounts for structures that are also transformed and reproduced by actors over time. In exploring the 'Future of the World Order' Cox (1976) provided an extrapolation of the historical dialectical approach to understanding global politics:

The social world is a construct of the human imagination yet there remains a gap between the socially constructed ideas of the world order and the actual reality for pockets of social groupings within populations. The 'concrete' or the realities of the world are mediated through human activity and interpretation from the human mind. Human activity and interpretation is a product of a self-reproducing system or order that is derived from the relations between ideas, social forces and structures (Cox, 1976, p. 183).

Gramscianism is grounded in history but is acutely aware of the complex, diverse and inter-connected transformations that have changed our understandings of world order. As Cox notes, Gramsci's conceptual thought was grounded in 'historicism' where Gramsci would situate and adapt his concepts to history: 'he was constantly adjusting his concepts to specific historical circumstances...A concept, in Gramsci's thought, is loose and elastic and attains precision only when brought into contact with a particular situation which it helps to explain' (Cox, 1983, pp. 162-163).

This project adopts this Gramscian approach, which uses an adapted conceptual framework to provide an historical and empirical examination of the reproduction of hegemonic structures. According to Cox (1996, p. 517-518), hegemony 'derives from the ways of doing and thinking of the dominant social strata of the dominant state or states insofar as these ways of doing and thinking have inspired emulation...these social practices and the ideologies that explain and legitimize them constitute the foundations of the hegemonic order. *Hegemony frames thought and thereby circumscribes action*' (italics added). The internalisation of ideology is thus a crucial factor in building hegemony, yet this process is uneven. Gramscians note that hegemony moves along a continuum from ethical hegemony to outright domination primarily based on the capacity to garner political legitimacy amongst the subaltern classes through organising a



structural ‘fit’ between the political, economic and social. Hence consent is a contested space and is rife with what Gramsci described as ‘contradictory consciousness’ – a situation where both the internalisation of the hegemon’s values take place but also forms resistance on different occasions (Femia, 1981, pp. 42-45). This project seeks to capture the shifts in these ideological conditions.

However, Gramscian IR analysis is overly reliant on the capacity of the hegemonic *state* to maintain its authority, rather than viewing hegemony as a complex network of relations that need to be studied and explained. Such analysis has fallen prey to the common trap of focusing too closely on inter-state relations and the actions of transnational elites whilst marginalising the role of networks of non-state actors. Much Gramscian scholarship on non-state actors has focused on social forces and organic intellectuals that act as the extended state (Gill, 1991; Murphy and Augelli, 1989; and Rupert, 1995), while largely taking little heed of how non-state actors, through new opportunities provided by globalisation, have challenged the centrality of the inter-state system. Furthermore, traditional Gramscian analysis gives far too much weight to the capacity of the United States to unilaterally secure forms of domination in a world order that is undergoing an organic crisis. My methodological approach will seek to build an explanatory narrative that focuses on the complex transnational networks that support hegemony and the role of social forces and non-state actors in creating an organic crisis of this hegemonic network.

The rise of emergent powers in the non-Western world presents a significant challenge to United States’ hegemony in multilateral organisations. Yet this challenge does not come in the form of supplanting United States and broader Western dominance, but rather one based on levelling out and complicating inter-state relations. Added to this complication, the capacity to present moral and intellectual leadership by the US, and the West more broadly, has been severely undermined by the chequered history of United States-led hegemony. Non-state actors currently have a far greater role in presenting moral and intellectual leadership by building narratives that can be critically internalised by subaltern classes using ideals like human rights, sustainable development, and scientific integrity. Consequently, a key methodological aim of this project will be to capture the ways in which non-state actors have provided alternative moral and intellectual leadership that has gained much traction in global issue-areas like the environment.

Furthermore, Walby (2003) has presented complexity theory as an innovative alternative to mainstream IR theories that explains the systemic qualities of these globalising trends upon interactions between unequal actors. From an epistemological standpoint, Walby (2003, p. 10) argues that complexity theory offers ‘the notion of emergence and the ability to address more than one layer of determination yet still retain holistic concepts, holding at its core an anti-reductionist analytic strategy...[that] seeks to combine an understanding of both individual and social structure, that does not deny the autonomy of the individual while yet theorising changes in the social totality’. When the system is far from equilibrium, small changes, or actions from traditionally weaker actors, can bring about dramatic change that can feed into critical turning points in social relations. From this perspective, complexity theory allows us to focus on the US as a state actor yet extend the analysis to the broader system of hegemony encompassing networked relations with a host of subordinate actors.

Therefore, complex-Gramscianism is a critical theoretic approach that examines historical processes and social reproduction and is primarily concerned with accounting for *historical change* in global social relations. Cox (1996, p. 514) elaborates that the historical dialectic ‘begins with an assessment of the dominant tendencies in existing world order, and proceeds to an identification of the antagonisms generated with that order which could develop into turning points for structural transformation’. Therefore, the focus of Gramscian thought is upon the tensions and forms of alienation within the world order that could indicate the potentialities for transformation. Such transformation must be formulated through the ‘limits of the possible’, thereby posing a theoretical boundary upon emergent alternatives to the current world order.

From this perspective, I share Gill’s methodological defence of Gramscian approaches to global politics which presents three important functions:

- i. Theoretical frameworks are situated and informed by the processes of history that are cumulative *not* repetitive.
- ii. World orders can be explained through analysing an ‘ensemble’ of processes from social forces, ideas and actors, including states that interact with and reproduce social structures.

- iii. The driving purpose of Gramscian analysis is to encourage an alternative world order based on democracy, social justice and a sustainable future. (Gill, 1993, pp. 22-24)

My complex Gramscian methodology builds on these functions by identifying three areas of historical change that need greater attention:

- i. *Crises as historical ruptures that reveal heightened tensions and cleavages between social forces in relation to how hegemony is reproduced.* Emergent contradictions create tensions and cleavages in history. As Fontana (2005, p. 118) notes: 'hegemony is inherently unstable, constantly undermining itself; that is, it is intrinsically contradictory, for its internal logic and dynamic generate continually a counter-hegemony.' These tensions manifest as challenges to hegemony that exist on spectrum between diplomatic resistances from other state actors to open confrontation. It is particularly important to examine the crises where the United States' hegemonic order is revealed as limited and contradictory. Minor, localised crises are a natural characteristic of any social system. However, how crises are managed in order to reduce destruction, return stability to the order and ensure similar crises will not return characterise the vigour and resilience of the hegemon. Specifically, these periods can reveal the disparities between the integrated hegemony of the core and the passive revolution of the periphery. The unfulfilled promises of hegemony naturally breed discontent and resistance. These tensions and cleavages become more acute during times of crisis and can directly change how actors engage with the United States and hegemonic institutions. Localised or specific crises that are focused on different areas of the historic bloc and are poorly managed by the hegemon can be interpreted as indicators or descriptors to the system-wide crisis of the hegemonic order. Gramsci described them as the 'morbid symptoms' that provided a deeper explanatory context to the organic crisis. The resilience of hegemonic institutions and the hegemon's capacity to lead during a crisis provide a useful insight into the well-being of this order. The response to these 'morbid symptoms' can act as a microcosm to the wider systemic organic crisis providing important insights to the analyst.

- ii. *The relationship between globalising processes and the reproduction of hegemony.* In analysing global politics, emergent social forces, the non-linear nature of global life and the co-evolution between systems that are external and internal to hegemonic rule demand a more thorough analysis. Neo-realists contend that national interests are static and ahistorical, yet the internal political systems of the hegemon deeply influence how it behaves in multilateral institutions, while non-state actors and global processes have the capacity to influence or even change societies. Feedback loops that constantly engage with societal structures on differing levels, which must be understood in a holistic fashion, are necessary in examining hegemony. This is why an examination of hegemony cannot be limited to areas of inter-state relations or the inter-governmental management of security issues. As Walby (2007, p. 454) puts it, there must be ontological depth that explore the domains of the 'economy, polity, violent nexus and civil society' that are layered by a diversity of social relations. However, such an ontology must be situated within the formations, tensions and cleavages of the self-reproducing world order. This methodological process is described by Gill (1993, p. 30) as investigating the extent to which integration and disintegration (as both processes proceed simultaneously) is characterising the global order.
- iii. *The emerging global organic crisis as entailing both the failure of the hegemon to respond to global problems and a means to explore alternatives.* Gill, and to a lesser extent, Cox, have referred to the global organic crisis yet without much elaboration. Through conflict and crisis, an alternative can emerge through the demand of a transnational response to address the cleavages exposed. In the words of Ulrich Beck (2006, p. 23): 'conflicts perform an integrating function in that they make clear that cosmopolitan solutions have to be found. Such solutions can scarcely be envisaged without new global institutions and rules, and hence without a certain degree of convergence'. The demand for 'new global institutions and rules' is a result of the failure of the hegemon to adequately address the crises and conflicts that afflict the world order through a reformed set of multilateral institutions.

The methodology in this research thesis could be applied to a number of recent US administrations, especially from the Clinton era onwards. However, the Obama Administration is the ideal candidate for such a methodological approach. The Obama

years are best suited to analyse and critically examine these three areas of historical change. Unlike his predecessors and successor, Obama presented himself as a champion of cooperation who would rejuvenate the liberal US hegemonic order. Clinton maintained an acute sensitivity to domestic politics. Bush II's administrations were characterised by unilateralism. And the crude politics of Trump has been founded on the protectionism of America First. This thesis looks to examine how the conditions of organic crisis and the residual hegemony of the US hegemonic order are managed by the most globally engaged and cooperative US president in recent memory.

This project will focus on these aspects of US hegemony by examining three case studies. Case studies, by carefully examining unique historical periods, provide opportunities to understand how wide-scale global flows and power-relations between actors have changed and evolved in relation to US hegemony. The chosen case studies look to understand hegemony in three key issue-areas of global politics: security, the environment and the economy. Global security remains one of the leading indicators of hegemonic stability, and the capacity for multilateral institutions to address security crises is a central facet of exercising global authority. In the environmental area, climate change presents a significant existential threat to our planet that demand responses from the most powerful actors in order to reduce long-term consequences. In terms of the global economy, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis has laid bare the human cost of financial crises, demanding responses to stabilise and repair economic systems. These case studies will enlighten key areas in global politics through targeted empirical research with the intention to provide a holistic understanding of the organic crisis of United States' hegemony.

Each case study was chosen to best examine the organic crisis of the US hegemonic order and the residual hegemony exercised by the Obama administration. The case studies needed to explore a range of key issue-areas in international relations to ascertain a well-rounded appreciation of the exercise of hegemony. The cases also needed to be historical moments where the consensual nature of global hegemony had an opportunity to flourish but ultimately struggled. The 2011 Libyan Intervention was initially lauded as a form of humanitarianism and global cooperation to protect vulnerable civilians. The intervention was characterised as the United States 'leading from behind', elevating a form of global consensus to provide a new era of global security. The 2009 Copenhagen Conference was

a global event where heads-of-state from around the world gathered with the intention of signing an agreement that would usher in a new era of global climate change management. The G20 response to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis was considered the saviour of a global financial system on the verge of collapse. Each of these historical moments unravelled for the Obama administration revealing important tensions and cleavages that plagued Obama for the entirety of his time in office. Thus, the case studies selected provide a revealing portrait of the organic crisis of the US hegemonic order and the residual mechanisms exercised by a hegemon in systemic crisis.

In summary, my methodology involves the application of a complex-Gramscian theoretical framework to a range of cases to build an empirical analysis of US hegemony during the Obama Administration. In each case, a context of crisis is used to build conclusions about the condition of US hegemony. This interpretive methodology is premised on the need to situate theory within history in order to address a gap or deficit in research about the ensemble of processes that contribute to historical structures. This will be driven by what Gill (1993, p. 21) describes as the ‘central task of social science’: to examine and provide accessible explanations of ‘social action, social structures and social change’.

Each case study combines two overlapping elements. *Historical analysis* will elucidate a contextualised understanding of key events of crisis to locate the contradictions and limitations in the exercise of hegemony. This historical investigation will provide an analysis of conflicts and tensions in relation to how hegemony is reproduced and resisted, focussing on multilateral institutions. Gramsci and Cox have consistently situated their analysis in history and close readings of how hegemonic forces interact with and reproduce historical structures. Consequently, the Complex Gramscian analysis will involve an *empirical examination of the ‘ensemble’ of social forces processes, and relations* that impact on the reproduction of hegemony. Such an examination can only be undertaken by investigating the ensemble of social forces and how they interact with each other through a holistic account of complex social relations.

## **Structure of the thesis**

In Chapter 1, I explain the work of Antonio Gramsci and how it has been applied in IR literature by the likes of Robert W. Cox, Stephen Gill, Kees Van der Pijl, Mark Rupert, Craig N. Murphy and Enrico Augelli. Here, I will explore the Gramscian method of analysing how orders are reproduced and the processes that are employed that identify structural transformation. Even though previous Gramscian contributions have provided important insights into the reproduction of hegemony and the role of social forces in building world orders, my analysis ultimately concludes that these interpretations have been lacking in key areas. Past Gramscian interpretations have not adequately explored the contestation that exists in the processes of reproducing hegemony from both state and non-state actors. Much Gramscian work lacks thorough analysis of counter-hegemonic challenges to the United States' hegemonic world order, instead focusing on the different means by which hegemony has been bolstered by varying organic intellectuals or ideologically co-opted through such organisations as the Tri-Lateral Commission. Furthermore, Gramscian analyses have heavily focused on political economy yet have not devoted enough research into such key fields as global security and diplomacy.

In Chapter 2, my elaboration of complex-Gramscianism intends to address these apertures in Gramscian IR. Here, I outline the framework of complex-Gramscianism that I will utilise to build my analysis of US hegemony. My application of Gramscianism focuses on the contestations and challenges in the processes of hegemonic reproduction. Complexity theory is used to augment the Gramscian approach by emphasising features of complex systems, elaborating on three key concepts: multi-nodal networks, emergence and attractors. It will argue that processes of globalisation are expressed in multi-nodal networks through which all relations are inter-connected and have the capacity to feedback into each other in uneven forms depending on the circumstances. In these feedback loops, emergence is a process in the far from equilibrium interactions that allow for different actors to engage with traditionally much larger actors at key moments. Such moments can take place through different attractors. 'Strange' attractors have the capacity to disrupt and build tensions through engagement with feedback loops in complex systems. Using these concepts, complex-Gramscianism is used to elaborate on the conceptual make-up of residual hegemony and organic crisis and how it applies to the United States' hegemonic order. The organic crisis can be understood to be present when

three conditions become evident: (i) a decline of moral and intellectual authority to the point that coercion becomes more prevalent; (ii) disintegration of organic networks resulting in more overt challenges from emergent counter-hegemonic social forces; and (iii) the hegemon is unwilling and/or incapable of reforming multilateral organisations to address global crises. Based on this framework, it can be hypothesised that the United States during the Obama Administration had moved into a form residual hegemony while an organic crisis became more entrenched.

Having developed my theoretical approach, in Chapter 3 I apply this framework to my first case study: the 2011 Libyan Intervention. This case epitomises how residual forms of hegemony can produce forms of limited consensus, yet is so paper-thin that a multiplicity of other problems can emerge. The intervention was presented and reluctantly accepted as a global humanitarian exercise founded on the premise of protecting the citizens of Libya from a brutal dictator, Muammar Gaddafi, who was supposedly set to unleash his security forces upon his own civilian population. The unified NATO action sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council was justified through the emergent global norm of Responsibility to Protect. The UNSC approved a no-fly zone, but this quickly escalated to air-to-ground attacks with far-reaching consequences, including Libya descending into a failed state, the expansion of local militias and the country becoming an attractor for terrorist organisations. Since the 2011 Libyan intervention, the United States has faced much resistance within the UNSC, especially permanent members like China and Russia. The chapter will argue that the United States, whilst remaining a key component in global security responses due to its military capabilities, lost legitimacy as the World's Policeman. Furthermore, despite superior military capabilities, and a network of state and non-state allies, the United States faced significant challenges from emergent counter-hegemonic actors like terrorist networks and local militias. This case demonstrates that the consent to and application of military power as a key plank of hegemony had become far more problematic for the United States.

Chapter 4 critically examines how the weak multilateral response to climate change, epitomised by the 2009 Copenhagen Accord, is a direct product of the global organic crisis. The 2009 Copenhagen Summit was intended to be a defining global moment where heads of state would sign a new international agreement that would mitigate the threat of climate change. Obama flagged that the United States was open to ratifying a new



agreement that would be a turning point in addressing the existential crisis of climate change and in deepening global cooperation. However, this conference witnessed how weak the US' moral and intellectual leadership was vis-à-vis state and non-state actors. Emergent state actors in the form of the BASICs (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) advocated for diplomatic positions that were a distinct departure from the US. While simultaneously the United States was limited in its negotiating position due to domestic political and economic forces that were openly opposed to reducing carbon emissions. In order to achieve some kind of diplomatic and public victory, Obama bypassed key allies, notably the EU, to negotiate directly with the BASICs in order to draft the Copenhagen Accord – a widely derided three-page document. In order to build support for this non-binding accord the Obama administration resorted to applications of coercion with some state actors. Obama also faced challenges from counter-hegemonic environmental civil society organisations that provided an alternative ideological framework to the US and allied state actors. Despite being marginalised in the negotiating process, these non-state actors applied novel and inventive strategies to build alternative approaches in addressing climate change. The role of corporations will be examined in relation to the divide between those that supported action on climate change and those that opposed such actions. This examination will critically explore the strategies employed to exercise influence over proceedings, especially in relation to such areas as carbon markets. Last, a critical study of the UNFCCC and the processes at Copenhagen will be applied. I will argue that the Copenhagen Conference was mired by both its undemocratic process and reliance on consensus-building – a situation that the United States does not want to reform nor is capable of. Meanwhile, the United States remains central in the multilateral response to climate change. Whilst the US continues to be one of the lead polluters and the largest national economy their role in negotiations remains essential. Moreover, the residual nature of hegemony and the absence of any alternative leadership has allowed the United States to continue to play a role as leader by default.

Chapter 5 examines the G20 response to the Global Financial Crisis with a focus on the uneven moral and intellectual decline of the Washington Consensus but a sustained commitment to global capitalism. This a situation is a consequence of the resilience of the emerging economies during the GFC and the growing appeal of their state-interventionist economic policies. However, their ongoing commitment to global capitalism and in reforming the IMF and the World Bank demonstrated the reforming

role of the emerging economies rather than a transformative one. Furthermore, the fragmented and localised approach of counter-hegemonic civil society actors resulted in a marginalised role in the G20 process and in shaping policy. Conversely, the business community and financial actors increased their diplomatic presence in G20 summits and in shaping the global financial architecture since the GFC. The co-ordinated G20 response demonstrated a form ‘residual hegemony’ in which collective action was able to stabilise the global economy in the short term, but unable to rectify the *structural* limitations and contradictions of financialisation through any significant multilateral response. As systemic changes were not implemented the likelihood of another global financial crisis has increased.

In the Conclusion, I provide a generalised account of the organic crisis of US hegemony during the Obama administration and synthesise how complex-Gramscianism explains this situation. This approach is historically orientated towards the dialectical tensions that emerge between social forces, especially during moments of structural transformation. Ultimately, this project concludes that hegemony is a contested network of relations in which actors from ‘above’ and ‘below’ play a role in reproducing, disrupting and transforming hegemonic relations. As global crises continue to expose the limitations and contradictions of United States’ hegemony, emergent social forces will continue to contest the future without a strong hegemon to direct it.

# Chapter 1

## The Gramscian Approach to Hegemony

The Sardinian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, was concerned with how hegemony was applied to social relations, especially with regard to the bourgeoisie's leadership in Italian society. As he languished in prison from 1929-1935, Gramsci had much time to write on a variety of political subjects, but his work on hegemony was the most original and astute. According to Bates (1975, p. 351), Gramsci's political writing was quite disparate, yet his work on hegemony was 'the unifying thread of Gramsci's prison notes, and appears to be the logical conclusion to his total political experience'. Unlike other Marxists, who were concerned with how the vanguard could lead the working-classes and dominate the antagonist classes (Lenin's 'dictatorship of the proletariat'), Gramsci wanted to ascertain why this failed to eventuate in most capitalist societies. He also sought a departure from what he saw as the 'economic-determinist' interpretations of Marx, and instead contributed to Marxism through a critical analysis of cultural hegemony. His discussion on hegemony has left a significant intellectual legacy and has inspired scholarly work that has extended his analysis well beyond his original scope of research.

Even though Gramsci's intention was to apply his writing to the practical undertaking of a socialist revolution, generally within a nation-state and specifically in Italy, his work on hegemony can be applied in a number of contexts, including international relations. In general terms, a Gramscian understanding of hegemony is premised upon social relations that primarily involves the ideological leadership that emerges from the historical struggle between the dominant class and subordinate groups. Yet Gramsci was well aware that national societies were influenced by external forces that shape the development of historical structures. In the *Prison Notebooks*, he discussed how the developments of the French Revolution, especially the Napoleonic Wars gave 'old regimes a powerful shove, and resulting not in their immediate collapse as in France but in the 'reformist' corrosion of them which lasted up to 1870' (Gramsci, 2012, p. 119). France provided a catalyst for ideological change in the 'international economic field' of 'free competition and free exchange' (Gramsci, 2012, p. 120). Further, he did understand that the stratification of international relations did impact on state formation and how a state behaved internally

and externally: 'international relations intertwine with...internal relations of nation-states, creating new, unique and historically concrete combinations' (Gramsci, 2012, p. 182). He did not, however, imagine a world of international actors forming a historic bloc and exercising hegemony on global scale. Indeed, many critics of Gramscian approaches to international relations have focused on how Gramsci's work has been misappropriated for a theoretical application that Gramsci never intended for (Saurin, 2008, pp. 30 – 31; Femia, p. 346).

However, I concur with Murphy (1998) that the appropriation of Gramsci is based purely on its explanatory insights. In applying Gramscian approaches to IR, it is important to remember that these approaches are valuable for their conceptual utility and not because they entail a strict adherence to every aspect of Gramsci's propositions. Murphy puts it best when he notes that 'the extent to which Gramsci's theory helped us understand IR, we saw it as worth pursuing; to the extent to which Gramsci's theory was not particularly helpful, we were quite willing to part company with Gramsci'. Indeed, national societies are far more integrated than the more diffuse and distant social relations at the international and global levels. But the point of Gramscian research is to look at how these global social relations are developing in a space that has experienced elements of coercion and consensus-building from a dominant state acting on a global stage. Gramsci scholarship provides rich insights into the processes of building hegemony and its exercise in a historically situated world order.

In this chapter, I will outline the conceptual contributions of Gramsci and Gramscian IR analysts that will be taken to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the organic crisis and residual hegemony of the United States during the Obama Administration. Applying Gramsci's ideas to international relations, specifically the exercise of hegemony in multilateral institutions, provides an approach that is both historical and dialectical in the sense that it focuses on how orders emerge, reproduce and transform through human agency and the reproduction of social structures. The contributions of Gramsci and Gramscian scholars will provide the theoretical foundations within which to analyse the case studies and the changes in US hegemony. The limitations of Gramscian scholarship will also be explored in order to indicate the theoretical gaps complex-Gramscianism will fill in Chapter 2.

In the first section, Gramsci's theory of hegemony is outlined through an examination of its characteristics and an account of how hegemony is reproduced through social relations. This section will also elaborate on an underdeveloped area in Gramscian literature: the contested nature of hegemony. This provides a crucial explanation of how incomplete forms or 'levels' of hegemony become unravelled and is an area that warrants greater attention if we want to identify when residual hegemony and organic crises emerge. The next section examines how scholars have applied Gramscianism to international relations, especially the work of Robert Cox, who was the pioneer of this approach. Here I will explore how these interpretations have provided insights into how social forces, ideas and material conditions work in and around international organisations to reproduce hegemony within the historic bloc of a world order. The last section takes note of the limitations of Gramscian accounts of international relations, especially their tendency to interpret expressions of hegemony as a neat fit that does not give enough weight to contestation within a world order.

### **Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony**

Gramsci understood hegemony to be times in history when the dominant social class was able to apply forms of consent and coercion upon a multiplicity of social forces through a historical process of conflict, compromise, mediation and domination. This analytical approach was 'relational' in that it was premised on historical development and engagement with historical structures arising from the interactions of social agents. Hegemony entails the legitimacy to derive consent from subordinate groups and the power to implement forms of dominance towards antagonistic groups. This consent is derived from the subordinate class who have, to varying degrees, internalised the ideology and worldview of the ruling hegemonic social class. When a social class becomes hegemonic it forms a *historic bloc*, a harmonisation between civil society and political society (the state) as well as the economic productive forces of society, where the narrow interests of the dominant social class are successfully perceived as general interests. The power of the hegemonic social class is fundamentally justified through their superiority and control in economic production, yet hegemony is generated or reproduced through the normative and intellectual educative actions of political and civil society – a conquering of the 'ideological terrain'. In these realms, the various subordinate social

classes (eg. workers, peasants) willingly accept the worldview presented by the ruling group and the ruling group must - at least plausibly - appear to be representing the interests of all.

This dialectic between material conditions and social forces is so interwoven that they cannot be understood separately. Material conditions and production influence ideology and ideology provides the intellectual engine for the perpetuation of material conditions and production. Gramsci avoids the static reductionism of orthodox Marxism that narrowly interprets society through the prism of economics and class-warfare (referred to as 'historical economism'). The hegemonic bloc may involve different forms of allegiance, and accommodation to other ruling groups and even the subordinate classes. This process is uneven and will historically develop in a unique form for each society. Therefore, the hegemonic state that emerges from this process is distinctive to the historical conditions that brought about its birth, but is also continual evolving in order to satisfy the needs of the social formations that took place in its development (Rupert, 1995, pp. 40 – 41). The ideology of the ruling group evolves and forms a dyadic relationship with subaltern groups where subordinate ideologies are absorbed until it is perceived as the 'collective-national popular will' (Gramsci, 2012; Woolcock, 1985, p. 206; Lears, 1985).

When hegemony is established, the social forces involved in the shaping of the market and the production are intimately intertwined with the emergent social class. Hegemony emerges through a simultaneous social, political and economic process – it must be all three. The emergent hegemonic social class is directly associated with domination in a mode of production that exponentially expands across society, and then is imbued with an ideological position and identity that conquers the 'ideological terrain'. Gramsci was very clear in positing the economic basis of hegemony, writing 'if hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, it must also have its foundation in the decisive function that the leading group exercises in the decisive nucleus of economic activity' (quoted in Femia, 1981, p. 24). However, only a segment of economic actors is aligned with the emergent hegemon as allies in society. There are other economic forces that are either opposed to the nascent hegemon or are not as organically linked due to a myriad of historical circumstances. State (trans)formation is thus premised on economic dominance that is able to integrate or extinguish oppositional forces to form a new political structure.

As Gramsci (2012, pp. 263 – 264) argues, ‘the content of the political hegemony of the new social group which has founded the new type of State must be predominantly of an economic order: what is involved is the reorganisation of the structure...which might (and should) be changed at all times.’ Further, Gramsci (2012, p. 214 – 215) notes that a military component is organically and consciously cultivated to act as a ‘spontaneous’ defender of the hegemonic social group when necessary in order to be ‘immunised from the political gangrene’. The military takes on a social dynamic in that it has internalised the logic and values of the hegemonic social group to be its natural defender. Conversely, during times of hegemonic decline, economic social forces become more fragmented, creating increased tensions and challenges for the hegemon. Some economic actors break off and align themselves with other emergent social forces in an effort to establish a new order. This is also when the hegemonic group can access leadership from the military forces to institute a form of what Gramsci describes as an example of ‘Caesarism’ or ‘Bonapartism’ to impose a coercive form of command to defend the hegemonic group from collapse (Gramsci, 2012, p. 215).

In explaining how this hegemonic relationship operates, Gramsci argues that there must be a separate understanding of civil society and political society. Civil society is taken to mean private organisations like schools, churches, unions, the press and voluntary associations that exist separately to the state. Civil society organisations allied with the hegemonic class share an organic link by having a commonality of ideological values and national interests, which then serves a normative educative function by justifying and entrenching these ideological values into society. As Gramsci (2012, p. 366) writes, ‘if a social group is formed which is one hundred per cent homogeneous on the level of ideology, this means that the premises exist one hundred per cent for revolutionising: that is that the “rational” is actively and actually real.’ Leadership from the hegemonic social class is legitimately accepted and exerted over social, political and economic structures. The organic intellectuals of civil society actively involve themselves in maintaining and directing hegemony through theoretically and culturally linking the masses to the state and thereby transcending class interests. As Gramsci (2012, p. 12) writes, ‘intellectuals are the dominant group’s “deputies” exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.’ Allied private organisations that are not institutionally-linked to the state nurture and strengthen hegemony through internalising the values and interests of the ruling group and widely spreading this message so that it

is adopted as *common sense* in society. Common sense is the process by which the ideological values of the ruling group become so entrenched in society that it is perceived as a shared view held by the general populace. Organic intellectuals provide the means by which legitimacy or consent is derived from the *subaltern groups*: those who are ruled through exclusion or alienation from direct participation in the structures of political society and economic production. According to Gramsci, the consciousness of subaltern groups is not always a direct product of their class – as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2014) note ‘the organic ideology does not represent a purely classist and closed view of the world’.

According to Gramsci, political society refers to the institutions of the state proper – the parliament, the bureaucracy, the judicial system, the armed forces and the police. Political society exerts the means of coercion and dominance through fraud, legitimate applications of violence and the ‘liquidation’ of antagonistic groups. Here Gramsci borrows from Machiavelli’s (2012) *The Prince* and his discussion on the Centaur – half-man (civil society) and half-beast (political society). When political society and civil society work together as a united front hegemony is willingly applied to the masses as ‘leadership’ and the ideological goals of the ruling classes are internalised to the point that their ideology is accepted widely. Yet the beast (political society) must be ready to squash antagonistic groups and apply various forms of force, coercion, fraud or propaganda in order to maintain control. If hegemony is deeply ingrained in society, the act of liquidating threats will be legitimately supported by the masses as they perceive it as serving their own interests.

Thus, for Gramsci, consent and coercion, hegemony and domination, are intrinsically linked. While hegemony might imply the absence of coercive forms of domination, including the application of repression and fraud, there are times when the application of coercive forms of domination are necessary under hegemony, especially when addressing antagonistic groups – ‘hegemony protected by the armour of coercion’ (Gramsci, 2012, p. 263). The state is therefore understood not simply as the political apparatuses of the government but the combined projections of consent from state institutions (political society) and private organisations (civil society). By focusing on the state as a collective union of political society’s elements (parliament, bureaucracy, judicial system, armed forces and police), without consideration of other actors in civil society, many IR scholars



have provided a limited and rigid understanding of states, which has not recognised the historically-situated and ever-evolving relational form in which states develop and operate. As Gramsci puts it ‘it would be wrong to think that this unity is simply judicial and political...the fundamental historical unity, concretely, results from the organic relations between State or political society and “civil society”’ (Gramsci, 2012, p. 52).

Indeed, for Gramsci the state takes on an active ideological role in achieving consent through the role of organic intellectuals in internalising and representing the interests of the ruling group. Political society or state-based institutions maintain legitimacy with the masses and survive times of crisis because organic intellectuals defend their function and purpose. Such groups are vital in times of crisis; it is only when organic intellectuals fail in their ideological message that the state will resort to more blatant forms of domination, repression and fraud. In under-developed states, when civil society is quite weak, revolutions from either the Left or the Right are possible, as in the case of the Bolsheviks in 1917 Russia and the Fascists in 1922 Italy. However, in bourgeois liberal-democratic states this is not the case as their civil societies are quite robust and, therefore, a strategy based on building organic links with the subaltern masses is a prerequisite for revolution. Consequently, Gramsci departs from Marx in that he places a greater emphasis on the ‘superstructural levels’ of civil society and the state’s political society, whilst narrowing the role of the productive economic relations of the base. Hegemony is thus present when a dialectical relationship exists between the superstructure and the base. As Woolcock (1985, p. 207) argues, it is ‘the notion of an historical bloc and the concept of ideologies as organic links which enable Gramsci to assert the dialectical unity between structure and superstructure as a single totality’.

However, it is important to note that Gramsci did not narrowly interpret the subservience of the subaltern groups as one dimensional, but rather saw the process of consent as being quite complex and never absolute. Gramsci argues that consent from the subaltern masses is a complex social relation where there are contradictory forms of consciousness that have the potential to challenge the legitimacy of the state and even form a counter-hegemonic bloc. This is understood as *contradictory consciousness* where individuals interpret and internalise the cultural hegemony of the ruling groups to different degrees where passivity and resistance, as well as other responses, are simultaneously present. The subaltern groups have a consciousness that is intimately linked to their socio-

economic cultural identity, yet there is another consciousness that is derived from the past in which the dominant group's values are absorbed to the point 'that produces a condition of moral and political passivity' (Gramsci, 2012, pp. 326-327). There are sometimes 'flashes' of action that resist hegemony, but in most cases they are not long lasting. The short-term nature of these revolts is largely a product of an inability to convincingly imagine a different worldview from that proposed by the organic intellectuals of the nation-state (Lears, 1985, pp. 569-570). Consent is never absolute, the subaltern groups' organic links with the state are ambiguous, divided and at times tenuous. Consequently, the integration of the subaltern groups exists on a spectrum that indicates the success of the hegemony project.

Hegemony is thus inherently contested in that it is premised on an internal counter-logic – the harmony of hegemony can only exist if it provides opportunities for the emergence of counter-hegemony. As Femia (1981, p. 45) notes:

Those who experience pain from the existing distribution of income, power, and status, though often sharing much of the consensual pattern of belief, also have contrary inclinations. A society which unjustly inflicts the distress of exclusion or deprivation cannot wholly succeed in assimilating into its affirmative consensus those whom it mistreats.

Furthermore, the promised imagined reality or utopia of hegemony can never be attained for the subaltern masses; therefore resistance and antagonisms directed at the ruling group are inevitable. Indeed, Fontana (2005, p.118) writes that 'hegemony is inherently unstable, constantly undermining itself...a "battle" of competing and opposing hegemonies...social reality is itself both product and producer of such a battle'.

As hegemony is quite unstable, it is important to explore a rarely discussed aspect of Gramsci's theory of hegemony: his conception of differing applications of hegemony or the depths of hegemonic integration in society. Femia (1981) best elucidates this notion by developing an analytical scale of hegemony from its peak of full integration to its weakest point of minimal hegemony. Femia identifies the peak as *integral or ethical hegemony*, which indicates a high level of moral and intellectual integration from all aspects of society where internal contradictions and antagonisms are largely absent. In this case, the state performs an 'educative' role in society as it is seen to be and

legitimately performs a progressive role in fostering political, social, ethical and economic advancements. However, as bourgeois relations with the proletariat are inherently beset with internal contradictions, the state cannot perpetually represent the interests of all, nor can it continually provide a progressive role to society as it must further entrench class relations in order to maximise capital accumulation. A level of *decadent hegemony* is present when the alienation of the subaltern classes becomes more distinct, and the legitimacy of the ruling group and consent from the masses is severely tested. This form of hegemony is characterised by a growing distance between the subaltern classes and the ruling group, where superiority in economic production is the last bastion of hope and a tenuous justification for the limited consent offered from the masses.

Finally, Femia calls the most hollowed-out expression of legitimate rule over the subaltern classes *minimal or residual hegemony*. This situation is observable where there is an ideological and economic allegiance between the ruling elite, yet no substantial organic link with the masses – here the organic crisis of hegemony first emerges. Moral and intellectual leadership is in steep decline and only momentarily emerges in flashes – particular moments that are not long lasting – where the pendulum returns to a state of residual hegemony. According to Gramsci, the historical contradictions in the crisis of capitalism ensures that a hegemonic class will decline and therefore increasingly turn to more coercive methods in order to maintain dominance. The prestige of the hegemon will be lost and the façade and promise of social and economic advancements abandoned in favour of exploitative economic relations that further entrench the stratification of society. Alternative pathways will emerge from varied sources trying to address different aspects of the crisis. The social forces that gain increasing success in adapting to the organic crisis have the potential to emerge as a new hegemon depending upon their relations with other key actors and capacity to build organic links with elements of civil society. During times of residual hegemony *transformismo* is applied to co-opt potential organised threats to the ruling groups' legitimacy over time, and exploit their position of power. The bourgeois state's liberal-democratic institutions appear to the subaltern classes to be either nothing more than a front for exploitation or, at best, a body unrecognisable in its function. Gramsci outlines that multiple historical factors – such as economic production, the capacity for organic intellectuals to maintain organic links with political society, and the critical role of civil society – must be considered in analysing hegemony. According

to Gramsci, then, hegemony can only be understood through a prism of historical contestation, even during times of relative harmony.

Consequently, it is necessary to clarify Gramsci's understanding of counter-hegemony as a situation that emerges during times of residual hegemony. Counter-hegemony, according to Gramsci, comes in two forms: *war of manoeuvre* or *war of position*. War of manoeuvre was Gramsci's metaphor for upfront political struggle in the cause of revolution. It is understood in the same terms as the conventional means of a frontal assault in armed conflict. Yet, a direct, frontal attack on the entrenched institutions of a bourgeois liberal-democracy, even in times of crisis, would be folly. The ideological integration has been so successfully internalised that an upfront assault on the state would be met by stiff resistance from the masses led by organic intellectuals. So, in contrast, a war of position was interpreted by Gramsci as a form of indirect trench warfare that aimed to articulate a new worldview that would slowly and systematically undermine and eventually replace the decaying ruling group (Gramsci, 2012, pp. 108 – 110, 229 – 235). The key to success in the war of position was preparation in relation to the political, social, economic and cultural organising of the masses so as to successfully hollow out the hegemony of the ruling group and proceed to a revolution that supersedes the previous regime. Ultimately, he argued that a revolution cannot be won through direct antagonistic confrontation, but through the process of winning the continual battles for the 'hearts and minds' of the subaltern groups. As Gramsci (2012, p. 88) writes, the masses can only 'endure the immense muscular, nervous and psychic strain with the aid of great reserves of moral strength.' The process of war of position is the gradual destruction of hegemony, while the alternative hegemony develops around a newly emerging ruling group that is gathering greater popular support through the intellectual and moral leadership of their own collection of organic intellectuals.

As noted by Filippini (2017, p. 19), Gramsci presents a thesis that views hegemony as constantly evolving into different stages, but in moments of organic crisis there is a counter-hegemony of 'organic recomposition' from an alternative source. According to Gramsci, when a hegemonic order is in organic crisis a newly emergent hegemon will rise to address the multiplicity of crises that plague the disintegrating society. As will be outlined in this thesis, there was no alternative hegemonic bloc able and willing to do this during the Obama Presidency. However, Gramsci's understanding of 'stages' of

hegemony, and his account of residual hegemony in particular, provides a valuable framework for assessing the condition of US hegemony in this context.

### **Robert Cox and Gramscian International Relations**

Robert Cox (1981; 1983) was the first to apply Gramsci's theoretical arguments as a counterpoint to neo-realist interpretations of hegemony and as a sympathetic critique of world-systems analysis. Cox's seminal article 'Social Forces, States and World Order' (1981) firstly challenges 'traditional' IR notions of the state as being nothing more than the collection of political bodies that express the executive orders of the government – 'a state was a state was a state' (Cox, 1981, p. 127). Cox contends that social forces must also be considered in analysing the processes and actions of the state. His primary purpose was to 'sketch a method for understanding global power relations...[not] underrating state power, but in addition give proper attention to social forces and processes [to] see how they relate to the development of states and world orders' (Cox, 1981, p. 128). Cox wanted to distance himself from IR scholars who were either too narrow in their focus (neo-realists) or those who were trapped in 'reifying a world system' like Wallerstein and his world-system analysis colleagues.

He proceeded to present a novel interpretation of international relations that exposed the limitations of both neo-realist and Marxist approaches. He attacked their narrow definitions of the state, ahistoricism in their analysis, and their fundamental flaws in understanding the structures of what he called the 'world order'. Neo-realists and Marxists were limited by only focusing on the inter-state system and imposing a reified interpretation of international relations. Neo-realists were inherently limited in their approach as they assumed all state actors were motivated by rational self-interest, and that the inter-state system did not undergo any fundamental changes or evolutions in its framework. Marxism suffers from similar limitations as result of its economic determinism, narrow focus on the maintenance of an ahistorical world-system, and is in many ways a 'study in abstractions' (Cox, 1981, p. 133). However, Cox does not refute all realist and Marxist interpretations; he simply argues that these interpretations must be informed by history. According to Cox, the work of realist scholars like Machiavelli and

E.H. Carr, and Marxist historians like Eric Hobsbawm, are quite insightful as they provide a theoretical analysis situated in history (Cox, 1981, 127).

Based on these premises, Cox presented a Gramscian interpretation of IR that will be applied in my historical research and analysis of social forces during the Obama Administration. In it he provided an analysis of international historical structures premised on multi-layered and complex forces that exist in mutual dependency – ideas, material conditions and institutions. This historical structure sets the limitations within which actors can operate, yet this process is not mechanical. As Cox (1981, p. 135) notes, actors can ‘move with the pressures or resist and oppose them but they cannot ignore them. To the extent that they do successfully resist a prevailing historical structure, they buttress their actions with an alternative emerging configuration of forces, a rival structure.’ Hence, three specific categories of force interact within historical structures: (i) forms of economic production through the exploitation of resources, advancements in technologies and labour relations; (ii) the ideas that intelligently and symbolically represent the inter-subjective relations between ruling groups and subaltern classes; and (iii) the institutions that organise society based on the ideology of this ruling group. These forces inform the different *methods of a historical structure*. Cox explains that a method exists within a limited defined space and time as it is ‘a particular sphere of human activity in its historically located totality’ (Cox, 1981, p. 137). The method of a historical structure exists on three levels: (i) social forces vis-à-vis the organisation of production; (ii) forms of state as a product of the complex social interactions with political and civil society; and (iii) world orders especially in relation to the forces that influence the capacity for war and peace between states. These levels are not mutually exclusive, but rather directly impact on the function and shape of each. Historical structures evolve, change, are torn down and rebuilt anew based on the processes and social relations of history (Cox, 1981, p. 138).

By establishing how a historical structure functions in a defined world order, Cox is then able to present his most novel contribution to IR: the application of Gramsci on the definition and role of hegemony (a definition that I use and build upon in Chapter 2). Cox argued that a hegemonic world order entailed a state that could create and maintain a system based on a universal ideology that all other actors consent to through a critical consciousness. Hegemonic moments involve a congruence of material capabilities, a

conquering of the 'ideological terrain' and conscious maintenance of an order that would encompass a sizable geographic area. Cox (1983, pp. 170 – 171; 1981, pp. 140 - 144) only identifies the British Empire in the nineteenth century (1845 – 1875) and the post-World War 2 US world order (1945 – 1965) as the sole two hegemonic moments in world history. Hegemonic moments imply that forms of domination like force and deception would be absent or in the background, while non-hegemonic moments would see forms of domination at the forefront. This form of hegemony could not exist solely within the realm of inter-state relations, there must be a role for a civil society that would operate within this space and time-bound world order. Here, Cox applies the Gramscian interpretation of the state to include civil society or the *extended state* to function as the hegemon.

For Gramscian approaches, mine included, the unit of analysis for the study of international relations is expanded beyond statist interpretations to include the ensemble of global civil society. For the exercise of hegemony, organic intellectuals including the media, public intellectuals, think tanks and key international organisations, function in an ideological educative role and as a means to reproduce hegemony in the complex dynamics of social relations across the world. Like world-system analysts, Cox argues that a hegemonic power emerges following an internal social, political and economic revolution where institutional and civil society transformations have implications that transcend national boundaries. Economic revolution is a direct result in changes in modes of production and subsequently influences the social forces that emerge from these circumstances. This revolution develops an alternative to the decaying world order of the declining hegemon. Like Arrighi (2010), Cox argues that initially world hegemony emerges as a form of emulation from other states who seek to mimic the success of the hegemon by establishing similar economic and social institutions, as well as following similar patterns in ideological culture and technology. Forms of state are a product of historical circumstances. For instance, Cox (1981, p. 138) associates the 'military-industrial complex' in the post-World War 2 core as a result of the 'conflictual conditions of world order'. Indeed, the world order is created in the image of the expanding hegemon, where states and international institutions fundamentally entrench the ideological logic and common sense of the new hegemony.

However, unlike Arrighi and other world-system analysts, Cox demonstrates that in relation to periphery states, the process involves a 'passive revolution'. These people have not enjoyed the fruits of economic growth like those of the core and therefore have not undertaken the same social adoption of the ideology of the hegemon. Even though some aspects of economic and cultural characteristics from the hegemon are present, political change has not emerged nor has there been a widespread internalisation of the ideological values. In some regards, the ruling groups within peripheral states adopt the ideological values of the hegemonic world order, but this educative role is not passed down to the masses who in general experience different forms of domination. In many circumstances, the presence of the economic and cultural characteristics of hegemony have become targets for resistance and neo-populist forms of counter-hegemony like nationalist movements. Generally, the model of the hegemon is more adaptable and acceptable in the core and highly problematic the periphery (Cox, 1981, p. 171). The application of hegemony in a world order can be applied on a continuum from the harmony of a historic bloc, to varying degrees of contestation and resistance, to outright domination. The importance here for practical applications in research is to systematically analyse the historical processes of social agents to understand how forms of coercion and consent have been exercised globally.

According to Cox (1983, p. 171), a state oversees a hegemony that is 'universal in conception' as other states are not dominated or exploited but rather willingly participate in the order as it is 'compatible with their interests' (Cox, 1983, p. 171). Such a world order cannot operate within a strict inter-state system alone, but also involves the participation of social forces that act on a transnational level through the world-wide operation of modes of production. The organic intellectuals of this world order function as facilitators of the maintenance of hegemony through institutions, the dominant mode of production, and social relations. Like Gramsci, Cox states that: 'World hegemony is describable as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot be simply one of these things but must be all three.' (Cox, 1983, p. 171-172). Therefore, hegemony is essentially a structural 'fit' of the three elements of (i) inter-state relations, (ii) social forces and an (iii) economic mode of production, which becomes entrenched into the world relations of actors. Under these circumstances, international organisations are central to the maintenance of the rules and mechanisms of hegemony. It is within these platforms that organic intellectuals educate and integrate other actors



into the ideological framework and mode of production of the hegemonic order. Furthermore, international organisations have the capacity to absorb and resist different attempts at building counter-hegemonic movements either through *transformismo* or liquidation.

With his examination of multilateral organisations, Cox (1996, p. 494) provides useful advice for Gramscian scholarship: ‘Multilateralism can only be understood within the context in which it exists, and that context is the historical structure of world order.’ The current hegemonic world order was a product of the agency of the United States in building allied institutions. Cox contends that the US was hegemonic between 1945 – 1965 when economically it maintained a position of centrality, based on a Keynesian free market system of international trade supported by international organisations geared towards responding to and maintaining the complexities of world capitalism (Cox, 1981, pp. 140 – 141; Cox, 1983, pp. 170 – 173). However, according to Cox, from 1968 onwards the United States has applied different forms of domination in order to maintain its ruling position in the world. This situation is the product of its economic decline and the destabilisation of world-wide inflation vis-à-vis economic centres in Western Europe and East Asia. This situation led to the dismantling of the welfare state, the growing influence of corporate interests over social needs, and increased unemployment and labour insecurity (Arrighi, 2010, pp. 309 - 335). These circumstances inevitably sever the social contract amongst the American populace and the subaltern groups of the core.

In this view, the crisis of US hegemony (and of any hegemony in general) is a crisis of economic forces of production, representation and identity. Dominant groups are in direct competition over future paths whilst subordinate groups are fragmented and lack a coherent strategy of counter-hegemony. As Cox puts it, ‘one historic bloc is dissolving, another has not taken its place’. Cox (1987, pp. 278 – 285) suggests that a ‘diffusion of power’ emerges within the embattled world order. This diffusion presents a significant challenge to the capacity to reproduce hegemony as emergent actors begin to test the limits of the hegemon’s authority and expose the inherent contradictions of hegemonic institutions. The promise of stability and mutually beneficial relations of hegemony collapse under the pressure of fragmentation and propel forward the dissolution of the historic bloc. Under these circumstances, the actor or actors leading the diffusion of power from the hegemonic centre have the opportunity to build a new world order, but only if

an alternative institutional structure and supporting social forces and organic intellectuals are situated to usher in this change. A consistent theme in the case studies presented in the following chapters is how state actors including China, Russia, India and Brazil have resisted and challenged the moral and intellectual leadership of the United States-led hegemony. Moreover, non-state actors have questioned, publicly opposed and even violently challenged United States' hegemony in varying circumstances. Yet, it will also become evident that despite this diffusion of power entrenching an organic crisis in US hegemony, it had not yet re-formed around an alternative hegemonic project.

### *Other Important Contributions from Gramscian IR*

Based on this understanding of hegemony in international relations, Robert Cox became the theoretical father to a first generation of IR-focused Gramscians, widely identified by other scholars as neo-Gramscians or the self-titled 'Italian School' consisting of most notably Stephen Gill, Kees Van der Pijl, Enrico Augelli, Craig Murphy, and Mark Rupert. Even though these scholars pursued different research areas there existed a theoretical base from which they framed their interpretations. Like Cox, these Gramscians rejected neo-realist, neo-liberal institutionalist and world-system analysis interpretations for reifying an ahistorical inter-state system. They all also shared the Gramscian approach of closely considering social forces and historical social relations in the reproduction of hegemony.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will highlight four key areas of their scholarship. First, Gramscian scholars have argued that social forces, especially those considered to be 'organic intellectuals', were crucial in producing hegemony as a means of providing 'moral and intellectual leadership'. This suggests that it is not only material capabilities that are the main determinants of hegemony, but rather the capacity to maintain ideological organic links with the other actors that have – ideally – internalised the worldview of the hegemon to the point that it is considered 'common sense'. Second, key Gramscian scholars, notably Augelli and Murphy, have argued that the periphery was subjected to a form of 'passive revolution' and that international organisations like the United Nations, the World Bank and the IMF have acted as deputies, serving a disciplining function to impose a form of domination upon these subaltern actors. Third,

for most Gramscian IR scholars, the United States is the centre of a transnational hegemony where global governance institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the G7 serve as platforms to reproduce this hegemony in both a structural and organic intellectual sense. Finally, I would like to explore the contribution of Kees Van der Pijl in relation to his work class fractions and the contestation that exists within the core. The rest of this section will serve as a synthesis of these four key areas of Gramscian scholarship.

Much of Gramscian literature is focused on how international organisations have supported US hegemony after World War 2. Enrico Augelli and Craig N. Murphy (1989; 1993) have provided useful insights into the constitutional role of intergovernmental organisations in the integration of the Third World into the historical structures of United States' hegemonic order. In relation to post-war decolonisation and the process of 'development', the United Nations and other international institutions and organisations were pivotal. Under the guidance and support of the United Nations, decolonisation ensured stability and the continued access to raw materials to assist in the perpetual expansion and integration of the world economy. This process of 'development' was justified through the promise of liberal-democracy, modernisation and economic growth. As Augelli and Murphy (1993, p. 80) write, 'together, the private and the public institutions helped hold together a vast world market in which a highly articulated international division of labor could develop'. Organic intellectuals like the 'Chicago Boys' (neo-liberal economists from the University of Chicago that advised far-right periphery governments, most notably the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile in the late 1970s), economist, Milton Friedman, multilateral organisations like the World Bank and institutions like the Council on Foreign Relations understood and argued that this process was mutually beneficial for the core and the periphery – essentially elaborating a vision, or myth, of a prosperous future for all (Augelli and Murphy, 1989, p. 195 – 197).

In addition, Augelli and Murphy have provided important insights into the evolution of civil society actors allied to the United States and its influence in the United Nations, the World Bank and the IMF. Following the end of World War 2, these multilateral organisations had a direct or 'educative' role in the development of national civil societies, in attempts to integrate the ideological perspectives that were conducive to the maintenance of the United States' hegemonic order. Following the collapse of Keynesian

welfarism and the emergence of financialisation (the expansion of financial innovations to all areas of the world economy), the Reagan Administration pursued a policy of ‘tightening of the liberal economic logic’ in their interactions with Third World governments. International institutions imposed neo-liberal agendas involving structural adjustment, dismantling the welfare system, pursuing narrow export-orientated economies, and severely undermining domestic economic growth. As Augelli and Murphy (1989, p. 193) note: ‘the IMF and World Bank have never really looked at all the ways that Third World economies could be adjusted to the new external conditions. They have simply pushed for turning Third World economies towards exports and reducing state intervention in the economy.’ Here, organic intellectuals from intergovernmental organisations like the IMF and World Bank, as well as leading scholars from various leading Ivy League schools, have supported neo-liberal agendas aimed at liberalisation and de-regulation rather than creating mutually beneficial forms of trade supported through development assistance.

Stephen Gill (1986; 1991; 2012a) has also provided valuable insights into the role of global civil society and organic intellectuals in the reproduction of US hegemony. He has rightly criticised the false assumptions of neo-realists and Marxists that the decline of US economic dominance vis-à-vis other capitalist centres, most notably Western Europe led by Germany and a Japanese-led East Asia, implied a decline in American hegemony. These arguments were firstly based on the misinterpretation of hegemony as a form of domination over the rest of the inter-state system, essentially fulfilling a policing function. However, as Gill (1986; 1991) points out, such interpretative frameworks are prone to be undermined, especially considering that ideological leadership from the United States and the continued neo-liberal market perspectives shared by the US and other capitalist states like Germany and Japan at the time. Here, Gill explains that the Trilateral Commission, during the 1980s and 1990s, was a leading mechanism for the maintenance of United States’ hegemony that has co-opted other core states within the existing structures of the world order. Gill extended his thesis to include the role of US intellectuals in propagating what he calls the ‘imperialist common sense’ (Gill, 2012a, p. 506). Under these circumstances, leading US intellectuals, essentially reinforce the universalism of liberal imperialism and justify the ‘inequality that permit[s] the USA and its principal allies to consume the lion’s share of global resources in ways that are often violent, unjust and unsustainable and associated with the intensified exploitation of human beings and

nature' (Gill, 2012a, p. 507). This is essentially a problem of ontology where the framework of interpretation has been presented through the lens of ahistorical cycles of liberal imperialism. Such organic intellectuals functioned to intellectually perpetuate justifications for the disparities in wealth and power between the core and the periphery. Such allied-intellectuals include George Kennan, Robert Keohane, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Joseph Nye (Gill, 2012a). Gramscian scholars like Van der Pijl (2010, p. 5) have argued that the primary purpose of Western intellectuals, especially in the field of IR, is to reproduce the 'dominant order of society' and even act as apologists 'justifying capitalist market discipline'.

Importantly, Gramscians have highlighted the conflicts and division within the core that remain under US hegemony. Kees van der Pijl (1989, 2012), for example, has provided a detailed reading on class fracturing, formation and conflict in the context of global capitalism. Capitalist development is a continuous movement that must be bound to historical structures. Indeed, the evolutions of the world economy is a cumulative process that has expanded beyond the bounds of state territorial borders in order to integrate divisions of labour for capital accumulation purposes. From this perspective, Van der Pijl (1989) notes that even if the world was controlled by a capitalist world-state, the ruling classes would still be divided or *fractured* in competing with one another for labour, capital and resources. Capitalist elites share a general interest in maintaining a liberal world order and the subordination of subaltern groups, but that is where it ends. Beyond this point, ruling groups act in *class fractions* united in their ideological worldview and a shared economic and political agenda. These class fractions exist beyond the national boundaries of states as 'nomads' and work in collaboration within national-settings so as to establish some form local hegemonic harmony with the subaltern classes.

In this view, the transnationalism of class conflict should be understood as complex processes between competing fractions of the bourgeoisie in projecting what actually is the general interest (Van der Pijl, 1989, pp. 5-11). The ascendancy of these fractions have emerged by either representing moneyed capital or productive capital derived from the Atlantic region of the world on an international scale. Van der Pijl (2012), as well as Van der Pijl and Yurchenko (2015), outline how through the New Deal moneyed capital, represented by the banking and financial industry, was disciplined to invest in mass production and consumerism. These circumstances were the result of the catastrophe of

the 1929 New York Stock Market Crash and the subsequent years of the Great Depression. Here, US president Roosevelt (FDR) was able to co-opt workers and farmers by addressing their needs and interests in economic security whilst ‘neutralising socialist tendencies’ (Van der Pijl and Yurchenko, 2015, p. 500). Accordingly, we can see that class coalitions and accompanying ideology are a product of the historical struggles that shape the emerging ruling group.

The role of class fractions can be seen throughout history. Many Gramscians apply the production philosophy of Fordism on a world-scale as a metaphor for the global project to integrate the periphery into industrialised forms of divisions of labour and thereby impose a form of market discipline upon local forms of working-class groupings. Robinson (1996; 2013; 2015), in particular, has focussed on the processes and development of capitalism as it has moved from a *world* economy to a *global* economy. Here, globalisation can only be seen as the expansion of capital to further integrate pre-capitalist forms of labour into global capitalist divisions of labour. This is why Gramscians have an international and even global focus that explores how the social forces of the world economy engages with local and national economies that shape and in-turn are re-shaped by these reciprocal relationships. Gramscians depart from world-system analysis in that they identify the complexity of class forces in the capitalist world economy and the processes by which they compete for control. Furthermore, they suggest that the bourgeoisie do not work in harmony as a singular unit with a shared class consciousness, but rather compete through class fractions with narrowed ideology, economic, social and political goals. Importantly, each class fraction has accompanying organic intellectuals that represent their worldview whilst simultaneously taking for granted the more general liberal world order that has been established under United States’ hegemony.

### **Limitations of Gramscianism in International Relations**

Notwithstanding the important contributions that Gramscians have made to understanding US hegemony, their interpretations can be problematic on four key fronts. In this section, I outline the limitations of Gramscian analysis in four areas: (i) a concentration of scholarship on how hegemony is reproduced without fully appreciating

the contested nature of hegemony; (ii) in that same vein, far too much Gramscian scholarship in IR has been devoted to political economy and less on diplomatic and security issues which demand further analysis; (iii) Gramscian approaches have not sufficiently considered the prospects of non-state challenges to hegemony in forming counter-hegemonic movements; and (iv) the changing nature of sovereignty in a globally complex world has not been adequately absorbed into Gramscian scholarship. A detailed account of these issues is provided below.

(i) Gramscianism does not adequately acknowledge the *contested* nature of hegemony within the core. Even though Van der Pijl and Gill have discussed the role of class fractions, they nevertheless paint a decided harmony within the transnational space centred on the United States. This harmony is elicited through the loose and complex networks of social forces and organic intellectuals. As indicated above, Gill has written extensively on the partnerships developed and entrenched through the Trilateral Commission and the role of the organic intellectuals from the three leading centres of the world in imposing the common sense of ‘market civilisation’ in the current world order. Van der Pijl (2006) does acknowledge the global rivalries between the neo-liberal orientated English-speaking West, or the *Lockean heartland*, and the contender, state-centric and non-English speaking core, or the *Hobbesian contenders*. This rivalry emerges as the contender states that have greater control over their national industries attempt to catch up with the Lockean heartland. He argues that there are transnational rivalries that exist in the ‘internal extraterritoriality of the heartland’ of the West and also the more dangerous ‘systemic rivalries’, which are ideological battles about ‘organising the transnational space (heartland, wider West, world)’ (Van der Pijl, 2006, pp. 16-17).

Yet Van der Pijl argues that many of these contender states have, inevitably, through independent economic development, eventually internalised the neo-liberal logic of the Lockean heartland as they advance forward. Their industries adopt the same practises as the largely English-speaking centre and become an attractive investment to transnational capital, leading to integration: ‘At some point they will seek the reduction/restructuring of the directive state...[because] the chances that a given state class can retain its hold on power are extremely limited...rivalry may in a perverse sense serve as a mode of expansion of capital, even if this proceeds through crises and violent conflagrations’ (Van der Pijl, 2006, p. 14). Van der Pijl subscribes to the same interpretation as other

Gramscians, arguing that global organic intellectuals function as advocates of the transnational capital class who provide the 'hegemonic formulas that underpin the systemic orientation of the wider West' (Van der Pijl, 2006, p. 18). Such discourse implies a high-level of harmony of ideology between inter-state relations and transnationally-orientated forms of capital. According to Van der Pijl (2006, p. 18), there is a co-ordinated effort by global organic intellectuals to develop a global consensus through complex networks of social exchanges:

The process of establishing and renovating the hegemonic consensus of the West is achieved through an infrastructure of informal networks...At this level, systemic rivalries are being articulated and, ideally, overcome...[to produce] the hegemonic formulas that underpin the systemic orientation of the wider West, its comprehensive concepts of control. A concept of control provides the ideological framework that in a given age provides overall cohesion to the class consciousness of the capitalist class, and at the height of its 'comprehensiveness' sets the limits of the possible/thinkable for society at large.

This interpretative framework overstates the ability of the hegemon to build a cohesive and transnational leadership centred on the English-speaking West, let alone its broader composition. Furthermore, it is, to an extent, an economic determinist argument and economic-reductionist interpretation. There is more to the 'Lockean Heartland' than just a transnational capitalist class with an agenda for economic integration. Consider the role of culture or the tensions towards the United States within global governance institutions from other core states. Gramsci (2012) noted that 'everyone acts according to his culture, that is the culture of his environment', indicating that ethno-social identity and practices have a deep bearing on someone's agency and cannot simply be defined through economic rational interest. Even long-term allies have presented problems for the United States' hegemony. For instance, France and the United Kingdom, along with Israel, attempted to reclaim the Suez Canal from Egypt in 1956 and topple popular nationalist leader Gamal Abdel Nasser despite warnings from US President Dwight D. Eisenhower to not engage in such a conflict. Such an intervention contradicted the US' new policy of limited universal liberalism (limited in that universal liberalism only applied to Third World states that were not sympathetic to socialist tendencies), and support for newly independent former colonies. The Suez Crisis ended with a withdrawal by the British and French following significant pressure from the United States including financial threats. The incident became a cultural turning point for the British and French in the realisation



they were no longer ‘great powers’, but it also served as an early test of US hegemony. There are a number of other historical examples of tensions and challenges emerging against the United States despite enjoying strong historical ties, not least resistance in the Security Council. For instance, the strained European relations during the Reagan era over the intensification of the nuclear arms race (Calleo, 1987, pp. 71 – 83). Another more far-reaching example would be French President Charles De Gaulle’s announcement in early 1965 for a return to the gold standard, openly rejecting the US dollar standard (Chivvis, 2006, pp. 712 – 713).

Furthermore, Van der Pijl does not take into account how neo-liberalism as an ideology has been philosophically accepted by many in the international community but not necessarily practised consistently. For instance, the World Trade Organisation’s (WTO) negotiations have consistently been stalled from a divergence of competing agendas between core states and emerging state actors. The European Union, the United States, India and China are unwilling to remove their own trade barriers whilst campaigning for liberalisation in other regions (Arrighi, 2007, p. 208; Chang, 2008, pp. 78 – 79). The United States has a long history of applying a diverse range of policy options to protect local industries, whilst still presenting itself as a beacon for neo-liberal deregulation. Such examples include its regular use of intellectual property protections, quotas and the rampant use of subsidies (Chang, 2008, pp. 76 – 77). The Lockean Heartland often has a decidedly protectionist element to it, despite frequently lauding the benefits of neo-liberalism.

Hegemony is a multi-layered ongoing process that is perpetually expressed, undermined, recreated and challenged. The expression of hegemony is a multi-nodal networked complex of relations between the dominant and the subaltern. Even though hegemony is underpinned by internalising the logic and ideology of the hegemon as common sense, there is an inherent contradictory consciousness built into it. The unrealised promises of universal liberalism and the inherent contradictions and limitations of the US hegemonic world order only encouraged further challenges from other global actors, even if they subscribed, in varying degrees, to the same neo-liberal logic of the hegemon. As will be explained later in the thesis, a heightened condition of contradictory consciousness emerged during the Obama Administration that has undermined the United States’ moral

and intellectual leadership and reduced its hegemony to a residual form relying heavily on coercion.

(ii) The primary focus of Gramscian analysis in international relations has been on international political economy whilst not giving enough weight to issues of *global security* and *diplomacy*. Apart from Agnew and Corbridge (1995) and Van der Pijl (2006) Gramscian scholarship has not incorporated global security and military expressions of hegemony, instead primarily focusing on the global political economy (GPE) as the basis for hegemonic reproduction. Even though GPE is a key factor in understanding and explaining the processes and functions of IR, it cannot insulate itself from considerations like security issues, diplomacy and other key global threats such as climate change. Owen Worth (2011) notes that Gramscian scholarship in IR has been quite lacking in many areas. According to Worth (2011, p. 387), ‘Gramsci has played less of a role in critical security studies and equally little figures in studies on nationalism, ethnicity and ethnic conflict. This is despite that such areas have obviously become increasingly prominent within the post-Cold War era of IR.’ There have been a few attempts at discussing global security, such as Van der Pijl (2006) who explored global security rivalries during the Cold War up until the 2003 Iraq War. John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge (1995) have explored the ‘mastering of space’ through interpretative paradigm of geo-politics. Yet both forms of analysis argue that political economy underpins their view of security. This limits their interpretations and forecloses an analysis of the ensemble of material power, including military capacities, required for social forces to be hegemonic.

(iii) There is decided lack of Gramscian scholarship on transnational non-state *challenges* to the United States’ hegemonic world order. Much of the most ground-breaking scholarship from Gramscian intellectuals has focused on what Gramsci described as the ‘extended state’ of organic intellectuals. As an intellectual approach that provides an alternative explanation to the neo-realism, liberal institutionalism, and world-system analysis, much scholarly research has focused on demonstrating how hegemony is produced outside of the ‘state proper’. Research has been directed towards how hegemony exists beyond material capabilities and networks of economic exchange and is situated in the application of internalising ideology through social forces, institutions and the modes of production. This structural fit is present in Gill’s account of the Trilateral Commission, Van der Pijl’s work on the ‘Atlantic ruling class’, Rupert’s examination of the post-war

union movement and Augelli and Murphy's examination of 'American Supremacy'. These studies are focused on the nuances of how hegemony was exercised by social forces, institutions and organic intellectuals in support and collaboration with the US state proper.

However, hegemony is a fluid balancing act that demands varying responses to counter-hegemonic forces. These Gramscians have not paid due attention to Fontana's account of the inherent instability of hegemony. Where *transformismo* cannot be applied by the hegemon, acts of domination are exercised to varying success. Yet, while military and policing powers are important for disciplining and eliminating threats to the hegemon, especially when we realise that they are ever-present, the increased use of violence and coercion merely signals that hegemony is under challenge. Attempts at neutralising different threats to hegemony naturally deepen tensions from subaltern periphery groups that have only undergone different forms of passive revolution during the dizzying heights of hegemony in the core. Global hegemony lacks consistent organic linkages across complex networks and contains resistance in areas of tension that expose the contradictions and limitations, and provide significant challenges to rule. Anti-hegemonic social forces like neo-populist Salafi jihadist movements are largely ignored by the Gramscian discourse. Gill (2003) has acknowledged and discussed the means by which subaltern groups in the periphery are marginalised in 'market civilisation', a contradictory movement of reproducing the cultural and ideological myth of the success of the neo-liberal globalisation project, whilst engraining an exclusionary hierarchical transnational social structure. However, what is not overtly acknowledged by Gill or his contemporaries is that due to the advancements of communications technology, and the deepening organic crisis of the United States' hegemonic world order, counter-hegemonic movements can more easily organise transnationally to pose serious challenges to the legitimacy of governance and undermine organic links between civil society and the extended hegemonic state.

(iv) Relatedly, Gramscian scholarship has not adequately acknowledged the *changes and challenges to state sovereignty* in the past few decades arising from revolutions in communications technology, and the increased influence of non-state actors and transnational corporations. Even Cox assumes that states behave autonomously when interacting with productive and social forces as well as the world order. In his book

*Production, Power and World Order*, Cox (1987, p. 220) argues that the neo-liberal state emerged as mediator 'between an oligopolistic world market that dictated the policy priorities and domestic groups that had varying claims on its political allegiance.' However, scholars such as Pinar Bedirhanoğlu (2008, pp. 93-94) argues that Cox's analysis of the state is akin to that of a 'liberal' and an 'ahistorical' scholar: 'Cox goes as far as valuing autonomy as a desirable goal for powerful states.' Yet, Joseph Camilleri and Jim Falk (1992) note in their book *The End of Sovereignty?* that the notion of states enjoying sovereignty over the well-defined territorial space of their borders is a fiction that can no longer be believed. First, sovereignty was a political fiction that could only be maintained by the most powerful of states. For weaker periphery states, sovereignty was incredibly difficult to hold. Second, if we were to ignore the realities of sovereignty, it would now be very difficult to argue that even the most powerful of states had complete control over the people they govern. Technology, the environment, non-state actors, global movements, security crises and, of course, the machinations of the fluid and erratic world economy (as it becomes more dominated by financialisation) erode the imaginary walls of sovereignty. As Richard Falk (2007, p. 35) notes, globalisation 'subverts the capacity of states to govern the internal life of society, and non-state actors hold an increasing proportion of power and influence in the shaping of world order'. Even China, a state that has strict control over its citizens, including a heavily monitored internet, repressive laws against dissent, an economy run through state-private partnerships and strict censorship laws on media content, cannot wholly control or insulate itself from a host of transnational processes that have a direct bearing on its citizens, including fluctuations in world markets, public scrutiny and environmental crises.

Crucially, there has been a decided diffusion of power since the mass expansion of communication technologies widely available to everyday people. Such developments have the emergence of globally complex transnational flows to disrupt and challenge the centrality of the state. As Camilleri and Falk noted in 1992 (p. 3), 'not only is the world being progressively integrated but, perhaps paradoxically, it is also experiencing a process of progressive decentralization of authority and fragmentation of society.' Communication technologies, coupled with the exponential growth of social media, has empowered many people from the general masses to challenge forms of authority – successfully. Politically organising through social media has seen the downfall of many sitting leaders across the Middle East in 2011, most commonly referred to as the Arab

Spring (Al-Jenaibi, 2014). Social media has been employed by non-state actors like global Salafi jihadist movements to groom and recruit members (Ogun, 2012, pp. 207 – 208), on many occasions within the heart of the Western world, including the United States, England, France and Belgium.

Additionally, NGOs have acquired a growing influence within global institutions, becoming key actors in the development of policies and in shaping global behaviour. Bisley (2007) outlines three areas within which NGOs are demonstrating ‘private authority’ in the sense that these groupings or movements have the capacity to exercise significant influence over other actors including states and transnational corporations:

The first involves the private establishment of regulations, rules and standards...The second involves markets determining norms of behaviour which are monitored by private entities...The third element is slightly nebulous, though not unimportant, whereby NGOs shape both the broader agenda of economic governance as well as the specific aspects of rule-making established by states and IOs. For example, NGOs now have a formal place at the WTO table to contribute to both the broader agenda setting as well as the nitty gritty of WTO work (Bisley, 2007, p. 101).

Transnational corporations have also significantly increased their role and influence in global affairs on a number of levels. First, as the world economy becomes more financialised, and therefore more fluid and inherently more erratic, corporations have become more focussed on the policy-making mechanisms in relation to global regulation of markets and responses to financial crises. Second, transnational corporations have become more fluid in the ways in which they operate on a global scale. These entities are in control of global commodity and labour chains where they have the power to move operations within a relatively short span of time. These movements are not limited to branches of these global chains but can also be directly linked to relocation of headquarter operations (HQ) from their home countries to new locations that contain laws, labour and resources that best serve their interests.

In response to these changes, governments from around the world have dramatically altered policies either to maintain or entice these corporate entities. However, Gramscians like Gill and Van der Pijl assert that class interests of the global corporate elite married well with the ideological zeal of their government counterparts. For Gill (with David

Law), the current situation for capital is that ‘the bulk of transnational capital is headquartered in a small number of economically large nations, ones in which *capitalist hegemony is firmly embedded*.’ (Gill and Law, 2003, p. 112, italics added). Van der Pijl (2012) provides a detailed account of varied capital interests from financial firms, to transnational orientated corporations, to industrial nationally focused enterprises, mostly focused on links within and between the Atlantic region and that of continental Europe. However, Van der Pijl works from an assumption that the diverse social forces of capital share a culture, ideology and myth that has an overlap with the ruling groups of respective governments in leading core states. However, even if there is some sharing of ideology and culture, transnational corporations are very much capable of challenging and undermining the ability of states to govern on a local, national, regional and global level. Conversely, there are also a number of examples of where states have imposed restrictions and regulations upon transnational corporations, notably the EU in relation to human rights (Mohan, 2011, pp. 59 – 61). Research into the more complex and networked relations that exist between capitalist elites and the governing class need to be explored further and acknowledged when discussing how these different actors behave within a hegemonic system.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have outlined the explanatory insights provided by Gramsci’s analytical framework on the exercise of hegemony and how this approach has been applied in international relations. Based on this sympathetic critique, we can see that the theoretical works of Gramsci can account for the role of state civil society actors in (re)producing hegemony, thereby avoiding dominant interpretations in IR solely focused on inter-state relations. This interpretation is the founding basis for understanding historical moments of hegemony as the exercise of authority through consent and the reproduction of ideological organic links established by a political organ (i.e. the state) and intellectually defended by allies within a civil society. Gramscian approaches have actively encouraged a methodological approach that is centred upon historical structures and processes that are shaped by social agents, which looks beyond the narrow state apparatus as the primary unit of analysis. They have also provided important insights into the role of global civil society as allies to the United States, including in moments of coercion. Analysis of these

linkages provides an explanatory framework for investigating how the United States uses multilateral organisations to implement coercive policies (eg. Structural Adjustment Programs), while organic intellectuals ideologically defend such practices to build consensus globally.

As discussed above, however, Gramscian scholarship is beset by a number of limitations. Gramscians have focussed much scholarship on the structural 'fit' that takes place in international relations rather than exploring in more detail the contested nature of US hegemony. The reproduction of hegemony is an ongoing relational process that is continually facing challenges and tensions that are either remedied or create ruptures in the organic links of the hegemonic order. This analytical deficit has resulted in an explanatory gap concerning more recent developments in US hegemony. This lack of analysis is compounded by a decided underappreciation of globally complex networks of social relations and their impacts upon the reproduction of hegemony.

Based on this critical survey, then, I will build upon Robert Cox's approach to analysing how historical structures are developed in international relations and how hegemony interacts with various social forces. The key conclusion of my analysis is that increased weight must be given to the contested and unstable nature of hegemony as well as the increasing significance of complex transnational flows that are difficult to govern. In addition, the under-utilised Gramscian framework of stages or levels of hegemony, particularly the idea of 'residual hegemony', will be taken as a key analytical tool for understanding the condition of US hegemony in the Obama period. In the next chapter, I outline an approach that refines these theoretical tools and overcomes their deficiencies by taking into account the complexity of hegemonic relations between states and non-state actors in the global system.

## Chapter 2

### A Complex Gramscian Approach to US Hegemony

In Chapter 1, I outlined the main features of Gramscian analysis in understanding the reproduction of hegemony, and provided a critical interpretation of the Gramscian approaches to United States' hegemony in the current world order. Gramscianism in IR, beginning with the work of Robert Cox provided a refreshing and unique approach to international relations and a necessary rebuke of traditional forms of IR scholarship that applied the state as the primary unit of analysis. He further argued that we needed to analyse historical structures in terms of: (i) social forces; (ii) forms of state; and (iii) world orders to build a more comprehensive, historically-informed interpretative framework that can explain how they work to reproduce hegemony in a historic bloc. Gramscian interpretations of hegemony have provided a rich and multifaceted contribution to this study, yet they have been inadequate in analysing the inherent tensions and challenges that beset the reproduction of hegemony. The assumption of a neat 'structural fit' in reproducing hegemony makes it difficult to understand the disintegration and challenges to the United States' hegemony.

In this chapter, I build upon the theoretical contributions of Gramscian approaches by addressing this deficiency and advance an approach that I call 'complex-Gramscianism'. In order to explain the analytical framework of my complex-Gramscian approach, I outline three analytical contributions that a complex-Gramscian approach can provide in understanding contemporary hegemony. In the first section, I outline the main characteristics of an organic crisis as an analytical framework that can be applied in examining the disintegration of hegemony. Second, I develop Gramscian analytical concepts for understanding how hegemony is reproduced and contested. Next, I explain how complexity theory enhances our understanding of global social relations by introducing three key concepts: multi-nodal networks, emergence, and strange attractors. Finally, I outline my complex-Gramscian framework that entails three key propositions:

- (i) Residual hegemony is indicated by a decline of moral and intellectual leadership to the point that international action predominantly relies on coercion and overt consent is limited.



- (ii) Complex networks of social relations that support hegemony disintegrate to the extent that oppositional social forces overtly challenge the hegemonic bloc.
- (iii) The hegemon is unwilling and/or incapable of leadership within international organisations or reforming them to adequately respond to global problems.

This framework will be applied to the three cases of global crisis in subsequent chapters to provide a Gramscian account of the condition of US hegemony during the Obama Administration.

### **Understanding Organic Crisis and its Global Application**

Organic crisis, as Gramsci (2012, pp. 210 – 218) understands the concept, is associated with the limitations and contradictions of capitalism. Gramsci argues that an organic crisis emerges in different circumstances in historic blocs and cannot be understood as developing from a singular event. Crisis is an internal expression of the limits and contradictions of capitalism as a mode of production that is socially organised to maximise profits for capitalists, and produces an uneven distribution of wealth to subaltern classes that causes blockages in capitalist mechanisms. A system based on such an unequal distribution of wealth inherently breeds competing social forces that disrupt and bring imbalances to the system. Gramsci calls this a ‘quantitative intensification of certain elements neither new nor original....the intensification of certain phenomena, while others that were there before...have now become inoperative or have completely disappeared’ (Gramsci, 2012, p. 324). Capitalism is in a permanent state of crisis, the basic framework of this system cannot reconcile its inherent process of unequal appropriation from subaltern groups, which results in moments when tensions and conflicts become open and intensified and there is either a rebalancing or a collapse of the order as an alternative system emerges. Filippini (2017, p. 92) argues that such an interpretation of crisis implies that it is a process of conflicting forces, causing an intensification of various forms of imbalance in societal structures. A crisis can be stabilised from an opposing force that rebalances the order or can become more acute through an intensification of distinct forces that disrupt structures and/or when previous rebalancing mechanisms become inept or are passive.

The organic nature of hegemony is premised on the integration of the ideological relations between the hegemon and subaltern actors. This ideological integration is developed through the historical structures of world order in economic, political and social relations. The primacy and centrality of the hegemon allows it to build multi-layered networks of social relations. During moments of peak or integral hegemony the dominant group's relations between allied and subordinate groups would 'naturally' occur based on a critical consciousness of consensus. An organic crisis is the disintegration of these organic links or networks due to a system-wide breakdown of consent and compliance with the hegemonic order. This systemic crisis could potentially emerge from a multiplicity of sources. Gramsci would argue that it is primarily derived from evolutions in the contradictions and limitations of late-stage capitalism where the dominant group would move into more exploitative forms of economic exchange in order to maximise the extraction of profit. However, there is every possibility that a systemic crisis could emerge primarily from political origins. The point is that the organic crisis is the disruption of the organic networks of hegemony where the legitimacy of the hegemon has been so severely undermined that its leadership capabilities have been reduced to a shadow of its former-self. This process of disintegration results in the dominant group only being able to exercise residual hegemony. By this I mean that primarily the hegemon must resort to mechanisms of coercion to accomplish agenda-goals, but the hegemon retains structural advantages in key areas and there remain instances when consent can be generated.

Minor, localised crises are a natural characteristic of any social system. However, the vigour and resilience of the hegemon can be characterised by how crises are managed to reduce disorder, return stability to the system and ensure similar crises will not return. Localised or specific crises that are focused on different areas of the historic bloc and are poorly managed by the hegemon can be interpreted as indicators of a system-wide crisis of the hegemonic order. Gramsci described them as the 'morbid symptoms' that gave meaning to the wider terminal crisis of hegemony (Gramsci, 2012, p. 276). When these localised crises emerge, how political, military, economic and civil society actors engage with the hegemon and the resilience of hegemonic institutions provide useful insight into the condition of this order. If the seemingly disparate crises have significantly undermined the authority or the capacity to build consensus amongst allies and subordinate groups within society, then this indicates that a wider organic crisis is present. Minor or localised morbid symptoms can act as a microcosm to examine the systemic

organic crisis of the world order. From this angle, the organic crisis is *the* crisis that describes the potential collapse of the hegemony while counter-hegemonic social forces remain under-developed. An organic crisis occurs when the ‘morbid symptoms’ create such an imbalance that the naturalness of the system is questioned and the organic links between the ruling classes and the subaltern groups becomes so strained and conflictual that rule can only exist through domination. This process is uneven and forms of consent can still be present, but such instances are increasingly rare and disconnected as the hegemon faces intensified resistance from other elites and the subaltern masses.

When discussing the organic crisis of US hegemony, Stephen Gill, writing for the *Monthly Review* online, provided a succinct description of the circumstances afflicting the institutions, networks and processes that define this historic bloc:

In this period of morbid symptoms, the future of the world is pregnant with a multiplicity of intersecting and interrelated crises, each of which presents moments of danger and opportunity for different political forces. Together these moments combine in what I call, following Gramsci, a ‘global organic crisis,’ in ways that shape the potentials for transformation of society and culture on a global scale. In other words, the present world order is in a state of organic crisis due to both a political impasse for the old frameworks of politics and a search for new directions. This crisis therefore goes well beyond questions of capital accumulation and it indeed poses fundamental questions concerning the ethics and politics of the making of our collective future. It poses, in an acute way, the issue of whether that future is sustainable in a political, social, and ecological sense (Gill, 2010).

This characterisation is quite fitting, but Gill does not go beyond this description in his interpretation of global organic crisis.

Complex-Gramscianism provides a more detailed interpretation of the concept of organic crisis that can be used to describe the contemporary conditions of the US hegemony. First, morbid symptoms need to be separated from the holistic nature of the organic crisis. Morbid symptoms are the crisis fault lines that disrupt the ongoing reproduction of hegemony and the organic links of the political order. Morbid symptoms of an organic crisis are tangible in the sense that they are historical, involve different actors and can be immediately addressed through various global and local actions. Morbid symptoms are different episodes of the crisis that can be identified, characterised and directly impact on

the function of hegemony and corresponding institutions. Crises are an intrinsic feature of social relations and can occur when hegemony is at its peak. However, during these peak times, the hegemon is able to use its material power, institutional mechanisms, and ideological authority to respond to these crises by neutralising the challenge from resistant social forces and containing it so as to stop the instability from spreading. In a more degraded form of hegemony, however, a morbid symptom is revealed by a crisis that presents an ongoing and increasing threat to the hegemony from varied social forces. The institutional mechanisms (established by the hegemon and allies), are inherently limited in responding to the crisis and it can more easily intersect with other crises to threaten the hegemonic system as a whole.

The organic crisis is the network that links all localised crises or morbid symptoms to the structural architecture of the hegemon and the corresponding historic bloc. The organic crisis feeds upon the morbid symptoms of a hegemon's historic bloc as they continue to undermine and pressure the organic capacity to reproduce hegemony. An organic crisis is therefore present when the structural features and inherent limitations of the hegemon cannot address these morbid symptoms because they reveal the inherent flaws in this complex system. That is, an organic crisis is an ongoing process that attacks the very legitimacy and authority of the established hegemon to the point that the hegemon no longer is the 'natural' leader of the subaltern and appears to be applying different forms of coercion in order to maintain domination. That is what makes these minor crises 'morbid' – they are the death knells of the hegemon, even while potential alternatives are still in their earliest stages. The *global* organic crisis can be understood as the world order undergoing radical transformation in which institutions are disintegrating and the new order is either in its infancy or is yet to emerge. Such a radical transformation can elicit a variety of other inter-related crises. As Gramsci (2012, p. 276) has famously noted, an organic crisis 'consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.'

Like Gramsci, we cannot limit our analysis to economic processes but rather must focus our approach on the broader limitations, contradictions and contestation that diminish the legitimacy, consensus and authority that underpins hegemony. Complex-Gramscianism argues that this contestation takes shape in the ever-increasing complexity of networks and processes that have evolved from US hegemony. The crises that have emerged do not

exist in isolation but rather interact and are compounded through the multi-layered nature of political, economic and social tensions and the intensification of oppositional forces that instigate disequilibrium in the system.

Based on these theoretical propositions, the hypothesis to be established in the case studies is that US hegemony was in a state of a debilitating organic crisis during the Obama Presidency. It had degraded to a residual form of hegemony however, there was no other state, non-state or international actor that has demonstrated a willingness or capacity to adopt the mantle of global leader in a singular fashion like the United States. Even with international organisations taking major roles in most global crises where the role of the US is diminished or challenged, in most of these cases it was the United States that attempted to provide global leadership (detrimental or otherwise). Attempts to solve problems of global security, international trade, global finance, and environmental degradation continue to be deeply influenced by US leadership capabilities. Furthermore, oppositional or alternative leadership remains dormant or passive. In 1991 Japan was described as an imminent hegemon (Taira, 1991) in the 2000s the rise of China as a great power had become apparent (Arrighi, 2007), and some even described the European Union as a superpower in the twenty-first century (McCormick, 2006). However, not one of these actors presented itself as a global challenger or alternative to the United States' leadership. Nor has any state actor since World War Two presented itself as a military alternative to the United States' supremacy. There has been no indication that any actor apart from the United States desired the role of world hegemon. In this context, the absence or passivity of an alternative oppositional force that could build a new world order further compounds a global organic crisis.

### **A Complex-Gramscian approach to Hegemony**

Academic analysis of international relations has been dominated by neo-realist and neo-liberal institutionalist approaches. As I have argued in the Introduction and Chapter 1, such theoretical models are ahistorical and limited in their analytical merit. Gramscian approaches, led by Cox, provide important insights into how historically framed social relations reproduces hegemony through the establishment and maintenance of historic blocs. My approach builds on the contributions of Gramscian interpretations of

international relations. Complex-Gramscianism accepts the leading premises of the Gramscian school of IR, which provides an important explanatory framework relating to hegemony and multilateralism. First, hegemony is understood as an historical structure that is reproduced by the state and the extended state as a historic bloc, which provides moral and intellectual leadership to other core actors, subaltern periphery actors and other social forces. As explained in the previous chapter, this is a process that involves ongoing conflict, tensions and ideological reproduction within civil and political society in an ideological battleground where hegemony is either reproduced, challenged or replaced with forms of outright coercion and dominance. Second, the exercise of hegemony is bounded within a unique historical structure in both time and space. Hegemony has a beginning and an end based on the changing material conditions of actors and the capacity to reproduce hegemony through the internalisation of ideology. Finally, institutions and modes of production emerge to serve the hegemonic order and are defined and bound by the ideological drive of the hegemon. Structurally, these institutions are born from the social, economic and political relations that contributed to the emergence of the hegemon. At its peak, the ideological structures of the hegemon can be found in every aspect of global multilateral organisations and are woven together to represent an over-arching worldview or ‘common sense’.

Complex-Gramscianism also seeks to overcome the limitations of Gramscianism outlined in the previous chapter. These limitations centre on its deficiencies in adequately accounting for the global organic crisis of hegemony that cumulatively occurs as tensions and challenges boil to the surface across different contexts of crisis in international relations. These tensions are inherent in the exercise of hegemony that is not fully integrated in society and maintain immanent through forms of coercion and passive revolution. All past examples of hegemony have not reached what Femia describes as ‘integral hegemony’ and therefore are imperfect systems that contain unequal distributions of power, wealth and resources. In this light, the global hegemony of the US has been an uneven project – and as the relative material capabilities of the United States have declined we have witnessed a marked increase in the tensions and challenges from varying sources, including rising state actors, resistant social forces, internal constituencies, exploitative forms of social power like global financialisation, and even non-human phenomena like climate change.

### *Contestation and Challenges to Hegemony*

Many Gramscian IR scholars assume a neat fit of social, political and economic structures in the world order created by the hegemon. As explained in the previous chapter, this is most notably the case in Stephen Gill's (1990) analysis of the Tri-lateral Commission, and Enrico Augelli and Craig Murphy's (1989) arguments about the United Nations. Kees Van der Pijl (2006) discusses the competition between the *Lockean Heartland* and the *Hobbesian* contenders, yet even that implies a level of collective management and class fractions that are relatively unified. However, even when the hegemon is at a peak of legitimacy and there appears to be a stable organic link with other actors, there is still a level of contestation and contradictory consciousness. Challenges from various actors will emerge and force this leadership to negotiate, evolve and modify itself continually to manage and lead inter-state relations in order to maintain the ongoing stability and function of the system. Gramsci (2012, pp. 12-13) also notes that at times the hegemon may have to apply forms of domination upon groups that challenge and confront their rule – alienating and eliminating these threats are necessary but may also undermine legitimate authority.

Hegemony is never absolute as it encompasses critical consciousness and consent, which can be characterised as a continuum from organic relations where leadership is seen as a morally and naturally good, to the point that hegemony has been abandoned and replaced with overt coercion using various forms of repression and violence. Gill has consistently argued that despite relative decline, the United States has enjoyed '*structural domination*' and 'by virtue of its political, economic and military centrality...exercise[s] considerable *structural power*' (Gill, 1991, p. 64 – italics in the original). However, structural domination requires the reproduction of hegemony exercised by the extended state. The relative material decline experienced by the hegemon will invariably lead to an emergent global organic crisis in the hegemonic order. There is an obvious lag due to the absence of any alternative, but as the limitations and contradictions become more entrenched, crises on a variety of fronts will result in heightened contestation from a variety of actors. Residual hegemony first emerges when structural domination cannot be reproduced as the relative decline in material capabilities becomes more entrenched and other actors emerge to challenge and undermine (US) hegemony. Emergent state actors (such as China

and Russia) that are organised differently to the dominant hegemon and do not share the same ideological 'common sense' will challenge the authority of the hegemon and deepen the diffusion of power already present due to the relative decline in material capabilities. This is where neo-liberal institutionalists are lacking in their analysis. They assume that international organisations can remain unchanged in the face of increasingly powerful state actors that do not share the ideological commitment to universal liberalism and have the capacity to introduce significant reforms or even competitor institutions.

As hegemony degrades into a residual form, this intensified contestation is also evident in the contested nature of the state internally within governing bodies. World orders led by hegemonic powers are not monolithic; nor are states (despite governing within well-defined territorial spaces). States are contested arenas with competing groups fighting for increased influence and control over important state functions – most notably the executive. Gramscians, and many other IR scholars, presume that states have a long-term rigid or static set of national interests no matter which grouping is in office. States do not exist in isolation; and despite much literature on sovereignty, the reality is that their control over transnational flows is limited on many fronts. As relative material decline becomes entrenched, the political, social and economic consequences are experienced on a local and national level which is then reflected in competing and increasingly more polarised forms of 'common sense' being advocated by differing political movements. The United States, in particular, is incredibly polarised between different political groupings, and even when one particular group is in a position of advantage they must address and manage challenges and tensions from antagonistic groups. As we will see in the following chapters, during the Obama administration the President was continually restricted by a recalcitrant Republican-controlled Congress. These internal dynamics are played out on a global stage as the executive leadership of the hegemon must address and take into consideration the complex domestic political situation that inevitably has a direct impact on foreign policy-making. Internal factors must be part of the unit of analysis when discussing the nature of hegemony in the global arena, and with that comes an analysis that must be more fluid in understanding how the interests of state actors change over time. To understand how the organic crisis of the US hegemonic world order took shape we must closely examine how the contestation of social forces manifests at local, regional and global level.



### *Where Complexity Meets Gramscianism*

Complexity theory provides a theoretical framework that allows us to overcome the limitations of traditional Gramscianism because it places the focus on the inherently multi-faceted, networked and contested nature of any hegemonic system. Ongoing technological changes in global communications and transportation have re-shaped how actors operate. Actors in a diverse range of fields now operate on a global scale, which challenges previous notions of how hegemonic power can be exercised. As Bauman (2000) argues, change now moves sideways as previous local incidents can have reverberations across the globe almost immediately. Local non-state actors can now undermine and expose the limitations and contradictions of US hegemony. The political, environmental, social and economic realms overlap and move through each other in transnational flows that inform how actors engage and reproduce these structures. In a fluid, complex world, the depth of complexity that intertwines the political, social and economic becomes even more compounded in time and space where change is rapid with far reaching consequences. This section will examine how complexity theory brings an extra element of depth and support to a Gramscian approach in studying global social relations.

Highlighting the interdependent nature of multi-nodal networks as a result of globalisation is not new in the academic world. Keohane and Nye (1989) presented an argument of interdependence as a justification for the stability of international regimes and in defence of ongoing United States' hegemony. Camilleri and Falk (1992) presented research on the changing dynamic of sovereignty in the inter-state system largely due to the processes of 'relentless globalisation' as the world is becoming 'progressively integrated but, perhaps paradoxically, it is also experiencing a process of progressive decentralisation of authority and fragmentation of society' (Camilleri and Falk, 1992, p. 3).

However, complexity theory attempts to provide a greater focus on the social consequences of globalisation in that state and non-state actors now interact in systems that are more diffuse and flat. The complexity and diffusion of power compounded by the transnational nature and fluidity of different social forces in the contemporary world has

the potential to undermine hegemony in new ways. Specifically, complexity theory provides three important analytical tools for analysing how hegemony is expressed and challenged in the contemporary world: (i) multi-nodal networks; (ii) emergence; and (iii) attractors. First, *multi-nodal networks* are multi-layered connections that exist globally between actors, institutions and even non-human phenomena (for example ecosystems). The ‘nodes’ of multi-nodal networks refers to the social relations that exist at intersectional points in these networked connections. Within particular networks as nodes gain in number, the power of that network grows substantially as its relevance and impact expand (Urry, 2003, pp. 52 -53). The networks of these connections are based on transnational flows of communicative action with the purposeful intent of building diverse channels that mutually engage in discourse, exchange and/or forms of production. For instance, these connections of networked relations serve a purpose or agenda that is delivered through communications, which can be as innocuous as a global fan network of a pop singer to complex trade networks to social movements that seek to topple governments. These connections exist as a complex web that simultaneously branch off into directions that can be so numerous to defy measurement. Global networks develop in a non-linear fashion that functions in multiple formats, but in such a complex and layered existence that the movement of communications and impacts on social relations are diverse and difficult to track and predict. For instance, since 2001 much attention has been paid to the ubiquitous nature of the global jihadist network and the way its nodes or ‘cells’ are connected to other layers of networked relations: global communication systems, transnational criminal syndicates, and financial transfer facilities, for example.

Networks become multi-nodal based on the multi-layering of networked links that spread out and add strength to these connections. Active contributions from social actors in networks, reproduce the legitimacy of these networks and movements, adding to the expansions and multiplying of these networks across time and space. The nature of this layering from the multi-nodal of networks can push these branches to combine with the strong and weak links to get to the point of long-term societal, political and economic impacts (Urry, 2003, p. 53). Within multi-nodal networks of a complex globalised system, ‘positive feedback loops’ of new inputs and disruptions have the potential to expand exponentially over space and time with unknown consequences (Bousquet and Curtis, 2011, p. 46). Complexity refutes the notion that states are the primary unit of analysis and, instead, posits that the system is far more open and ambiguous than an anarchic

system of sovereign competitive state actors. Shifting and breachable boundaries between various complex systems allows exchanges of information and engagement between different actors that can transcend state borders and have the potential to reach distant populations.

Consider, the rise of Uber, Airbnb and TaskRabbit, commonly described as the 'gig economy'. These companies provide services and a customer base through their apps which has members who contract out their labour and material resources for hire for differing fees. The capacity to earn an income is dependent upon the members and their material resources *not* the company. However, these services are relatively cheap and widely available which has resulted in an exponential expansion. The gig economy has presented significant impacts and regulatory challenges upon labour, economic relations and different service industries.

Politically, the rise of hyper-masculine and far-right populist movements and parties has seen seismic shift in politics across the world, gaining much momentum since the victories of Brexit and Trump in 2016. These movements harness communication networks to spread out and link up with each other in mutually reinforcing ways. Since 2016, parliaments across the Western world have seen a spectacular rise in far-right populists winning numerous seats and, subsequently, reframing political discourse. In 2018, Jair Bolsonaro, a controversial far-right populist who has been compared to Trump on numerous occasions, won the Brazilian presidential race in a landslide victory with over 55 per cent of the vote. What can be learnt from these multi-nodal network expansions is that as strong and weak branches combine and build wider acceptance and legitimacy, these networked links reproduce at a much higher scale. Urry (2003, pp. 53 - 55) describes this as a process of 'increasing returns' or 'feedback mechanisms' which allows for outputs from networks to increase over relatively short periods of time and have the capacity to build 'path dependence' or the locking in of set processes if the massification of this pathway reaches a point where it is continually reproduced and reinforced socially so that alternatives are alienated and/or disregarded. Crucially, the multi-nodal network of US hegemony is built on hierarchical layers of interaction, with the United States being the central node that links up the system. This network of American power is in a continual process of integrating and maintaining organic links with global political institutions (ie UN, IMF, WTO), financial networks (through the

decision-making of the Federal Reserve and centrality of Wall Street) and in other key areas, such as cultural reproduction (Hollywood, sport and music). These connections are created by conscious social relations between actors (or nodes) that support, ideologically reproduce and engage with the hegemon so as to maintain feedback loops, allowing the network to strengthen and expand. As the organic crisis becomes more entrenched through the accumulation of localised crises, challenges from various sources and a relative decline in material capabilities, the linkages of this network weaken and collapse, and a situation of residual hegemony becomes more pronounced.

*Global emergence* is the process by which complex systems and networks mature and expand from interactions that can be from the grass-roots to the highest levels of government. Complexity theory's concept of emergence is a response to the agency versus structure debate by demanding that we consider how agency and structure mutually reinforce their existence. Giddens (1984) theory of structuration has famously explored the mutually dependent nature of structure and agency. By structure, Giddens refers to the social structures of society that are continually reinforced by the accepted normative behaviour of people acting as knowledgeable social agents. This normative behaviour relates to accepted daily practices or routines thereby creating legitimated social reproductions based on the foundation of these social rules and control of resources. The reflexive nature of structure and agency creates what Giddens calls 'duality' where independent actions are undertaken, yet by doing such deeds actually further legitimise the social structure, consciously or unconsciously. Put another way, agents who seek transformative change are forced to act within the norms of the very social system they seek to alter and by doing so structure and agency simultaneously reinforce each other. This 'structuration' is therefore able to illustrate that people are neither pure products of rigid social structures nor are they free agents unswayed by the influences of their social environment.

Drawing on this notion of structuration, Manuel DeLanda's (2006) assemblage theory is a complexity approach to understanding emergence in globalised complex systems. He firstly rejects the absolutist notion of solely analysing the agent in relation to structure or the individual in relation to society. Instead, DeLanda puts forth an argument of relativity based on different scales of social organisation between the most base level of the individual through intermediaries of varying levels of social organisation and of

increasing spatial size, enjoying fluctuating levels of relative autonomy. These larger entities are made of smaller component parts that interact with each other to build larger social organisations. However, the larger entity acts as a platform that concurrently limits and empowers the smaller components. This process of limitation and empowerment is a result of the norms, laws and structures established through assemblage, yet this continuous process also allows the smaller components to engage and access the varied and complex resources made available through its depth and sophistication. Emergence occurs when small components of a system coalesce and begin to impact on the larger entities that condition their existence.

Finally, *attractors* serve as an important concept in understanding how processes within a complex system either remain stagnant or move towards an alternative. Fritjof Capra (1996, ch. 6) and Urry (2003, p. 26 - 29) both elaborate on how when a dynamic system remains in a restricted space it is usually the result of an 'attractor' that draws in and stabilises that process through *negative* feedback loops. Put another way, a system can be restricted from changing and evolving when negative feedback or restrictions are applied to it so that it remains or returns to the specified fields established by the structure. However, 'strange' attractors can emerge from instabilities in a complex system that can cause deviations or movements of change to be drawn away from the point of equilibrium. This strange attractor can build over time and draw greater focus away from the functioning of the system. Components of a large social entity like a nation-state can be drawn to attractors like global institutions in order to reproduce the structure and maintain stability through the rules, norms, ideology and actions taken by the institutions. As complex systems are non-linear and based on imperfect systems of information exchange, strange attractors can emerge in various forms to challenge and provide alternatives to the regulations of the status quo. Strange attractors in the case of global social relations can come in the form of Salafi jihadist movements, anti-neo-liberal activism or simply alternative governance organisations like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (an alternative to the World Bank led by China with 69 members and 24 prospective members on the waiting list).

Complexity theory can add value to Gramscian approaches to IR by looking at how the processes of globalisation and transnationalisation have impacted on the reproduction of hegemony *and* the global organic crisis of the United States' hegemony. Multi-nodal

networks can explain how hegemony is reproduced through ingrained path dependencies established and continually reinforced by the hegemon through the functioning of its networked power and ideological relations with other actors. Conversely, it allows us to see how challenges can emerge through new cultural and economic exchanges that have developed over time and can form new networks or even branch away from the established networks of the hegemon.

Emergence provides Gramscianism with a theoretical lens to understand how challenges to hegemony emerge even though its grip appears to be strong. Conceiving of hegemony as a network allows us to see how component parts of social organisation contribute to and are shaped by larger whole entities, instead of adopting singularly hierarchical model of hegemonic relations that sees decline in linear terms with the fall of the hegemon's power over other actors. Such a theoretical underpinning allows for a fuller appreciation of how hegemony is reproduced through networks of organic intellectuals, civil society organisations, and supporting institutions that nevertheless always contain weak links that can be exploited by challengers. Emergence allows us to see how these challengers disrupt the multi-layered networks of hegemony to challenge it on an ideological and institutional level.

Attractors and the role of feedback loops serve a similar analytical role as emergence under different circumstances. Applying the concept of attractors allows for a focus to be placed upon institutions in their role in providing stability and functionality of a world order. The norms, rules and the ideological cultural reproduction of hegemony is centrally situated in institutions that regulate the processes and social interactions of the actors in a world order. However, a strange attractor can emerge in a world order if the functioning of the institution and the ideological authority of the hegemon has been undermined in the worldview of different subaltern actors. Gramscianism provides the theoretical apparatus of hegemony, world order and the global organic crisis, and complexity theory provides a theoretical lens to explore the new depths and magnitude of this unfolding situation.

## **An Analytical Framework to Examine Organic Crisis and Residual Hegemony**

There exists a multitude of factors that can characterise an organic crisis. However, the areas that are critical to the reproduction of global hegemony lie in the capacity to secure the ongoing stability of the political structures of world order through organisational integration, which involves maintaining consent in these international organisations through the ideological internalisation of allies and subordinate groups, and the capacity to neutralise and/or minimise threats from resistant social forces. As mentioned above, organic crisis can be identified when seemingly disparate crises in different fields of the hegemonic system (the ‘morbid symptoms’) cascade and link up in ways that sever the organic links between the ruling classes and the subaltern groups. These relations become so strained and conflictual that parts of the network collapse and the system is degraded to a form of residual hegemony in which direct coercion is commonplace in holding the system together. Consequently, there are three key propositions that I will apply in the following case-study chapters to investigate the condition of US hegemony:

- (i) Residual hegemony is indicated by a decline of moral and intellectual leadership to the point that international action predominantly relies on coercion, and overt consent is limited in time and space.
- (ii) During global crises, complex networks of social relations that support hegemony disintegrate to the extent that oppositional social forces overtly challenge the hegemonic system.
- (iii) In a condition of residual hegemony, the hegemon is unwilling and/or incapable of leadership within international organisations or reforming them to adequately respond to global problems.

It is now necessary to explore what I mean by these propositions and what role these concepts have in the exercise of global hegemony.

### *Residual Hegemony and Moral and Intellectual Leadership*

One of the primary mechanisms of hegemony is the capacity to build and maintain moral and intellectual leadership. Moral and intellectual leadership can be characterised as having three key elements: (i) a *prestige* that actively encourages emulation (ii) a capacity

to *present actions as serving a universal good* in order to build consensus from allied and subaltern groups; and (iii) *ideological leadership* that involves presenting the worldview of the hegemon as right and applicable for all people. Each element builds upon and is dependent on the other.

The *prestige* that comes with being a hegemonic power is derived from building material superiority vis-à-vis all other state actors in production, military capabilities and finance. Such success inherently encourages emulation from other states who want to follow the same developmental path. As mentioned in previous chapters, Cox (1996) and Arrighi and Silver (1999a) have discussed how moments of hegemony expand as other states seek to mimic the success of the hegemon by establishing similar economic and social institutions, as well as following similar patterns in ideology, culture and technology. Indeed, an emergent world order is assembled in the image of the expanding hegemon, where international institutions fundamentally entrench the ideological logic and common sense of the new hegemony and build organic linkages between the hegemon and subordinate actors. The gloss of this prestige begins to wane when the superior material capabilities of the hegemon enters a stage of relative decline vis-à-vis other actors and the networks of the hegemonic order are disrupted by various social forces and their political challenges. In this situation, alternative forms of social organisation (in any of the fields of security, production or finance) gain traction as a superior approach to the status quo. Residual hegemony is present when the prestige of the hegemon is challenged by a decline, material superiority and the emergence of alternative models of social organisation.

Global hegemony is a project that demands a substantial expenditure of resources and is therefore only available to an actor that enjoys a great superiority in material capabilities. Such superiority can only be translated into leadership if it is politically organised and institutionally structured to present itself as *serving a universal good* for the betterment of humanity. Cox (1983) discusses how in the formation of a world order other state and non-state actors must be convinced to support the reproduction of hegemony as there is a shared interest in doing so. Under hegemony, the benefits of public goods in security, trade, finance and multilateralism are received positively from allied core states that are organisationally-orientated to take advantage of such relations. Conversely, in many periphery states public goods from the hegemon can be more coercive and exploitative



(i.e. the conditions associated with loans from the World Bank and the IMF, international trade laws in the WTO, the use of military interventions in the periphery).

To express moral and intellectual leadership, then, the hegemon must present itself as taking actions that have common or collective benefit to the subordinate and dominant groups. As Gramsci (2012, p. 182) argues, this leadership comes from being ‘conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the ‘national’ energies’. In this situation, subordinate actors would actively support the hegemon as it would be perceived to be acting for a collective benefit, as well as being in the self-interest of the hegemon. This is a delicate balancing act for the hegemon to manage: the tensions between the re-production of hegemony for naked self-interest and its presentation as serving a universal good are ever-present. If the balance is perceived as being tipped too far to pure self-interest, the contestation inherently present within hegemony threatens to flare and undermine the network. In moments of residual hegemony, the frequency with which the hegemon is perceived to act in pure self-interest reaches a level that its narrative of the common good is rejected by key allies and subaltern groups. The good will and legitimacy of the hegemon as the ‘motor force’ for a universal benefit is under a cloud of doubt and suspicion. Under these conditions of residual hegemony, leadership is undermined as the hegemon responds to increasing competition and disruptions to the networks with increasingly coercive strategies.

The final key element of moral and intellectual leadership is the *ideological role* that is articulated to all other elements of global society and defended by organic intellectuals who attempt to educate and integrate these values in normative practice. Moral and intellectual leadership requires an integration of ideological values that suit the organisational orientation of the hegemon in the task of expanding the networks of the hegemonic order. This element of moral and intellectual leadership involves an *educative* role that communicates the ideological worldview and values of the hegemon so that it can be internalised by allied and subaltern groups. This ideological education must be appreciated and normalised to the extent that it is considered ‘common sense’ and natural.

Under conditions of residual hegemony, this capacity for ideological integration becomes limited in geographical scope and fragmented across the different layers of the network. The ideological claims of the hegemon are consistently challenged and undermined by

other social forces and alternative organic intellectuals. Put simply, the hegemon struggles to sell its universal message as its legitimacy and inherent prestige is increasingly questioned. Hegemony is residually apparent in the ideological appeal and social integration that the hegemon can muster in key organisations, supporting organic intellectuals and subaltern groups. But in moments of residual hegemony the *universality* of this ideological position would be increasingly challenged from a variety of sources and these sources would be gaining in legitimacy in direct relation to the declining hegemon.

In addition to state actors, organic intellectuals are also part of the leadership structure. As an emergent hegemon begins to rise, supporting civil society actors communicate and promote the ideological logic of the ruling group as ‘attractors’ that absorb other intellectuals from rival social groupings. Economic and productive success of the emergent hegemon ideologically justified by organic intellectuals draws other intellectuals to adopt a similar worldview as mutually beneficial and intellectually satisfying. Gramsci (2012, p. 60) writes:

there does not exist any independent class of intellectuals, but every social group has its own stratum of intellectuals, or tends to form one; however, the intellectuals of the historically (and concretely) progressive class, in the given conditions, exercise such a power of attraction that, in the last analysis, they end up subjugating the intellectuals of the other social groups; they thereby create a system of solidarity between all intellectuals, with bonds of psychological nature (vanity, etc.) and often of a caste character (technico-juridical, corporate, etc.).

Moral and intellectual leadership performs a key function in hegemony, especially during times of relative decline in terms of material capabilities. Organic intellectuals serve a central role in educating and morally framing the necessity of hegemonic leadership. However, during residual hegemony it becomes difficult to retain organic intellectuals to ideologically defend the hegemon as the intellectual justification for hegemony begins to unravel. As Gramsci (2012, p. 61) concludes, ‘As soon as the dominant group has exhausted its function, the ideological bloc tends to crumble away; then “spontaneity” may be replaced by “constraint” in ever less disguised and indirect forms, culminating in outright police measures and *coups d’etat*’ (italics in the original). Forms of coercion become ever more present as the moral and intellectual defence of the ideology of the

hegemon has less and less legitimacy. The hegemon and the corresponding organic intellectuals are resistant in ceding power, employing whatever mechanisms are available to maintain their position.

Building and maintaining moral and intellectual leadership serves two primary functions. First, it informs the institutional norms and processes of the structures developed by the hegemon by providing an ideological framework that can be intellectually justified as an inherent public good. Second, it provides a cultural legitimacy and authority to the hegemon as the bastion of this ideological position. During moments of peak hegemony or integral hegemony the hegemon will still face challenges and contestation from various sources, including the contradictory consciousness of the subaltern masses. However, when these challenges are mounted the hegemon has a number of tools or mechanisms it can deploy in order to reduce, neutralise or marginalise this challenge. Such mechanisms include the ability to absorb or co-opt resistant social forces into their fold (*transformismo*), exclusion from the economic trade networks, the use of organic intellectuals to debase and demean the ideological logic of the counter social forces, and/or use different forms of coercion including the use of violent suppression. As Gramsci (2012, p. 57) notes, ‘A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to “liquidate”, or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force’. When examining the Obama Administration, a close reading of its moral and intellectual leadership will be conducted in the case-studies to establish if and when such coercive methods were employed and therefore whether forms of residual hegemony were present.

### *Global Complexity and the Challenge from Oppositional Social Forces*

Under conditions of residual hegemony, the hegemonic network faces overt challenges arising from globally complex transnational flows and from oppositional social forces. As described above, the three concepts of complexity theory that I will use – multi-nodal networks, emergence and attractors – provide an interpretative framework for understanding how global complexity provides unique challenges to the hegemon, and greater insights to how global social relations function on a transnational plane of existence. The use of complexity theory concepts provides an holistic approach to analysis in relation to exploring multi-layered connections that exist globally between

actors, international organisations and even non-human phenomena. Such insights will ultimately garner greater clarity to how global crises have evolved and impact on social relations.

The concept of multi-nodal networks illuminates the challenges to the US hegemonic order from various actors as the diffusion of power over recent decades becomes more entrenched. The transnational flows and multi-layered networks of relations that take place across the globe present a difficult challenge for the United States to overcome and discipline within existing institutions and practices. Non-state actors can build social movements that gain ideological legitimacy and potentially undermine the moral and intellectual leadership of the United States. Emergent state actors can use the changing economic and diplomatic circumstances of declining US power to advocate for changes to institutional rules and norms and can build support through regional networks and trade partnerships with other state actors. Conversely, path dependency indicates how American hegemony and 'locked-in' networks within the US hegemonic order are difficult to dismantle. The multi-nodal networks of American power have been deeply ingrained in all major aspects of global relations, including institutions like the UN, IMF and the WTO. Global financialisation is driven by the decisions of the Federal Reserve and Wall Street. When global crises strike, these routine facets of US hegemony are tested as their structural limitations and contradictions become more exposed and acute.

The application of complexity theory allows us to see how the varied components of a global system autonomously interact with the whole through differing intermediary levels of social relations. More specifically, 'emergence' provides an analytical tool to address how the reproduction of hegemony is being challenged and how the global organic crisis continues to evolve and build alternatives. In residual hegemony, the emergence of oppositional social forces become visible through overt challenges to the material and ideological foundations of the system. Strange attractors can cause bifurcations in the reproduction of hegemony, resulting in disruptions and disintegration in the multi-nodal networks that create path dependence. In this situation, the United States retains some capacity to repair the system to bring it back to equilibrium, remaining a primary actor in global institutions, an unrivalled military, and control over global financial liquidity. Yet, the complex nature of global political and economic networks and the emergence of

alternative and attractive social forces continually limits the reproduction of US hegemony.

### *Dysfunction in International Organisations*

International organisations hold an essential function in reproducing hegemony in establishing, maintaining and exercising the rules and norms of this complex system. They provide an 'educative' role by ingraining the ideological logic within all structures that are defended and advocated by organic intellectuals. However, even though international organisations do indeed provide a platform where a declining hegemon is structurally situated to hold a central role, in times of crisis other pressures emerge to challenge and resist the status quo. As Cox notes, hegemonic organisations act as the 'regulation of [the] existing order and in part the site of the struggle between conservative and transformative forces' (Cox, 1996, p. 514). In his seminal article 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method', Cox outlined the importance of international organisations to the reproduction of hegemony. It is useful to repeat it here:

Among the features of international organisation which express its hegemonic role are the following: (1) they embody the rules which facilitate the expansion of hegemonic orders; (2) they are themselves the product of the hegemonic world order; (3) they ideologically legitimate the norms of the world order; (4) they co-opt the elites from peripheral countries and (5) they absorb counter-hegemonic ideas (Cox, 1983, p. 172).

According to Cox (1996, p. 525), international organisations serve two purposes 'one, to respond effectively to the pressing problems of the present; the other, to be concerned with longer-term questions of global structural change and with how international organization...can help shape that change in a consensually desirable direction.' By formalising the institutional networks of hegemony through intergovernmental organisations, other actors are bound to a system of global management that has clearly articulated ideology, rules, roles and procedures. However, as hegemony expands to the global level, the authority of the hegemon must be exercised to cover a larger geographic space and a deeper level of complexity in its expansionary networks of finance, trade and divisions of labour. This greater complexity and geographical scope extends the reach of

the hegemon but also makes the task of leadership more difficult as it must encompass a greater variety of peoples, practices and perspectives.

The purpose of my examination of multilateral organisations in the case studies is to critically explore the dynamics and structural capabilities of these organisations in responding to global crises. The reproduction of hegemony through international organisations is a 'solid' form of modernity (to borrow a term from Zygmunt Bauman), yet their rules, norms and mechanisms must be dynamic and changeable in order to deal with changing circumstances and problems. The utility of key international organisations comes into question when they remain rigid and there is no indication that the hegemon is willing to reform them to deal with various crises and problems. Consequently, key nodes of the hegemonic network weaken and eventually become redundant.

During times of residual hegemony, furthermore, the struggle between conservative forces attempting to maintain the status quo and transformative forces looking to reform or dismantle the institutional framework of the hegemonic institutions becomes more acute. The moral and intellectual leadership expressed by the hegemon and reproduced by supporting organic intellectuals comes under question. This is especially the case when crises within the system emerge and cannot be reconciled by the current institutional response led by the hegemon and allies. Structurally, during an organic crisis there is evidence of a significantly reduced capacity of the hegemon to use international organisations to address crises and return stability to the world. This is compounded by the fact that in many instances the hegemon is unwilling to reform international organisations to adjust to the changed historical circumstances because it would result in a decline in power, status and capacity to bend an already resistant international organisation to its will.

When international organisations are established by a hegemon, they are orientated to place the hegemon in the centre and with a structure that favours their interests. A stubborn resistance to reform these organisations are clearly premised on the self-interest of the residual hegemon in wanting to maintain its advantageous position. Arrighi and Silver (1999b, pp. 288 – 289) have highlighted such recalcitrance. Even though their scope is more expansive than mine, it is still worth noting here that: 'The fall is likely because the leading states of the West are prisoners of the developmental paths that have

made their fortunes, both political and economic. The paths are yielding decreasing returns...If the system eventually breaks down, it will be primarily because of US resistance to adjustment and accommodation.' The United States' refusal to reform international organisations is a key indicator of residual hegemony as it reveals that it is incapable of rectifying its lost material advantages and therefore attempts to cling to its primacy by refusing to give up its political status. In times of organic crisis, then, the hegemon and the international institutions it created are not structurally suitable for addressing the systemic problems and returning stability to the world.

## **Conclusions**

Complex-Gramscianism applies a Gramscian theoretical interpretation of hegemony to the complex globalising networks and processes that have developed in recent decades. This framework will be used to examine global crises that challenged the United States' during the Obama Presidency. Specifically, my account of organic crisis and three theoretical propositions concerning residual hegemony will be applied to three cases of global crisis to assess the condition of US hegemony during the Obama Administration. This examination will focus on the decline of moral and intellectual leadership, globally complex challenges from oppositional social forces and the structural dysfunction of international organisations.

The key hypothesis taken into the cases is that during the Obama Administration global crises in specific fields reveal serious disruptions to US hegemony. Gramsci memorably described crises that contribute to the organic crisis as 'morbid symptoms'. Such morbid symptoms can appear in varying forms that emerge in one field yet have ramifications in others because they exist in intersectional networks that are intimately linked through complex processes. Closely examining a morbid symptom of the wider emergent organic crisis will provide important insight into the complex relations that exist between various actors and the fragmenting system. Applying my theoretical framework will therefore allow me to determine to what extent residual hegemony was present in each case and whether they collectively indicate a broader organic crisis in this period.

## Chapter 3

### **The Libyan Intervention 2011 – 2016: The Organic Crisis of Global (In)Security**

Global security practices are a key component in the reproduction of hegemony. However, security cannot be interpreted solely through the analytical paradigm of applying military capabilities to neutralise threats, even though this is a key element of security. Rather, the hegemon must actively build an ideological framework – a structure and narrative – that can be consciously internalised and reproduced socially as a means of providing peace and stability generally. These combined elements of coercion and consent are necessary to reproducing hegemony, yet become increasingly difficult to exercise during times of crisis. The 2011 UNSC-sanctioned (Resolution 1970 and 1973) humanitarian intervention in Libya initially appeared to indicate that the Obama Administration was capable of building consensus to take multilateral action to provide security to a vulnerable population. UN Security Council Resolution 1973 that sanctioned a no-fly zone was passed without a single negative vote (with five abstentions, including China and Russia). The United States had support from key international actors including the United Nations, the Arab League and the African Union. Global civil society actors including Human Rights Watch, *Al Jazeera* and the *New York Times* also proved decisive in building consent. Did the United States in fact provide the moral and intellectual leadership expected of a hegemonic state? The purpose of this chapter is to assess the condition of US hegemony by examining the Obama Administration's Libya intervention. It will argue that despite the initial success in building a consensus for intervention, this consensus was highly conditional and quite shallow. Moreover, the events that transpired after the United States and NATO implemented the intervention demonstrated the tenuous nature of US moral and intellectual leadership.

The Libyan crisis began as an uprising during 2011 Arab Spring. People in cities across Libya rose up in public protest against the regime on the 15 February, called by the activists the 'Day of Rage'. Despite violent repression, protesters continued their actions against the government in cities throughout Libya, leading to a further escalation of violence from Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi's security forces and mercenaries. In the



days that followed, the rebellion was able to take a number of key cities from the Gaddafi regime, including Benghazi (Black, 2011). Civil pro-democracy organisations and some of the key rebel militias formed a loose coalition under the umbrella organisation the Transitional National Council (NTC). In his 22 February speech, Gaddafi labelled the rebels ‘drug addicts, jihadis and rats’ and promised to execute those involved in the insurrection. He also promised to ‘cleanse Libya inch by inch, house by house, home by home, alleyway by alleyway, person by person, until the country is cleansed of dirt and scum’ (Hilsum, 2012, p. 33). This promise became the call-to-arms for the international community. The Libyan rebels rejected any form of military occupation but did seek support from the international community in the form of arms and the implementation of a no-fly zone. For those that lobbied for intervention, the combination of Gaddafi’s reputation of brutality and the imminent threat of a mass atrocity helped build the momentum to act in Libya.

On 17 March 2011, the Security Council passed Resolution 1973 that sanctioned a no-fly zone in Libya with the explicit mandate to protect vulnerable civilians. The Resolution was initially touted as a United States-led multilateral humanitarian military response, which was premised on the emerging norm of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). This norm obligates the international community to intervene if a state is perpetrating mass atrocities, or is otherwise unable to protect their own people from them. R2P can come in many forms, including a number of non-violent methods, but its most scrutinised and controversial mechanism is military intervention. The UNSC resolution to militarily intervene with a no-fly zone was the first significant test of this type of R2P. The resolution only just passed with abstentions from key veto powers, Russia and China, and conditional support from the African state members. This endorsement was premised on strictly limiting the intervention to a no-fly zone and a focus on protecting civilian lives. As the no-fly zone escalated into regime change without a UNSC mandate, the conflict resulted in increased insecurity at local, regional and global levels. The intervention further eroded the West’s reputation in the Muslim World and joined a list of perceived illegitimate military actions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The campaign was initially led by the US’ AFRICOM (African Command), and then was transferred to NATO command headed by core European states under the mission title ‘Operation Unified Protector’. However, the European members of NATO struggled to continue the mission without US personnel and resources.

In this chapter, I provide a complex-Gramscian account of the 2011 Libyan intervention that reveals the limits of US residual hegemony and the key elements of its residual form. In the first section, I argue that initially it appeared that the Obama Administration was able to build consensus through international cooperation and a justification premised on the logic of Responsibility to Protect. The United States, through the diplomatic work of the Obama Administration and key allies from global civil society appeared to have demonstrated moral and intellectual leadership in passing UNSC Resolution 1973. However, despite building consensus through multilateralism the escalation of the conflict to regime change significantly diminished the initial support of a number of key state actors. Furthermore, the presumed support for R2P was limited to begin with and following the Libyan intervention was openly rejected.

In the second section, I outline how various transnational counter-hegemonic social forces have emerged from the Libyan intervention, which could not be managed or eliminated by the US. The Libyan intervention demonstrated how non-state actors could unexpectedly challenge the security capabilities of the hegemon, which was epitomised by the Benghazi attack against two US government facilities resulting in the death of the US ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens. Specifically, I will examine how transnational terrorist networks exploited the power vacuum created by the removal of the Gaddafi government and the absence of internal security. I will then examine the consequences of the expansion of violent non-state actors in Libya and argue that it disrupted local and regional stability as well as disrupting US efforts to integrate Libya into the hegemonic order.

In the third section, I examine the problems within key international security organisations: NATO and the UNSC. NATO's involvement and lead role in Operation Unified Protector was hailed by many commentators as a new era in global security in its application of so-called 'smart power' and the United States' decision to 'lead from behind', involving a coordinating role rather than one based on a huge military commitment on the ground. However, the limited military material capabilities of NATO members, including the UK and France, coupled with the lack of political will to increase burden sharing in NATO meant that Libya actually exposed the fragmentation of this organisation. The United States attempted to reform NATO but to no avail. In relation to

the United Nations, I will argue that its potency as a global security organisation has diminished significantly by the Libya intervention. Specifically, the failings of the Libyan crisis undermined the capacity for the Obama Administration to reproduce its moral and intellectual leadership in the UNSC in relation to other military humanitarian interventions – namely the Syrian Civil War which was repeatedly vetoed by China and/or Russia. Under conditions of global hegemony, international security organisations should prevent conflicts or, at the very least, respond effectively to ensure they are resolved in ways that do not destabilise the system. As will be discussed below, the residual hegemony of the United States was evident because its responses to security crises actually resulted in an increase in global insecurity.

### **A Tenuous and Uneven Exercise of Moral and Intellectual Leadership**

The most observable application of moral and intellectual leadership is the capacity to build consensus and to present an ideological perspective as ethically just and universally beneficial. Enrico Augelli and Craig N. Murphy (1989, pp. 125 - 129) note that Gramsci posits that a state is ethical if it performs a social good for the subaltern groups and the general population through both state functions and private initiatives. This social good is understood as ‘heeding the needs’ of subaltern groups and ‘establishes a dialogue with them’. However, a state can present itself as ethical but in reality seek to achieve security through the use of domination. As explained in Chapters 1 and 2, domination is antithetical to ethical hegemony because it applies coercion and force to control the ruled, especially antagonistic groups. When we examine how the case for the Libyan intervention was presented by the United States and others, moral and intellectual leadership was unevenly achieved because support, misinformation, and opposition were all evident. This section will argue that the United States was initially able to build a case for intervention based on the premise of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Most importantly, legitimacy for intervention came from the regional inter-state organisations of the Arab League and the African Union which positively affected the vote in the UNSC. The leadership of the United States in the implementation of the Libyan intervention was limited and conditional. When the no-fly zone escalated to regime change, the moral and intellectual leadership of the United States disintegrated and the

UNSC became a diplomatic quagmire with members openly challenging the US' legitimacy in putting forward future resolutions of this kind.

### *Renewed Moral and Intellectual Leadership?*

The United States has consistently portrayed its military actions as mutually beneficial for global security, yet this framing has been significantly weakened over time. After the Afghanistan War and Iraq War during the Bush II's era - generally characterised as unilateralism - the capacity to build consensus reached new lows for the United States. The UNSC's open rejection of Secretary of State Colin Powell's case for intervention in Iraq in 2003 epitomises this weakening. In this context, the Obama Administration promised a new era of more inclusive leadership and ideologically framed United States' hegemony as providing global security that would be beneficial to all. Early on in his administration, President Obama demonstrated an appreciation of the costs of military over-reach, despite enjoying military capabilities superior to that of any other state.

Initially, the US was internally divided over the decision to intervene in Libya. Britain and France led the charge for intervention, pressuring the United States to support it. It was reported in the *New York Times* that it took the lobbying of UN ambassador and National Security Advisor, Susan Rice, Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and National Security Council Chair, Samantha Power, to win over the concerns of blowback from National Security Advisor, Tom Donilon, Deputy National Security Advisor, Denis McDonough, counter-terrorism chief, John Brennan, Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, as well as Vice-President, Joe Biden (Cooper and Myers, 2011). The apprehension from the Obama Administration indicates an awareness of the limitations of United States' hegemony, especially in relation to building consensus and the long-term consequences of foreign intervention. Following the commitment to some form of intervention against the Gaddafi regime, leading advocates within the Obama Administration, notably Clinton and Rice, worked relentlessly to gain international backing in the UNSC and key Arab states (Cooper and Myers, 2011). Consequently, the United States' multilateral response was consciously carried out and publicly presented as a form of 'limited intervention' or an 'anti-Iraq', meaning that it would not have the same elements of an occupation, troops on the ground, or the huge human toll in civilian and soldier casualties. The United States

was highly aware of their reputation in the region and attempted to present itself, and its allies, as protectors of the Libyan people, reluctantly carrying out a military intervention that was limited to a no-fly zone. Building the case for this form of 'limited' intervention and framing the narrative of the brutality of Gaddafi was achieved through the diplomatic efforts of the US state department officials and the activist intellectuals of humanitarian organisations like Human Rights Watch, representatives from the United Nations, and from supporters in media organisations, including the *New York Times* and *Al Jazeera*.

Building consensus on intervention was a collaborative effort from US institutions, supporting core states, international organisations, and organic intellectuals. They continually presented a case for intervention based on representing a *common good*. The condemnation of Gaddafi and their concerns for the people of Libya built a case for humanitarian intervention within the United Nations that could be accepted in the critical consciousness of public opinion. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, described the actions of the Gaddafi government with horror: 'the callousness with which Libyan authorities and their hired guns are reportedly shooting live rounds of ammunitions at peaceful protesters is unconscionable' (OHCHR, 2011). As discussed below, Pillay emphasised the need to intervene in order to protect civilian lives: 'The international community must unite in condemnation of such acts and make unequivocal commitments to ensure justice is rendered to the thousands of victims of this repression'. UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon (UN News, 2011) was also quick to condemn Gaddafi and his security forces: 'the Government of Libya must meet its responsibility to protect its people...The reported nature and scale of the attacks on civilians are egregious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law...Those responsible for brutally shedding the blood of innocents must be punished.' NGOs like Human Rights Watch also condemned the violence of the Libyan government and described the violent repression as 'the reality of Muammar Gaddafi's brutality when faced with any internal dissent' (HRW, 2011a). During the week following the 'Day of Rage', a widely published report from *Al Jazeera* (2011c) contributed to the sense of government repression describing 'helicopter gunships' firing upon streets and fighter jets 'indiscriminately bombing' cities. A *New York Times* editorial (2011) was unambiguous in its advocacy for intervention: 'Unless some way is found to stop him, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi of Libya will slaughter hundreds or even thousands of his own people in his desperation to hang on to power.'

The norm of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) presented the ideal intellectual paradigm to justify the intervention in Libya. R2P emerged from the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) report on the Responsibility to Protect in 2001 which first outlined the doctrine with the proposition that there is a ‘collective international responsibility to protect’ when ‘sovereign Governments have proved powerless or unwilling’ to stop human atrocities (ICISS, 2001). Historically, R2P emerged after the tragedies of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and the mass killings in Srebrenica in 1995 where peacekeepers witnessed war crimes, but were powerless to intervene. These atrocities were deemed to be preventable by the international community and the introduction of R2P was an attempt by the UN to implement a framework that would allow member states to act. At the World Summit in 2005, the United Nations officially introduced the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect as a global norm that would act as a mechanism to trigger a UNSC resolution for intervention to protect human lives. The most provocative element of R2P is the third pillar, which states that the international community is compelled to act to prevent an imminent genocide, ethnic cleansing or mass killing in a timely manner. According to the United Nations, intervention can be exercised in a variety of forms, including non-violent peace-keeping or diplomatic missions. But military intervention is also possible when other methods fail.

According to Alex Bellamy (2011), the UN played a decisive role in framing the repressive violence of the Gaddafi government as a clear-cut case for humanitarian intervention premised on the normative framework of R2P. He notes that on the same day as Pillay made her public statements calling on the international community, special advisers to the UN Secretary General on genocide and R2P also released statements which argued that the Gaddafi government’s actions were tantamount to crimes against humanity and presented the case for military action from the international community. As indicated above, these statements were supported by Ban who also ‘strongly condemned’ the Libyan government for its actions. Most notably, the UNSC issued a statement on the 22 February demanding the Libyan government take the responsibility to ‘protect its population’. Hence, from early on, the conflict in Libya was framed as a potential humanitarian crisis as the civilian population was exposed to the brutal tactics of the Gaddafi government, which in turn laid the groundwork for legitimate humanitarian action. Ideologically, the United States and allied states, supported by key players in the

United Nations, appeared to have convinced the global community to adopt this perspective.

Consequently, the normative framework of R2P provided a platform from which the US could militarily intervene to protect human lives while securing long-term interests. After the disaster in Iraq, securing the backing of UN institutions, particularly the UNSC, under the mutually agreed norm of R2P brought much needed legitimacy in the international community. In this case, it would also bolster the emerging Obama Doctrine based on coalition-building and consensus, which had been criticised for its lofty rhetoric but lack of action. With a successful intervention in Libya, the Obama Administration would have a clear case of the United States acting in the name of human rights and the common good.

Furthermore, if the military application of R2P was successful then ideological integration of this norm would deepen and become more ingrained in international institutions. Pro-R2P scholars hoped that success in Libya would make future actions easier to attain by binding the UNSC to a responsibility that would limit 'institutional indifference' as a default option (Weiss 2011; Bellamy and Williams 2011). According to Ramesh Thakur (2011, p. 19), R2P gave Obama the 'necessary intellectual and normative tool to act', and as such it became the 'game-changer'. Bruce Jentleson (2012, p. 421) saw the success of the intervention in Libya as the final stage in R2P – 'institutionalisation and operationalization' in the normative framework of the UNSC's options when dealing with a humanitarian crisis. He goes on to suggest that the US is the only actor capable of 'providing the leadership needed for the world to act' yet that it must be wary of 'reducing partnership to followership'. Thomas Weiss (2011, p. 287 - 290) argued that Libya has put 'teeth in the fledgling R2P doctrine'. Accordingly, the Libyan case indicated that 'military humanitarianism is a necessary, albeit insufficient, component of the responsibility to protect'. This would be especially true in relation to generating enough public sentiment to pressure the other five permanent members to vote in favour, or at least to abstain, in a tabled R2P resolution. With the UNSC the pivotal force that green-lights R2P actions, the United States would be perfectly positioned to exploit the flawed structural inequalities of the Security Council as long as a balancing act was executed well enough to gather public approval for an intervention, and elicit the political support from the permanent members and regional inter-governmental

organisations. The United States could overcome the criticisms of inconsistency and selectivity if the Libyan intervention was widely accepted as a successful military action that protected threatened civilians, especially if it was conducted in a multilateral fashion with widespread support.

A crucial factor in legitimising a no-fly zone and military intervention was the support from key regional organisations, most notably the League of Arab States (LAS – commonly referred to as the Arab League) and the African Union (AU). It provided much-needed regional and cultural legitimacy to the intervention. The support from the Arab League and African Union undermined criticisms and accusations that the intervention was another case of Western imperialism and aggression against a Muslim state. Public support from the LAS and the AU was a major contributing factor in China and Russia abstaining from the resolution. I concur with Bellamy (2011) that the UNSC Resolution 1973 would not have passed without the vocal support of the Arab League.

The need for regional legitimacy is an indication of the limits of the moral and intellectual leadership of the United States. If NATO, under the command of the United States' AFRICOM, imposed a no-fly zone, or initiated a military campaign to oust Gaddafi without the support of these regional organisations, the intervention would almost certainly have been framed as an act of Western imperialism and just another attempt to exploit access to the natural resources of a MENA country. The United States and the West had been tainted by their previous military interventions in that region, such that consensus could not be built in the UNSC or in global public opinion without the support of regional organisations like the Arab League and the African Union. Even with the backing of prominent figures in the UN, organic intellectuals from humanitarian organisations and the mass media, the United States moral and intellectual leadership was still inadequate and needed to be supplemented by the public backing of two regional organisations. Notably, both organisations provided their support with the caveat that protecting civilian life was the priority and sought assurances that the intervention would not escalate into a full-scale invasion or occupation, indicating a continued distrust of the West generally and the United States specifically.

However, it soon became clear that support for the intervention from the Arab League and the African Union was quite shallow. Both organisations withdrew their acquiescence



and it became evident that they were motivated by different interests that did not necessarily indicate an adherence to the moral and intellectual leadership of the United States. In relation to the Arab League, even though Libya had been a long-time member, under Gaddafi there had been ongoing animosity between Libya and Saudi Arabia. Many Arab League members, notably Saudi Arabia and allied states, considered Gaddafi to be an erratic and decisive figure in their organisation. Saudi Arabia and Libya had been at loggerheads over a number of issues, and Gaddafi had even publicly accused King Abdullah of lying during an Arab summit in 2009. Gaddafi's removal would result in political advantages for the Arab League.

Following the escalation of violence and the likelihood of Gaddafi over-running the NTC-controlled cities in violation of UNSC Resolution 1970, on the 12 March the Arab League released a statement condemning the violence of the Gaddafi-led security forces and advocated for a no-fly zone. Some Western observers, including Bellamy and Williams (2011) and Robert Naiman (2011), have suggested that the Arab League pushed for a no-fly zone to divert attention away from the repressive tactics of Bahrain and Yemen in repressing local democracy movements during the Arab Spring. Bahrain and Yemen are allied to Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring presented a political challenge that was being addressed with repressive violence. By supporting the intervention, global resources and attention would be directed towards Libya and away from the social unrest in these other countries.

The motivations of the African Union (AU) were quite different to their Arab League counterparts. The norm of the Responsibility to Protect had been internalised by the African Union, which included R2P in its Constitutive Act. There existed an ideological internalisation of the liberal premises of humanitarian intervention, yet adherence to this doctrine appeared to be far more genuine compared to their Western counterparts. The African Union's approach to the Libyan intervention was premised on humanitarian protection using a variety of methods that included diplomatic mechanisms. The primary concern of the AU was to protect civilians and to do so under the most stable conditions available (African Union Peace and Security Council, 2011).

It is important to note that three African states were on the Security Council (South Africa, Nigeria and Gabon), and all voted in favour of Resolution 1973 despite the AU's

opposition to any form of military intervention. This was a confusing and embarrassing situation, especially considering that South Africa's UN ambassador was defending the resolution at the same time as Zuma was condemning it. However, the driving motivation behind the decision can largely be associated with two factors. First, these African states were legitimately concerned with the large population of African migrant workers in Libya who were being targeted by Libyan opposition forces. These African neighbouring states did not have the resources to adequately evacuate them. As there had been a history of some success with R2P in Africa (Sarkin and Patterson, 2010), a unified action backed by the UNSC would hopefully protect these civilians. Second, even though the focus of Resolution 1973 had always been on a no-fly zone, it was understood by the African members of the UNSC that as the resolution 'took note' of both the AU roadmap and of the Secretary-General's demand for an immediate ceasefire, a peaceful settlement between the warring parties would be a primary consideration. The African states insisted on these principles and were well aware of how crucial their votes were. As AU chairperson, Jean Ping (2011) noted, 'The resolution enjoyed the support of all the African members...genuinely driven by a commitment to protect civilians in Libya. Had just one of them abstained, there would have been no such resolution'.

The language of the resolution indicated that if a ceasefire was achieved, followed by a peace process that responded to the 'legitimate demands of the Libyan people', the no-fly zone would not be implemented by the West. Furthermore, the African Union (in the form of the ad hoc committee) was expressly tasked with collaborating with the Secretary-General's Special Envoy in facilitating negotiations to seek a peaceful settlement between the opposing parties. The intervention was premised on firstly seeking an alternative to the no-fly zone, which gave an important role to the African Union in brokering some kind of peace deal. With the African Union keen to avoid an escalation of the conflict, and wanting their organisation to gain more legitimacy on the world stage, its members backed the resolution (Ping, 2011; De Waal, 2013).

### *The Disintegration of Moral and Intellectual Leadership in Global Security*

Despite gaining some regional legitimacy for intervention, the United States' coalition resorted to forms of coercion involving the misrepresentation of their intentions and

suppression of dissent in order to escalate the conflict. Despite premising intervention on the protection of human life from imminent threat, the intervention relied on acts of domination in which misleading claims were used to build consensus. This approach was aimed at winning over key actors to legitimate the use of military intervention – namely the Arab League, the African Union and the UNSC. The United States’ long history of interventions in the Middle East and beyond, with the associated human costs, had tarnished its legitimacy and goodwill for military actions. Support from key regional organisations and multilateral organisations like the UNSC became necessary to legitimate the intentions of the US and other core allies – indicating an already weak moral and intellectual leadership capacity. The Obama Administration sought to distance itself from such a history and therefore presented the Libya case as an intervention completely different from its recent history in the Middle East. When Resolution 1973 was passed, it initially appeared that the United States was rebuilding moral and intellectual leadership through seeking consensus, having a multilateral approach (with the explicit backing of key regional organisations) and framing the intervention as focused on the protection of human life under imminent threat.

The premise that the intervention was motivated by the protection of civilians was shortly revealed to be misleading. Misleading others in order to build consent is considered a form of fraud and comes under the umbrella of coercion. Arrighi (1993, p. 149) has discussed how the use of fraud and corruption is a ‘rear-guard struggle to preserve power’ and can be perceived as the absence or ‘failure of power’. Gramsci (2012, p. 80n) has also characterised the use of fraud as a mechanism situated between consent and blatant domination: ‘Between consent and force stands corruption/fraud (which is characteristic of certain situations when it is hard to exercise the hegemonic function, and when the use of force is too risky).’ In either depiction, the application of misrepresentation in order to achieve immediate agenda goals is a feature of a decline in moral and intellectual leadership and, as we shall see, has long-term consequences for future relations. By misrepresenting their intentions, the United States and key allied state actors, most notably France and Britain, built a case for intervention on false pretences that had a far greater blowback than anticipated.

It was generally accepted in the international community and the world media that the introduction of the no-fly zone did not include regime change. However, the language did

provide room for such an action by allowing ‘all necessary measures’ to protect civilians, which allowed scope to remove Gaddafi if his security forces were the immediate threat to the population (Roberts, H., 2011). Some African leaders were reassured when Obama himself, speaking to the American people on the 28 March (less than two weeks after passing Resolution 1973) stated that regime change through military escalation would be folly:

But broadening our military mission to include regime change would be a mistake. The task that I assigned our forces – to protect the Libyan people from immediate danger, and to establish a no-fly zone – carries with it a U.N. mandate and international support. It’s also what the Libyan opposition asked us to do. If we tried to overthrow Qaddafi by force, our coalition would splinter. We would likely have to put U.S. troops on the ground to accomplish that mission, or risk killing many civilians from the air. The dangers faced by our men and women in uniform would be far greater. So would the costs and our share of the responsibility for what comes next. To be blunt, we went down that road in Iraq (Obama, 2011).

Such statements from the United States were meant to placate those who worried that the West was seeking regime change. Yet well before this statement, in early March 2011, Obama indicated that Gaddafi had to go. In a press conference with Mexican President, Felipe Calderón, on 3 March Obama stated, ‘Muammar Gaddafi has lost the legitimacy to lead and must leave’ (Quoted in Blanchard, 2011). The African states supported the no-fly zone in the spirit of R2P, using intervention to protect civilians, not fully aware of the United States’ intention to remove Gaddafi. They had internalised the logic of R2P and sought to carry it out, especially due to legitimate concerns for their own nationals in Libya. Reassurances from the West through public statements and in the wording of Resolution 1973 also indicated that R2P was being carried out and respected as armed forces were organising their joint responses.

However, just two weeks after explicitly denouncing regime-change, Obama, along with UK Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, published an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* unequivocally stating:

...so long as Qaddafi is in power, NATO must maintain its operations so that civilians remain protected and the pressure on the regime builds. Then a genuine transition from dictatorship to an inclusive constitutional process can really begin, led by a new generation

of leaders. In order for that transition to succeed, Qaddafi must go and go for good (Obama, Cameron and Sarkozy, 2011).

Resolution 1973 was re-interpreted to mean that protection of civilians could only be guaranteed with the removal of Gaddafi. The AU were quickly alienated, diplomatically and through organic intellectuals in public forums, following the high-level ad hoc committee's attempts to broker a cease-fire and a peaceful settlement with a view towards democratic reforms. The ad hoc committee undertook a diplomatic mission to Tripoli between the 10-11 April to negotiate with Gaddafi for a peace settlement. It was during this mission that Gaddafi accepted the terms of the AU roadmap and in Benghazi, the NTC was willing to talk if there was an immediate ceasefire. Despite Gaddafi repeatedly offering a cease-fire and an opportunity to negotiate with the opposition, these invitations were openly rejected by both the West (most notably the US, UK and France) as well as the NTC (De Waal, 2013, p. 372; Roberts, H., 2011). According to the former-director of the International Crisis Group, Hugh Roberts (2011), the West sought to cast Gaddafi as a ruthless and deranged dictator so as to justify their decision for regime change. The vision of Gaddafi sitting and negotiating with the NTC would reframe the narrative and possibly allow him to part of a future democratic transition. Organic intellectuals supporting the US position argued through the Western media that the African Union were apologists and even 'clients' of Gaddafi, vainly attempting to defend a dictator who has a long history of investing heavily in Africa (Malone, 2011; Ross, 2011). Such commentary is epitomised by the BBC's Will Ross (2011), who characterised the African Union as 'bankrolled' by Gaddafi, that 'he has bought friends in Africa' and any scenario that did not result in Gaddafi's removal would be seen as 'the AU saving the Libyan leader'.

In this context, Arab League consent to the intervention did not last long. Implementation of a no-fly zone would undoubtedly involve air-force strikes from the West. Therefore, to allay concerns from 'the street', the Arab League pushed for 'establishing safe areas', placing a strict caveat that they supported a no-fly zone on the condition that civilians must be adequately protected. Military interventions inevitably lead to civilian deaths and Libya was no different. Following the introduction of Resolution 1973, on 19 March France launched an early air-strike against a Libyan military targets killing over a dozen people (Al Jazeera, 2011a). Immediately after, the Arab League Secretary-General, Amr Mohammed Moussa decried, 'What is happening in Libya differs from the aim of

imposing a no-fly zone, and what we want is the protection of civilians and not the bombardment of more civilians.’ Such statements became part of the narrative that condemned the NATO operation and were one of the earliest signs of delegitimising the intervention while still maintaining the Arab League’s opposition to the Gaddafi regime.

The United States had already successfully garnered Arab League and African Union support for Resolution 1973 where just one abstaining vote would have seen it fail. The US also succeeded in minimising the damage from the AU’s vocal criticism, peace settlement ventures and attempts to realign the narrative on Gaddafi. But, crucially, the United States and the allied state actors were no longer perceived as representing a general interest for a *common good* and states from the Global South started to openly question their intentions. When it became apparent that the aim of preventing a mass atrocity was a prelude to removing Gaddafi, and that many states, intergovernmental actors and non-state actors were effectively ignored or, in the case of the African Union, were grossly misrepresented, global legitimacy was undermined. When the regional organisations of the Arab League and the African Union supported the intervention, there was an opportunity to rebuild the damaged legitimacy of the US in the Middle East and Africa. The actions of NATO and AFRICOM, which has resulted in the removal of Gaddafi, a significant loss of human life and further insecurity in the region, completely extinguished this legitimacy.

The erosion of moral and intellectual leadership in matters of global security was compounded by consistent criticism from two significant states – Russia and China. During the debate to introduce Resolution 1973, Russia and China had already voiced concerns and apprehensions about such a response. However, as was noted earlier, due to the acquiescence from two key regional organisations, Arab League and the African Union, China and Russia felt compelled to withdraw their vetoes despite their strong reservations. Following the escalation of the no-fly zone into regime change, Russia, especially the Prime Minister at the time, Vladimir Putin, described the intervention as something akin to a ‘crusade’. In late March, China used its official newspapers to openly criticise the air strikes, accusing the West of breaking international laws and labelling it a ‘blow to the UN Charter.’ (Buckley, 2011). They were not alone in their assessment. Within the West, Germany agreed with China that the action was illegal in that it violated article 2(7) of the UN Charter on the sovereignty of national government over domestic

matters. As a long-term ally of the United States, Germany's voice of criticism added much weight to the rising tide of diplomatic resistance. On 16 June 2011, Russia and China released a joint statement on a number of key areas that also included condemnation of the air strikes and urged adherence to the actual resolution (Anishchuk, 2011). As will be discussed later, based on the Libyan example, China and Russia committed to the use of their veto power if any form of humanitarian military intervention was proposed in a future UNSC meeting – which they followed through on in relation to the Syrian Civil War. The public reproaches by China, Russia, the Arab League and the African Union contributed to a growing perception in global civil society, especially in the Global South, that the escalation was a violation of international laws and the actions of NATO were illegitimate.

The loss of life and devastation in Libya from the air strikes, civil war and the escalation of the conflict to regime change systematically undermined the declared motivation of the intervention – the protection of civilians. As early as 28 March, military operations had conducted 619 sorties of which 365 were strike sorties. By the NATO's own report, Operation Unified Protector carried out in total 9,700 strike sorties and destroy over 5,900 military targets (NATO, 2011). The final report from the United Nations' Commission of Inquiry (2012, p. 4) into Libya found that up to 15,000 people were killed during the Libyan Civil War in 2011 in the first four months alone. Alan Kuperman's (2013) research has found the number to be as high as 30,000. Horace Campbell (2013, p. 185) notes that following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, raids on government storage facilities full of weapons and ammunition has resulted in these weapons landing in the hands of rebel groups, militias and terrorist organisations across the region. More broadly, the NATO-run intervention fuelled further instability across the region.

United States' leadership in creating *moral and ideological integration* permitting R2P military interventions was soundly rejected in the end. The hope that it would be 'institutionalised and operationalised' in Libya proved to be quite presumptuous and misinformed. Even at the UNSC Resolution 1973 session key states including Germany, India, Brazil, China and Russia voiced reservations about military intervention, even while they abstained from the vote. Indeed, it has been noted by Xymena Kurowska (2014) that the Russians were:

particularly troubled by how NATO appropriated the language of R2P to serve unilateral political purposes and raised concerns that ‘the Libya model’ would become part of subsequent NATO strategy, undermining ‘the very foundation of the world order’. It was agreed in Moscow that ‘the Libya model’ should not be repeated in Syria. The alleged prevention of this scenario via Russian diplomatic channels held therefore as much symbolic as strategic importance (Kurowska, 2014).

This is an important because it indicates that Russia was aware of the precedent that the ‘Libyan model’ presented as a legitimate avenue for multilateral R2P interventions led by NATO. Allowing such a precedent to take hold would provide a platform to justify unilateral actions in the name of R2P. Symbolically, such an action would also reinforce US leadership of liberal intervention that could be justified in a variety of contexts and potentially see Western expansionism carried out in the name of Responsibility to Protect.

Ultimately, the United States leadership under the umbrella of R2P highlighted its inability to hold together an international consensus and resulted in serious damage to the R2P norm. Instead of becoming a precedent for how the international community can act to prevent a mass atrocity, the use of R2P in Libya has tainted the norm for future applications. It revealed that ideological integration in relation to R2P had not been widely internalised by key state actors in the UNSC and beyond. This is especially the case for the Global South. Immediately following the Libyan crisis, diplomatic relations between the US and key leaders from Africa declined considerably. The African Union has used numerous opportunities to remind the West of their misuse of the UNSC. In early 2012, Zuma told the UN that Resolution 1973 was ‘abused’ and that ‘Africa should never be a playground for furthering the interests of other regions’. During that same year, South Africa assumed the presidency of the UNSC and introduced Resolution 2033, which looked to deepen relations between the UNSC and regional organisations, and would allow the AU to exercise increased influence over the UNSC.

The Libyan intervention revealed that the moral and intellectual leadership of the US was tenuous and fractured, and that its hegemony was reduced to a residual form that relied on misrepresentation and coercion to achieve its security goals in Libya. The descent of Libya into a failed state further entrenched this situation and resulted in the emergence of non-state social forces that directly challenged United States’ global hegemony. In the



next section, I examine how these social forces contribute to the global organic crisis.

### **The Challenge of Complexity in the Globalisation of Insecurity**

Following the public execution of Gaddafi and the defeat of his armed forces, Libya underwent a tentative rebuilding under a new transitional government. Before the defeat of Gaddafi, the US and core allies sought to legitimise the authority of the NTC. On the 14 March, Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton met privately with the NTC's foreign minister, Mahmoud Jibril, in a summit on Libya in Paris (Al Jazeera, 2011b). The leaders of the NTC promised to maintain oil contracts with the West and in return states from the West and the Arab League would officially recognise the NTC as the new government of Libya. The United States and allies - on multiple fronts - attempted to incorporate the new Libyan government into their networks of political and economic engagement. However, these attempts came up against the geo-political realities in Libya.

In 2012, the General National Congress was formed as a new liberal democratic form of government for Libya. However, the country was still splintered and polarised, most notably by tribal groupings, militias, religious affiliations and political parties. The antagonisms between the competing groups in Libya eventually reached a breaking point in July 2014 when the Islamist and Misratan-based parties did poorly in the national elections. After accusations that the new government was essentially a proxy for ex-Gaddafi officers and that the election was a poor reflection of the country due to low voter turnout, Islamist and Misratan militias took up arms against the government. The Islamists took control of Tripoli and established the General National Congress (GNC) while the various political parties and individuals that were opposed to the Islamist factions formed a new government in Tobruk, the House of Representatives (HOR). In 2014, Libya was home to two parliaments, two prime ministers and two cabinets with competing narratives over which parliament maintained greater legitimacy over the country. Notably, the HOR was recognised by the United Nations and Western states and locally from Cyrenaica federalists who controlled a large swath of Libyan oil. Conversely, the GNC held greater legitimacy amongst those connected to the wider Islamist movement. To further fuel tensions, militias, global criminal networks and transnational

terrorist networks have exploited pockets of ungoverned areas to carry out various operations to the detriment of any form of stability (Engel, 2014).

The case of Libya is both a product of, and contributor to, a growing counter-hegemonic movement, namely the global Salafi jihadist movement. Complex-Gramscianism is able to examine how non-state actors, in this instance global terrorist organisations, can act as ‘strange attractors’ that facilitate a process of *emergence* in social relations. Different actions from organised groups can disrupt and challenge the legitimacy and stability within a region accessing a number of mechanisms, most notably the use of violence and globalised forms of media. These groups can be quite ‘fluid’ in how they can navigate and strike over different geo-spatial landscapes. For the United States, the emergence of terrorist networks completely undermined its capacity to provide security to the region and disrupted attempts to integrate Libya into the US hegemonic order. Using the language of Gramsci, the actions of these terrorist groups would be described as both a ‘war of manoeuvre’ and a targeted ‘war of position’ (Gramsci, 2012, pp. 108 – 110). A war of manoeuvre as it was a direct confrontation with state apparatuses and key economic targets. A targeted war of position as terrorist organisations were attempting to build support amongst disenfranchised Muslim populations through their violent acts of rebellion. These counter-hegemonic social forces exploited the complexity of transnational flows of people and information to directly confront governments on a local, national, regional and global scales to challenge the stability of the US hegemonic order.

Salafi jihadist organisations already had a well-established presence in Libya during the Gaddafi years, and following the collapse of the regime other leading global organisations like al Qaeda and ISIS were prepared to exploit the Arab Spring in Libya to extend their influence. From a United States’ perspective, the most infamous act of terrorism in post-intervention Libya was the 2012 Ansar al Sharia and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) attack on the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, where the United States’ ambassador Christopher Stevens and two other CIA operatives were killed (Wehrey, 2013, p. 115). From a global jihadi perspective, the intervention served as yet another example of the US and the West occupying Muslim land and committing acts of violence against a Muslim population without any consequence for their war crimes. The attack on the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi was a reminder to the US of its security exposure to strikes from highly-motivated and violent non-state actors.

Due to the absence of internal security and stability, local and transnational terrorist organisations established operations throughout Libya. Locally, a diverse range of terrorist organisations emerged either with links to transnational terrorist networks or operating at a very local, geographically-specific level. It has also been alleged that local terrorist groups have worked in tandem with AQIM, who have used Libya for a number of operations to spread their network. The Mali government completely collapsed in 2012 following a series of attacks from ex-Gaddafi Tuareg fighters and AQIM (Kuperman, 2013; Engel, 2014; Wehrey, 2013). The Tunisian Ansar al Sharia-controlled cities in Libya, including Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte, greatly expanded its network across Libya, and engaged in friendly relations with terrorist organisations operating in other parts of North Africa and the Middle East, including ISIS and AQIM. It has been reported that a number of Libyans joined terrorist organisations like ISIS and al Qaeda with some cities, notably Derna, emerging as well-established havens for terrorist recruitment and training. One of the most brutal and bloody terrorist acts was the public beheadings of a group of 21 Coptic Christians on a Libyan beach. It was videoed and uploaded to the internet on the 16 February 2015. Such acts are intended for their global audience of potential supporters to demonstrate their willingness to commit acts of extreme brutality in their dedication to their ideology. During this period this movement attempted to build multi-nodal networks with their followers where normative values and ideological perspectives are repeated with the intention of disseminating this worldview and distorted moral compass to their followers.

In a document translated by the United Kingdom's Quilliam Foundation, a follower of ISIS has written an essay entitled, 'Libya: the Strategic Gateway for the Islamic State' (Winter, 2015). This essay to his Salafi jihadist fellow-travellers advocated the consolidation and expansion of ISIS in Libya for its geo-political potential. Its coastline faced southern Europe, or the 'Crusader states', which provided a number of opportunities to plot actions against Europe. Libya was also a treasure trove of arms, which proved decisive in the Islamist victories in Mali. Lastly, he suggested that Libya had the potential to expand ISIS across to Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, Mali, Algeria and Niger. Libya became a beacon for transnational Salafi jihadist terrorist networks with the clear intention of consolidating an occupation and expanding to develop a geo-strategic territory that can also launch various operations into neighbouring countries within the region and into

Europe. This oppositional social force was able to openly challenge the US during this time due to their organisational fluidity as they exploited the instability in both Libya and the region generally.

Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Nigeria experienced an increase in terrorist activity as Libya became a safe haven for terrorists to train, acquire arms and expand into these neighbouring countries (Engel, 2014; The Economist, 2015; Caifero and Wagner, 2015). Tunisia faced terrorist attacks on its security forces, including the 16 July 2014 attack led by AQIM forces that killed 14 soldiers and wounded 20 more. The 26 June 2015 ISIS-led attack killed 38 people, including tourists. Consequently, in 2015 Tunisia announced the building of a wall along the Libyan border to counter the expansion of terrorist networks from Libya (Tejas, 2015). Other neighbouring states have responded in more aggressive ways, including Egypt and United Arab Emirates, which have launched air-strikes upon Islamist targets. The United States also set up a nearby drone base to execute strikes on targets in the region including ones within Libya (Reuters, 2015; Engel, 2014). The strikes did degrade the presence of terrorist organisations in some parts but did not remove the threat that these organisations and movement posed to the region.

Terrorism and political resistance severely hampered oil production and disrupted the integration of Libya into the US hegemonic order throughout the years of the Obama Administration. In early 2015, there were a number of terrorist attacks on oil and gas facilities. In February, an ISIS-led group attacked an oil-field in Mobruk where 12 people were killed, with a similar attack happening again at Mobruk, Sarir and Bahi oil fields in the following weeks. All oil fields were joint ventures with international corporations including the Waha Oil Company (a Libyan joint project that included the Libyan National Oil Corporation with Conoco Phillips, Hess and Marathon corporations). According to Porter (2015), the terrorists' aims were to destroy these facilities, not to exploit their oil riches as they did not have the means or opportunity to make such an operation profitable. The competing Islamist-Tripoli and Western-backed Tobruk governments took control of different oil fields in their spheres of influence. The Tobruk government had access to substantially more gas and oil resources in the oil-rich east. Political occupation of oil facilities by activists was a tactic used by a variety of groups to force the government to negotiate better conditions for the local people. In late 2013 and throughout 2014 one of Libya's biggest oil fields, El Sharara was occupied by

protestors for a sustained period where previously 300,000 barrels a day were being exported (Laessing, 2014). In September 2015 an ISIS car bomb targeted an oil company joint-owned with Eni, Mellitah Oil and Gas in Tripoli (African Research Bulletin, 2015). Oil production in general across Libya declined dramatically as the conflict intensified.

The instability and the animosity towards the United States also resulted in any US presence becoming a target for armed groupings, either from terrorist organisations or militias. The threat of attack was so great, especially after the embassy attack, that the US decided to withdraw much of their official military personnel from Libya. AFRICOM suspended intended training operations with the Libyan armed forces in 2014 as the security situation deteriorated greatly. Instead, the United States has used coordinated airstrikes and drone attacks against ISIS in Libya, including a strike that killed 49 people in February 2016 (Botelho and Starr, 2016).

Using Zygmunt Bauman's (2000; 2001) interpretation of complexity theory, we observe that change no longer moves in a linear fashion but rather takes place sideways from all directions with the instigators of change not being fully aware of the greater consequences of their actions. The impact and influence of these Salafi jihadist social forces are far-reaching, cascading along transnational networks. John Urry has described how power is now mobile and administered by a new power elite that does not have to exist within a recognised territorial space. Power is now facilitated by varied technologically advancements by mediated global networks through online communications, video messages or other forms of media platforms. These forms of power, however, have unintended consequences that these new power elites do not have complete control over (Urry, 2003, pp. 112-113). In Libya and elsewhere, military supremacy in maintaining global security has proven to be of declining utility, especially when dealing with threats from global terrorist organisations. This is especially so when terrorist cells can emerge from unknown sources that only have the loosest connections to their affiliated networks. The events of the Libyan intervention have produced numerous attractors in the multi-nodal network of global jihadism. The Benghazi assault was a call-to-arms and prime example of what can be accomplished when a strike is co-ordinated against the United States. In Libya, the 'liquid' threat of global Salafi jihadist terrorism emerged, and a preponderance of military capabilities could not completely crush such a versatile and resilient network.

In addition, ISIS also sought to build state apparatuses in the territories that they have occupied in Syria, Iraq and Libya. During the last two years of the Obama Administration, the capabilities of ISIS and al Qaeda were degraded due to the ongoing military efforts of the West, notably the United States, France and the UK. Yet the expanded network and global appeal of the Salafi jihadist ideology meant that even when these organisations were completely dismantled the movement remains a threat. The global Salafi jihadist movement that these terrorist organisations were intrinsically tied to does not function with a centralised leadership that masterminds each and every terrorist attack. Instead, it acted more as an ideological attractor that encourages and supports acts of terrorism whilst the different terrorist cells plan and execute their own acts of mass violence (Burke, 2004, p. 18). ISIS or al Qaeda were not in total control of the rank and file therefore could not dictate to others the actions that are taken in their name. Put another way, these activities could take a life of their own that can reverberate and escalate across the world.

The Libyan intervention was quite easily framed by the global Salafi jihadist movement as a case of Western imperialism that disregards Muslim lives while seeking to exploit the natural resources of Libya. The successes of Islamist and terrorist groups in Libya demonstrated how to exploit a fragile state to direct instability across the region and exploit the security weaknesses in US capabilities. Using Libya as a base for other operations throughout the region further highlights how Libya contributed to the globalisation of insecurity. Libya's connection to these political situations demonstrates how change itself moves through networked relations that are globally connected and unpredictable. The transnational flow people and information encourage seemingly isolated phenomena to spread out exponentially across time and space to affect other people in ways that can't be controlled or adequately measured. But what can be understood is the consequences they create. The toppling of Gaddafi followed by the descent into civil war and emergence of rival groupings saw a dramatic rise in local, regional and global terrorism. These increased threats did not stay localised for long and their movement outwards to other conflicts are all threads in the globalisation of insecurity that cannot be contained through centralised military responses.

Hegemony is premised and reproduced by the guarantee of security in the core, and forms of domination or passive revolution in the periphery. The case of Libya and the challenge

from counter-hegemonic movements highlights the residual nature of US hegemony. The intervention of Libya joins a long list of other resource-rich countries invaded by the United States. In our globally complex world, the consequences of these interventions cannot be contained within the region; violent non-state actors can respond in the heartland of the West with quite deadly consequences. The rise and spread of global jihadism, in its various iterations, is another contributing factor to undermining of the legitimacy and perception of the security provided by the hegemon. The globalisation of insecurity has become more pronounced as Libya descended into a failed state. The country transformed into a vacuum for militarised non-state actors to use their operations and to instigate destabilisation across the region and pose a threat globally. The capacity for the 'solid' United States-led security institutions to address the 'liquid' threat of a global movement such as this was put to the test during the Obama Administration. In this context, the declining utility of military power, combined with a lack of political will, revealed a broader organic crisis of US hegemony. Crucially, this situation should not be taken as simply revealing a *linear* decline in material capabilities. Instead, it is evidence for a residual hegemony in which the US was unable or unwilling to marshal material and ideological resources to rectify crises in entire zones of its security network.

### **The Limitations of Residual Hegemony in NATO and the UNSC**

Global security organisations perform a direct stabilising role when violent challenges seek to disrupt a hegemonic world order. The central mechanism at the disposal of security institutions include authority to exercise forms of legitimate violence during conflicts. Legitimate violence can be simply characterised as forms of violence that are presented and critically interpreted as being just and necessary so as to return stability and order. During times of organic crisis, the legitimacy of the hegemon in security organisations will be questioned, resisted and even openly opposed by an ever-increasing group of actors. Moreover, the hegemon will be in a position where reform of these organisations is beyond reach or is an unfavourable option. This shift from organic links to crisis is an uneven process but can be examined in the diplomatic efforts of the United States in key organisations such as NATO and the United Nations Security Council. My examination of the changing and problematic nature of NATO will seek to illuminate the strategic withdrawal of the United States from its NATO commitments whilst attempting

to reform the long-standing organisation. After I will argue that the United States' authority in the UNSC has reduced significantly following the Libyan intervention and exposed the inherent flaws in the UNSC system.

### *'Leading from behind' in NATO*

Once the UNSC Resolution 1973 was passed, the introduction of a no-fly zone to protect threatened Libyan civilians was carried out by the United States' regional military command AFRICOM (Operation Odyssey Dawn) and then taken over by NATO (Operation Unified Protector). Numerous commentators (Daalder and Stavridis, 2012; Bolcu, 2013; Michaels, 2011) praised the accomplishments and victory of NATO with regard to the humanitarian intervention in Libya. According to Ivo Daalder and James Stavridis (2012, pp. 2-6), writing in *Foreign Affairs*, the NATO mission was successful due to its rapid response, capacity to protect civilian lives, working with regional actors and NATO members' willingness to provide 'the time and space necessary for local forces to overthrow Muammar al-Qaddafi'. According to Claudiu Bolcu (2013, p. 121) the mission was a great success: in 'Libya we find an almost flawless international cooperation, involving AFRICOM, the UN, NATO and even the Libyan rebels. What's more, the leading actor in the operation, NATO, proved to be extremely careful, taking every possible step to ensure that all of its actions are to the benefit and protection of civilians.' Such conclusions quickly become troubling when civilian deaths are estimated to be between 15,000 to 30,000 (Kuperman, 2013; Roberts, H., 2011; UN Human Rights Council, 2012); and the rapid descent of Libya into a failed state is taken into consideration. Furthermore, when we explore the dysfunctions of the NATO operations in Libya, such pronouncements from commentators appear false and misleading.

The NATO intervention provides key insights into the residual hegemony of the United States. The cooperation of NATO has largely been premised on the United States providing the majority of the resources to fund military engagements. Since the 2003 War in Iraq, members of NATO have been more vocal in their disagreement with military actions of the United States and in the application of NATO security forces in conflicts. France was particularly critical of the United States decision to invade and occupy Iraq, while Poland and Germany openly criticised the NATO-administered intervention in



Libya. In this context, the United States presented its role in Libya as ‘leading from behind’. This policy stance and its attempts to celebrate a stepping back from a front-line role gives an indication of the limits of hegemony and how the commitment of the United States to its hegemonic responsibilities in global security has shifted.

NATO’s military campaign in Libya was problematic and indicative of the changing military commitment of the United States. By 31 March, NATO had assumed leadership of the coalition as most states that were participating were already members (Canada, France, United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Norway as well as the United States). Other notable non-NATO participants involved in the intervention included Qatar, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. Operation Unified Protector led by Lieutenant-General Charles Bouchard had a three-pronged mission: (i) maintain the no-fly zone, (ii) maintain an arms embargo and (iii) protect civilians. The imposition of a no-fly zone and the arms embargo were relatively straight-forward military operations, especially considering the military experience of the US, UK and France. However, the mission to protect civilians during times of war, without the express deployment of ground troops, was quite a difficult task for the NATO-led operation.

Much has been written of the fact that the United States took on a more supportive coordinating role, or, as it has been popularly referred to, ‘leading from behind’ (Daalder and Stavridis, 2012; Hallams and Scheer, 2012). In relation to the NATO operations, the US pushed leading European states like the United Kingdom and France to take on a greater military role. The United States’ declining interest in being the World’s Policeman (compounded by ongoing war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan at the time) was exemplified through attempts to outsource responsibilities for the NATO operation to their European counterparts. Historically, NATO campaigns have not had the full participation of all its members, but Libya is the first such instance when the US did not represent the bulk of military operations. Instead, the United States provided intelligence, warships, refuelling, and coordination between participants. Combined, the UK and France represented 40% of the air sorties, while Italy and Greece provided air bases, and a diverse range of other members also imposed the no-fly zone.

The intervention of NATO in Libya has been used as an example of the US transforming burden-sharing in the organisation and applying their form of ‘smart power’, involving

the achievement of foreign policy goals through international cooperation, the use of advanced technologies that reduce soldier casualties, and the avoidance of over-extending US resources through unilateral actions. Joseph Nye (2008, p. 1353), the scholar to first use such a term, defines smart power as ‘a strategy that combines the soft power of attraction with the hard power of coercion.’ Gates and Obama both spoke of the need for European states to increase defence spending and invest more in NATO (Economist, 2011; Obama, 2011). In relation to the Libyan intervention, Obama (2011) stated that ‘this is how the international community should work: more nations, not just the United States, bearing the responsibility and cost of upholding peace and security.’ However, NATO members were not unified in their endorsement of the operation. Germany, which had abstained in their Security Council vote on the no-fly zone, did not participate in Operation Unified Protector and went so far as to remove German personnel from NATO airborne warning and control aircraft. Poland not only rejected the NATO operation, but also released public statements suggesting that the intervention was about securing oil interests (Reuters, 2011). Despite its material superiority and expansive military depth, the United States could not build consensus within the organisation that it leads, nor did it want to be drawn into another conflict that would inevitably involve a significant drain upon its vast yet finite resources. In responding to the crisis in Libya, the hegemon had lost much of its ‘soft power’ of attraction and its hard power of coercion came at an undesirable cost.

Furthermore, the Libyan intervention demonstrated the flaws within NATO. Hallams and Scheer (2012) have pointed out that the lack of participation from numerous other NATO members, the vocal opposition, and the fact that many members just did not have the military capabilities to execute sizable operations means that NATO will for the immediate future be dominated by the US and leading European powers like the UK and France. In relation to Libya, of NATO’s 28 members, only 14 participated in military activities and only six European states actually participated in strikes (Hallams and Schreer, 2012). Even though the Libyan campaign was a *military* success, it did not change the burden sharing of NATO and, in reality, exposed ongoing internal fractures and contradictions in the NATO model based on cooperation and mutual commitment to security. The United States was not able to reform NATO substantially, especially in relation to burden-sharing. No other European power indicated a desire to increase their defence budgets in order to make larger contributions to the armed forces and

administration of NATO. It was premature for the United States and others to claim that the Libya intervention was a precedent for future NATO operations, where the US could 'lead from behind', as the US will still be required to provide the bulk of the personnel, technology and military resources for any NATO action. The Libyan intervention underlined the inherent limitations of NATO based on deepening fractures within the alliance and the contradictions of an organisation founded on cooperation yet dominated by the United States which was increasingly unwilling to lead.

Putting aside the ramifications of escalating a no-fly zone into regime change (discussed in detail below), it would appear that NATO had successfully achieved a military victory through a multilateral coalition without the US taking on an overt leadership role. However, that was simply not the case. The continuing dependence on the US was outlined by retiring Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, in a speech on the future of NATO delivered in Brussels in late 2011. In that speech, after praising the efforts of NATO operations in Afghanistan, he quickly transitioned to a systematic critique of European military efforts in Libya. He noted that the Libyan intervention demonstrated that Europe's inadequate participation in NATO 'in *capability* and *will* – have the potential to jeopardize the alliance's ability to conduct an integrated, effective and sustained air-sea campaign' (italics added). Furthermore, he noted that when European states took the lead, they were still quite dependent on the United States on many fronts. For example, air operations from Italy had to be 'augmented' by specialised US personnel to accomplish strikes. After 11 weeks, many NATO members ran short of ammunition which had to be supplemented by the United States. He made the point that many European defence budgets have been 'chronically starved'. He also indicated that the US has lost its 'appetite' to continue to represent 75% of military spending in NATO, especially after the end of the Cold War (Gates, 2011). *The Economist* (2011) supported Gates claims by noting that even the leading military powers of NATO, the United Kingdom and France, struggled to maintain the eight month naval campaign, which has been acknowledged by their own naval chiefs. Britain worried about the 'challenging decisions' that would have to be made if the war dragged on, while France's naval ship, the *Charles De Gaulle*, which was situated just outside the Libyan coast during Operation Unified Protector, would have to be serviced for all of 2012. The United States was incapable of reforming NATO, largely because its other members were freeriding on its military material capabilities and unwilling to take on more responsibility. The Libyan

intervention revealed that NATO was a security organisation in crisis. With its most powerful member unwilling to lead from the front, a serious question mark was raised about the ongoing viability of NATO as a security organisation in maintaining US hegemony.

In Libya, the lack of moral and intellectual authority translated to a decided absence of consensus-building amongst the numerous NATO members. This was compounded by the United States' declining willingness to invest in NATO or to lead it in military operations. The NATO-led action demonstrated the limitations of other members in carrying a limited campaign against a single-state actor. The United States was forced to take on a greater role as many of the NATO members were ill-equipped, inexperienced and under-funded to carry out a seven-month long campaign. The efforts to 'lead from behind' can't work if partner states are unwilling to contribute their resources nor have the experience of their American counterparts. This exposed the primary dysfunction of NATO as a multilateral alliance dominated by a residual hegemonic power that is disinclined to lead military actions. Both Gates and Obama voiced concern and frustration at the lack of capability and will to carry such a limited mission among its allies. The Libya intervention was an attempt to step back from its overt responsibilities while still wanting to dictate the terms of military interventions in the world. Operation Unified Protector demonstrated that the other Western powers are not capable nor desire the mantle of providing this form of cooperative security. The residual hegemony of the United States also meant that Obama was incapable of achieving significant reforms of the organisation despite maintaining a strong desire to do so.

### *The Disintegration of American Leadership in the UNSC*

The response of the United Nations Security Council initially appeared to demonstrate how it could function through multilateralism and a shared humanitarian agenda. However, the Libyan intervention was a reminder of the limitations of the UNSC and became a catalyst that resulted in a further disintegration of the United States' authority in the Security Council. In the diplomatic efforts to get UNSC Resolution 1973 passed, the organisation was praised by some, most notably Thakur (2011), for the action taken in a relatively short space of time – approximately one month (compared to Kosovo in

1999, where it took close to a decade for NATO to implement an air campaign). However, even as the resolution was carried a number of states voiced concerns within the UNSC. The Russian representative, Vitaly Churkin, noted that the process and the wording of the resolution was railroaded by the Western member states. When the resolution was carried, Churkin declared that ‘the text could potentially open the door to large-scale military intervention’. He also noted that the questions and concerns by Security Council members like Russia, China, Germany, Brazil and India were ignored and that ‘the Council members for methods of force prevailed’ (UNSC, 2011b).

Despite NATO-led actions having the explicit support of UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, who stated that the mandate of Resolution 1973 ‘was strictly enforced’, the realities of Operation Unified Protector were quite different. A number of the members of the Security Council also disagreed with Ban. Brazil, India and Turkey were outspoken critics of the NATO-led air-strikes against Gaddafi and the violations of Resolutions 1970 and 1973. Russia and China demonstrated their opposition to NATO’s military over-reach in both public statements and in their diplomatic actions. Russian President Vladimir Putin openly condemned the actions of NATO, especially in relation to civilian deaths and destruction of vital infrastructure (Ulfstein and Christiansen, 2013, p. 166). The Chinese Foreign Minister, Hong Lei urged those participating in the intervention to ‘strictly abide by the spirit’ of the resolution (ibid). However, never at any stage of the intervention was the Security Council returned to session to discuss the violations of Resolution 1973 and the dramatic escalation of the no-fly zone to regime change. The members of the UNSC must always have a representative available to meet in joint sessions in case of an emergency or crisis that demands an immediate response. There were opportunities for the Russians or the Chinese to demand that the Security Council return to discuss how the spirit of the Resolution was violated by NATO. No such actions were taken.

There is no documentary evidence that explains why Russia, China or the other members of the Security Council chose not to return to scrutinise and halt the NATO operation, but some suggestions can be made. First, it is possible that the Russians and Chinese allowed the NATO operation to escalate so as to have a concrete justification to oppose any other future humanitarian interventions. Russia and China are opposed to interventions that undermine state sovereignty and Libya was allowed to proceed to demonstrate that

interventions are fundamentally flawed with a myriad of uncontrollable consequences. Second, Russia, China and other members could have been concerned with the public backlash of halting a mission that had widespread support, especially since Gaddafi was presented as a brutal tyrant that must be removed. After the backing from Arab League and the African Union was established (despite changes in position later) a move to stop Operation Unified Protector would have been problematic. Finally, the veto power of the permanent five members would nullify any chance to end the intervention. Three of the five permanent members (the United States, the United Kingdom and France) were actively involved in carrying out the intervention and would resist any resolution that would end the conflict.

Following the Libyan intervention, the structural flaws of the UNSC due to the veto system were in full effect. The situation was reminiscent of the Cold War years where the opposing super-powers regularly used their respective vetoes to make the UNSC impotent in its global security aims. This had significant and far-reaching implications for the UNSC because it completely disabled its binding resolutions for military interventions based on the protection of human rights. The reproduction of hegemony is premised on building consensus with allies and subaltern groups while resorting to some forms of coercion (fraud, threats and violent neutralisation if necessary) to address resistant segments of society. Multilateralism is the extension of the hegemon as a platform to organise and direct state actors and supporting non-state actors in responding to global problems. When actors directly challenge and dispute attempts to reproduce hegemony within a multilateral organisation and indicate resistance in the future, the capacity to maintain organic links with parts of the hegemonic network comes into question. Overt obstruction within the UNSC after the Libyan intervention was a clear sign of the residual hegemony of the United States and its inability to secure consensus on key matters of international peace and security.

This was further compounded by the United States consistently indicating an unwillingness to reform this organisation as it would dilute the centrality of the US. The veto power of the Permanent Five creates a gridlock effect, especially in a situation of global organic crisis and fragmented relations. However, the United States was, not surprisingly, unwillingly to divest their veto status or to expand the permanent membership. This scenario would entail a loss of centrality for the United States and

would invariably involve a reduced negotiating position diplomatically vis-à-vis other state actors. Expanding the permanent members would have given increased power to states that could oppose to the United States interests in global security issues (Tharoor, 2011, p. 401 – 402). It is unsurprising, then, that during the Obama administration that the make-up of the Permanent Five members and the structural design of the UNSC did not see major reform at all

Moreover, following the Libyan intervention, the UNSC's limitations with regard to R2P emerged as it restricted future actions of humanitarian intervention led by the US – namely the Syrian Civil War. The military over-reach and violation of the resolutions 1970 and 1973 provided enough justification for Russia and China to use their vetoes for any future R2P action through the UNSC. During the Syrian civil war, which demonstrated similar humanitarian atrocities to that of Libya, both China and Russia exercised their veto power for any resolution that involved intervention into the Syrian conflict for the entirety of the Obama Administration. Despite condemnation from Western states and their publics, each time China and Russia pointed out the consequences of external intervention in the troubling historical precedent set by the Libyan intervention. The former US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, accused her Chinese and Russian counterparts of using a 'cheap ruse...who would rather sell arms to the Syrian regime than stand with the Syrian people'. The Russian ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin countered that a resolution calling for action against Syria would be exploited as a 'trigger' from the West for regime change rather than a military effort to protect civilians. At the first attempted resolution that included humanitarian intervention (UNSC Draft Resolution S/2011/612) to protect Syrian civilians, Churkin's public statement at the meeting is unequivocal in its rejection of R2P and its condemnation of NATO:

The situation in Syria cannot be considered in the Council separately from the Libyan experience. The international community is alarmed by statements that compliance with Security Council resolutions on Libya in the NATO interpretation is a model for the future actions of NATO in implementing the responsibility to protect...The demand for a quick ceasefire turned into a full-fledged civil war, the humanitarian, social, economic and military consequences of which transcend Libyan borders. The situation in connection with the no-fly zone has morphed into the bombing of oil refineries, television stations and other civilian sites. The arms embargo has morphed into a naval blockade in western Libya,

including a blockade of humanitarian goods. Today the tragedy of Benghazi has spread to other western Libyan towns — Sirte and Bani Walid. These types of models should be excluded from global practices once and for all (UNSC, 2011d).

Then-Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev confirmed the Russian view on Libya in a *Financial Times* interview where he stated: ‘I am firmly convinced that a good resolution was turned into a scrap of paper to cover up a pointless military operation... I would very much not like a Syrian resolution to be pulled off in a similar manner... Russia shall use its right to veto’ (Financial Times, 2011).

The Chinese leadership was not as outspoken as their Russian counterparts in relation to drawing similarities between the Libyan intervention and Syria. However, they repeatedly used their veto to stop any sanctions against the Assad government and continued with their calls for political dialogue as a solution to the civil war, despite the growing number of atrocities and the destabilisation of the region. Their actions in the UNSC concerning Syria speak loud enough of their thoughts on NATO carrying out an R2P mandate in the near future. Apart from the Libya intervention, China has maintained a consistent policy of non-intervention and the upholding of territorial sovereignty. The Libyan case was a unique anomaly due to the support of the no-fly zone from the Arab League and the African Union, combined with the sense of urgency to prevent a mass atrocity.

The positions of Russia and China are further supported by open resistance to the US from key allies of the Global South. Historically, the composition of the UNSC has favoured the United States, with a majority of the different sets of non-permanent members being either close allies or economic trading partners with the US. However, in the years after the Libyan intervention, the UNSC became a forum where non-permanent member states resisted intervention in Syria and openly questioned the motivations of the United States. In October 2011, at the 6627<sup>th</sup> UNSC meeting on a resolution for a Syrian intervention India abstained and advocated for increased ‘political dialogue’ and greater ‘responsibility on the opposition to abjure from violence’ (UNSC, 2011d, p. 5). Brazil, Lebanon and South Africa also abstained. With Lebanon’s close relationship with Syria it was not surprising that they chose to abstain and defend Syria’s right to sovereignty. However, South Africa openly stated that they were not willing to support another resolution that involved intervention as it potentially could be part of a ‘hidden agenda



aimed at once again instituting regime change’ – a clear reference to the NATO’s actions in Libya (UNSC, 2011d, p. 11). When the war escalated and refugee numbers were in the millions, South Africa still abstained in an attempted resolution in July, 2012 at the UNSC’s 6810<sup>th</sup> meeting. Once again, the justification was derived from concerns that such a resolution was aimed at regime change and did not adequately address containing the actions of the opposition. Pakistan also abstained from this vote, arguing that any kind of militarisation in relation to intervention would cause ‘greater suffering’ and would move further away from a ‘peaceful solution’ (UNSC, 2012, p. 6).

Pakistan’s opposition to R2P was quite indicative of the backlash that the West has experienced in relation to humanitarian interventions. Pakistan was a long-time ally of the United States and had been at the forefront of the ‘War on Terror’. Its people endured a number of terrorist attacks due to their government’s ties to the US and their geographical proximity to Afghanistan. Yet Pakistan voted against the resolution and cited their legitimate concerns over intervention. This opposition may in fact be determined by their need to distance themselves from the United States in a vote that was already known to fail, but it also indicates a willingness to oppose a very powerful ally. The Libya intervention seriously damaged the capacity of the US to lead humanitarian interventions and the opposition it produced within multilateral organisations demonstrates the residual nature of US hegemony during this period.

## **Conclusions**

The morbid symptoms of the global organic crisis of the United States’ hegemonic global hegemony project are diverse and uneven. In terms of security, the humanitarian intervention in Libya, premised on the emerging global norm of Responsibility to Protect, was intended to demonstrate how a military campaign could take place that was motivated by human rights, widely supported and respectful of the wishes of the local people, the region, and the world. Instead, the intervention exposed the limitations and contradictions within United States’ residual hegemony. The misrepresentation of the intervention and inability to build ideological organic links through the global norm of R2P has demonstrated the diffuse, uneven and contentious nature of the moral and intellectual leadership of United States. The emergent qualities of counter-hegemonic transnational

terrorist networks have disrupted attempts by the United States to integrate a new Libya into its hegemonic order and has resulted in increased insecurity on a local, national, regional and global level.

Despite garnering multilateral backing for a military intervention against the Gaddafi regime, the obvious violations of Resolutions 1970 and 1973 framed in the language of R2P greatly diminished the US and the wider West's moral and intellectual legitimacy in the UNSC and has undermined the future application R2P in other security crises. Furthermore, the aim of integrating Libya economically and politically into the United States' hegemony was significantly stalled following the descent into a civil war between two rival governments, ethnic militias, Islamists and competing terrorist networks. The collapse of Libya, and its role as a safe haven for terrorist training and recruitment, demonstrates the US' limited influence over the periphery and its inability to directly address the geo-political conditions that have precipitated the rise of violent non-state social forces, namely terrorist organisations. Salafi jihadist terrorism intensified after the fracturing of Libya as terrorist groups exploited the absence of state authority to expand across the region. The fluidity and momentum of Salafi jihadist terrorism expanded to such an extent that the United States and other state actors proved to be incapable of containing their spread globally.

Furthermore, the Libyan intervention demonstrated only a residual capacity for the United to impose its will on multilateral organisations, most notably the United Nations Security Council. Moreover, US actions in Libya damaged the operation of the UNSC, which was rendered impotent in relation to humanitarian interventions. Reform of the UNSC never emerged nor was considered during the Obama years as it would diminish the centrality of the US. In relation to NATO, the strategy of 'leading from behind' was fundamentally flawed and demonstrated the lack of political will and capacity among allied states to carry out the intervention. The inability to reform NATO and increase burden-sharing amongst European allies is indicative of the residual hegemony of the United States and the fragmentation of the alliance. Consequently, the United States did not advance the cause of multilateralism with its intervention in Libya, to say the least.

The morbid symptoms evident in moments like the Libyan intervention are both indicative and a contributing factor to the organic crisis of the United States' hegemonic

order. Global security is one of the key planks of hegemony as military power and its consensual use is vital to maintaining stability and neutralising existential threats. From this angle, the most dire consequence of the Libyan intervention was the disintegration in the US' capacity to build consent through moral and intellectual leadership. This is also evident in its responses to environmental and economic crises to which we will now turn.

## Chapter 4

### The Organic Crisis and the Limited Global Response to Climate Change: The Case of the Copenhagen Accord

The consequences of climate change pose an unprecedented global crisis and existential threat to an increasing number of people and ecosystems across the world. According to the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) 2014 Synthesis Report, the consequences of climate change include the increase in extreme weather events, the dramatic decrease in agricultural food production, and the rise in infectious diseases. The report states that ‘recent climate-related extremes, such as heatwaves, droughts, floods, cyclones and wildfires, reveal significant vulnerability and exposure of some ecosystems and many human systems to current climate variability (*very high confidence*).’ (IPCC, 2014, p. 53, italics in the original). Indeed, we are already experiencing the effects of climate change. According to the World Bank (2018), extreme weather disasters increased by 46 per cent between 2007 and 2016 compared to data from the 1990s, resulting in over 60,000 deaths worldwide. The World Bank also noted that the number of people globally subjected to heatwaves increased by 125 million between 2000 and 2016. The consequences of climate change pose a truly global challenge, in geographical, social, political and economic terms.

The 2009 Copenhagen Conference was convened as the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Fifth Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. The Conference was perceived as a unique global moment, filled with good will and hope, as the world’s heads-of-state came together to welcome a new era in global climate change management. The expectation was that Copenhagen would end with a legally-binding agreement to dramatically reduce carbon emissions and avoid the most disastrous consequences of anthropogenic climate change.

However, the divergent agendas of the United States’ and the emerging state actors, in particular China and India, ultimately led to a conference beset by diplomatic stalemate. The United States argued that a new agreement was required that would include an

increased responsibility for emerging economies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Conversely, the emerging economies pushed to maintain the original structure of the Kyoto Protocol and demanded that Western states increase their responsibilities because their industrial development was the leading cause of global heating. Brazil, South Africa, India and China formed an ad hoc voting bloc, known collectively as the BASICs. Scrutiny and advocacy from the climate justice movement added further tensions to the negotiations, advocating for a political narrative based on climate justice and climate debt. The corporate world was fragmented, with different groupings lobbying hard for completely juxtaposing positions.

In an attempt to save face and acknowledge the changed geo-political reality, US President Obama personally drafted a new accord with the BASICs on the night before the final sitting day of the conference. The final document was less than three pages and lacking in any binding targets apart from maintaining loose commitments to the Kyoto Protocol. The accord did promise USD \$100 billion a year by 2020 from the developed world to 'address the needs of developing countries'. It also alluded to the use of markets to 'enhance the cost-effectiveness of, and to promote mitigation actions' (UNFCCC, 2009, pp. 5 - 6). The Copenhagen Accord was widely criticised for its impotence, the absence of scientific merit and was emblematic of the entire Copenhagen Conference. This final 'political accord' was not even formally adopted by the UNFCCC due to objections from a small contingent of delegates including Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Sudan, Tuvalu and Venezuela on the grounds of its undemocratic process and incapacity to address the existential threat of climate change. The initial aspirations of Copenhagen were victim to the fragmented nature of a hegemonic order in organic crisis.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the nature and consequences of the residual hegemony of the US in the multilateral response to climate change with a focus on the Copenhagen Conference. It will be argued that the inadequate multilateral response to climate change reflected the organic crisis of the US hegemony beset by fragmentation, emergent state actors and oppositional social forces. The UNFCCC's failure to produce a legally-binding agreement and incorporate all relevant actors, especially the emerging economies, highlighted the residual hegemony of the United States in important ways. Using my complex-Gramscian approach, I will argue that emergent state and non-state actors acted as 'strange attractors' in direct opposition to the hegemony of the United

States', advocating for alternative pathways for addressing climate change. As discussed in Chapter 2, strange attractors are emergent paths that deviate from the feedback loops of a relational multi-nodal network – in this case the networked nature of global hegemony. These strange attractors disrupted the organic links of United States' hegemony. Its relative material decline allowed states like China and India to pursue an alternative approach to climate change management, while the decline of the United States as an ideological leader allowed non-state actors to propose alternative discourses and policy approaches. To sustain its multi-nodal network of hegemony, the US needed to structurally integrate multilateral institutions like UNFCCC, which act as primary nodes in organic links with a variety of actors that participate in the institutions and provide legitimacy to the hegemon. However, the US was unable to achieve any kind of leverage over oppositional forces in the UNFCCC, achieving only a residual agreement without the required commitments to meaningfully tackle climate change.

This chapter will make this argument by employing the three complex-Gramscian propositions detailed in Chapter 2 to reveal the circumstances and nature of the US' residual hegemony in its responses to climate change during the Obama Administration. The first section will outline the limited capacity of the United States to reproduce moral and intellectual leadership in multilateral institutions. The United States, under the leadership of the Obama Administration, struggled to craft a mutually beneficial outcome in negotiations. Furthermore, due to the United States internal ideological battles, the Obama Administration was severely constrained in its Copenhagen agenda in adequately addressing the unabated increase of carbon emissions. Alternative pathways to addressing climate change were put forward by state groupings, including the BASICs and the European Union. The fact that Obama was still able to create some form agreement and was willing to bypass traditional allies (especially the European Union) in order to negotiate with the BASICs indicates a form of residual hegemony. The superficial and highly limited conditions of the Copenhagen Accord also indicates the minimal organisational capacity of residual hegemony to elicit compliance from other actors.

In the second section, I argue that non-state actors and certain transnational corporate lobby groups acted as oppositional social forces. Environmentalist NGOs, publicly challenged and undermined the moral and intellectual leadership of the US, directly damaging the hegemon's capacity to build a narrative or 'common sense' that appeared

to represent the general interest. During times of organic crisis, common sense becomes undermined when the ideological legitimacy and logic of the hegemon is openly challenged and alternative world perspectives are given greater attention, acting as strange attractors with the capacity to build an alternative multi-nodal network. In this context, environmentalists demanding world leaders introduce policy that will directly combat carbon emissions emerged as a global social force unified by the common goal of addressing the existential threat of climate change. Transnational corporations, especially from the United States and orientated towards fossil-fuel production, acted as disruptors to negotiations, using lobby organisations to limit the scope of the agreement and the Obama Administration's negotiating capacity. I will argue that this ideological and policy fragmentation among various actors is indicative of the organic crisis of the US hegemony during this period.

In the final section, I argue that the UNFCCC was captured by the liberal ideology of the US hegemonic order and was ill-suited to rectifying global climate change. Like most other global multilateral organisations, it is a state-centric institution premised on the function of consensus decision-making, yet in practice was managed by a small group of core states. The United States, as a central actor in the Copenhagen negotiations, exploited the limitations and gaps in the UNFCCC process to form an ad hoc agreement with the BASICs. Yet this political accord was ultimately rejected by a small contingent of periphery states, and was unable to achieve any significant cuts, which indicates that the Obama Administration struggled to build any meaningful consensus on addressing climate change. I will argue that, despite its dysfunction, the United States was both incapable and unwilling to reform the UNFCCC as it would result in a diminished role in negotiations.

### **The Moral and Intellectual Leadership of the United States at Copenhagen**

When the theoretical framework of moral and intellectual leadership is applied to the United States and relations between key state actors in the Copenhagen Conference, we can see that only residual forms of hegemony were exercised and that state groupings approached global climate management in very different ways. In order to identify an organic crisis of a hegemonic order, we need to consider and analyse the different

perspectives and alternative pathways that emerge to disrupt the hegemonic network and can establish new organic links among existing nodes. Consequently, this section will examine the events and processes that indicated the residual hegemony of the United States, including how that was evident in the alternative visions presented and diplomatically manoeuvred by key state-based groupings. It will focus on how forms of coercion were applied to garner support for the Copenhagen Accord, as well as how further integration of the ideological logic of neo-liberalism was attempted through the advocacy of emission trading schemes (ETS).

When we examine the Copenhagen Conference, we can see that the Obama Administration's attempts at moral and intellectual leadership in multilateral climate negotiations had a two-tiered approach. The first tier was to address climate change while maintaining a commitment to neo-liberal globalisation, prioritising the expansion of markets and economic growth. The US only adopted policies that would foster economic opportunities without limiting carbon-dependent US industries. United States leadership in climate change has continually advocated for market-based responses and the commodification of carbon. This neo-liberal framing of reductions in carbon emissions has been widely accepted as an efficient approach to addressing climate change by many states and transnational corporate actors. These forces collectively contributed to the orthodoxy of market-based solutions. As Richard Falk (2012, p. 91) has argued 'the complexity of climate change challenge arises because responses cannot be delinked from the wider global crisis...preoccupied with the restoration of a sense of economic normalcy so far as aggregate growth is concerned'.

The Kyoto Protocol, ratified in 1997, was a legal framework that was designed to implement legally binding limits on GHG emissions that would ideally result in an aggregate reduction in emissions by 5 per cent between 1990 and 2017. However, legal obligations were only placed upon countries from the developed world, identified in a list of Annex I parties (for the full list of Annex I and non-Annex I parties see Appendix 1). This was premised on a long-standing principle that states have a common responsibility in addressing the existential threat of climate change but have *differentiated* responsibilities based on history and current economic capacity. The economic development of core Western states was largely based on the extraction and exploitation of fossil fuels. Moreover, these states were strategically better placed technologically and



financially to hold a higher responsibility in addressing climate change. That being said, some Annex I parties that relied heavily on carbon-intensive industries were actually permitted to increase their carbon output. For instance, Japan was required to reduce emissions by 6 per cent, but Australia was permitted to increase output by 8 per cent and Iceland by 10 per cent. Policy instruments like carbon sinks and cap-and-trade provided opportunities for Annex I countries to offset their increasing GHG emissions so as to remain within the perimeters of designated legal obligations. The developing world and the least-developed world were placed in the non-Annex I parties and were not legally obliged to make any significant cuts to their emissions. Instead, non-Annex I parties pledged to investigate and address carbon emissions through methods and instruments that were individually suitable to their economic composition. Tellingly, the US did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol during the Obama Administration.

The second tier of the Obama administration's attempts at moral and intellectual leadership was to formulate a global grand bargain on climate change. Before the Copenhagen conference, the United States indicated three clear goals: (i) Incorporate the developing world into legally binding commitments to emission reductions so as to create an agreement that accurately reflects all contributors to global GHG emissions; (ii) achieve some kind of victory from Copenhagen that would indicate a global shift by governments to address reducing carbon emissions; and (iii) be an active part of the negotiations to build a globally acceptable agreement, thereby creating a break from past US actions in blocking and/or undermining the process (Houser, 2010, p. 6). In pursuing these goals, the Obama Administration attempted to present a position that was for a *common or universal good*. A key aspect of this was to depart from previous administrations by participating in UNFCCC negotiations with the clear intentions of building a globally accepted agreement. Obama argued that if such a multilateral approach was going to work, there needed to be a global cultural shift in how the burden of mitigation would be shared amongst all leading economies. Naturally, the Obama Administration perceived itself as the global leader in formulating this new status quo. With the rise of multipolarity, and the fracturing of the organic links within the inter-state negotiations of the UNFCCC, the capacity to build and reproduce such hegemony was an insurmountable challenge for the United States. Furthermore, as will be elaborated below, the Obama Administration was limited in its intentions at Copenhagen by a recalcitrant Congress.

The Gramscian concept of 'common sense' is premised on expressing a worldview that is presented as mutually beneficial to all members of society, and ideally generally accepted by the entire populace. During moments of organic crisis, this common sense crumbles due to the fracturing of the hegemonic network. If we focus on the internal dynamics of the United States we can see that the political establishment was fractured in presenting two very didactically opposed positions in relation to legislative responses to climate change. Despite the Obama Administration's agenda in addressing climate change it faced internal ideological challenges from within its own political establishment that limited in the US negotiating position. According to Elizabeth DeSombre (2011, pp. 206 - 208), the United States' resistance to binding commitments in emission reductions is due to three inter-related factors: (i) the carbon-intensive economy and the fossil fuel industry's unwillingness to bear the costs of emission reductions and the move to a carbon-neutrality; (ii) the influence of the US Congress, especially the Senate, in blocking legislation due to the separation of powers in the three branches of government; and (iii) the lack of pre-existing domestic legislation, frameworks and 'common sense' in responding to the problems posed by climate change. This internal battle within American politics became quite entrenched in the news media and in voting patterns of US representatives in the Congress, with many political leaders openly questioning the existence of climate change and the veracity of climate science. This resulted in the restricted capacity for the Obama Administration to directly respond to climate change on a national-scale, but also severely limited its negotiating power in the UNFCCC due to the requirement of Senate ratification of international treaties.

The arrival of Barack Obama saw environmental issues take on a more prominent position in US politics. In 2009, the Obama Administration was pivotal in securing USD \$80bn of clean energy investment in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009) and worked with Congress to pass legislation on clean energy and climate change (Houser, 2010). Robert Brinkmann and Sandra Garren (2010, p. 4 - 12) note that domestically Obama enjoyed early success, including the creation of the EPA's Clean Air Act (2009), and following COP15 he signalled to Congress that he would sign policy commitments on GHG reductions of 17% of 2005 levels by 2017 and 83% by 2050. However, Congress made it clear that a global agreement needed to be premised on equality of sacrifice in relation to emission reductions from all major contributors. In the June 2009 American

Clean Energy and Security Act, one passage stated: 'it is the policy of the United States to work proactively under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change' as long as binding agreements are 'committing all major greenhouse gas-emitting nations to contribute equitably to the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions' (Clean Air Act, 2009, p. 1115).

With all treaties requiring two thirds support from the Senate for ratification, passing global agreements was an ongoing challenge. Furthermore, a number of Senators and Congressmen/women from the Republican Party openly resisted any new legislation that involved adaption to the consequences of climate and even openly questioned the existence of climate change (Percival, 2014). It has been well documented that a majority of Congressional Republicans are either openly sceptical of climate change science or have stayed silent on the issue (Collomb, 2014; Percival 2014). This political perspective impacted directly on the negotiating position of the Obama administration as any international agreement had to be ratified by a Congress populated by many climate change deniers. Obama was bound by the legislation already passed by the House of Representatives that had set their emissions target and with the full knowledge that the Senate would reject any ratification of the Kyoto Protocol (Hunter, 2010, p. 6). National politics limited the Obama administration's efforts to negotiate a more accountable climate agreement when US political organs were unwilling to do the same.

A delegation from the Republican Party attended the Copenhagen Conference. It included climate-change sceptics Sen. James Inhofe, Rep. Joe Barton, Rep. James Sensenbrenner, and Rep. Darrell Issa. Their intention was to undermine the science of climate change and to discuss with other delegates the need to maintain a stable economy. This delegation would not officially challenge the Obama Administration's negotiating capacity but was a clear indication of the resistance from Congress to accepting an agreement that would threaten domestic industries. These expressions of domestic power in the United States directly limited Obama's negotiating position and contradicted his administration's message of hope and change in global climate change management. As Falk (2012, p. 96) notes, 'If the United States had been in a position to set a high standard of self-regulation then American leadership might have seemed far more credible'. When Obama attended Copenhagen, he and his team went there knowing that he could not commit to any agreement that resembled Kyoto nor could he legally bind the US to reductions in

emissions without also securing equivalent obligations from China. China's position was crucial to securing support from the Congress for US commitments to emission reductions. Yet no such concessions would be forthcoming from China, especially with a United States' administration limited in its capacity to legislate change through a recalcitrant Congress. From this angle, the Obama Administration was stymied in Copenhagen by its internal political battles that had not been settled, but also by a declined position vis-à-vis other state actors in a world characterised by multipolarity.

Multipolarity within the inter-state system has become more prominent since the beginning of the twenty-first century, yet the ongoing centrality of the United States cannot be denied. Multipolarity entails the entrenchment of the fragmentation in inter-state relations between different political nodes. The rise of the emerging powers, exemplified by the BASICs, indicated a new geopolitical reality and a challenge to the status quo of the core states in the management of global affairs. The co-operative action of China, India, Brazil and South Africa as a negotiating bloc presented a new hurdle to climate negotiations and challenged the centrality of the core states. This unity also represented the fragmentation within the G-77+ as different groupings splintered away from the massive coalition to advocate for their shared interests based on mutual national agenda goals (Roberts, J. T., 2011, p. 779). The emergent groupings of states undermined the moral and intellectual leadership of the United States while simultaneously indicating alternative pathways to climate action.

However, the United States maintained forms of residual hegemony and influence, especially amongst the other core actors of the West and Japan. The quite literal eleventh-hour Copenhagen Accord, an inherently flawed and very limited document, was refined by the US and the BASIC heads-of-state and offered as a political accord to the other delegates. Despite its blatant undemocratic process and complete disregard for the negotiating rules of the UNFCCC, this accord still secured the backing of almost all of the delegates at the conference, despite the sidelining of key actors including the European Union, Australia, Canada, Japan and other key members from the G-77+. In what follows I outline how Copenhagen demonstrated both the residual hegemony of the US, but also the positions of different state-based groupings that indicated the earliest signs of alternative pathways for climate change management with their own attempts at representing a common good.

### *The BASICS and G-77+*

The emerging economies had made commitments to reducing their carbon output but, like their Western counterparts, had done so on their own terms. Before the conference, China and India had already made pledges to reduce carbon emissions. China promised to reduce emissions per unit of gross domestic product by 40 percent on 2005 levels by 2020, and India by 24 percent (Houser, 2010, p. 3). By 2008, China led the world as the largest producer of green technology, accounting for 1.4 per cent of its GDP (OECD, 2012, p. 8). However, such national achievements were not an indication of a commitment to a global legally-binding agreement, especially if such an agreement would limit economic growth. It was in preparation for the Copenhagen Conference that India and China worked together with South Africa and Brazil to form the BASIC voting bloc (Jayaram, 2015). In the months leading up to Copenhagen, the BASIC countries and G-77+ met in November 27 – 28 2009 to prepare for the conference and develop a unified stance on a number of key issues, including holding the developed world to account on their commitments to the Kyoto Protocol and to ensure support in adaption through increased financing and technology transfer.

Even though this ad hoc grouping for the Copenhagen conference never presented itself as an alternative form of leadership they did pose a serious challenge to the capacity for the United States to exercise hegemony within the UNFCCC. From a material capabilities perspective, these state members represented a sizable proportion of the world's economy and population. With a world economic trajectory shifting towards these emerging economies, their leverage in negotiations grew dramatically.

If we examine how this emergent group operated, we can witness the serious challenge this group posed to the reproductive capacity of the United States' hegemonic network. The central focus of this group was to avoid ratification of a new agreement that would undermine and threaten ongoing economic growth for the developing world, especially the emerging economies (Delman, 2011, p. 196). In terms of outcomes, the BASIC parties were able to uphold the Kyoto Protocol and did not enter into a new agreement that would legally-bind emerging economies to new targets or even rewrite the lists of Annex I and

non-Annex I parties, despite the substantial increases to GHG emissions from the BASICs since the late 1990s. They frustrated negotiations on removing the role of Annex I and non-Annex I parties, instead re-framing the narrative on historic obligations of the developed world and the need to accomplish the commitments of Kyoto, which had not been achieved by many Annex I parties. India and China were unified in their approach to the negotiations and even drafted the framework of the Copenhagen Accord together. China used their 'veto' power in negotiations to thwart a proposal in the Copenhagen Accord that would specify a 50% global emissions reduction by 2050 as compared to 1990 levels with the developed world cutting GHGs by 80% (Delman, 2011, p. 194). China, India and the other BASIC countries maintained their stance that their ongoing economic development and even their sovereignty was inalienable and not negotiable in these climate talks.

Apart from their unified position on resisting a new agreement that targeted the periphery, the G-77+ was quite fragmented, containing varied and often competing groups with different interests. For instance, Bolivia and the Islands of Micronesia sought a binding agreement to dramatically reduce carbon emissions. While, conversely, oil-rich states like Saudi Arabia were openly opposed to any binding agreement on reducing carbon emissions. When negotiations were completely stalled, the chair put forth a negotiating group of 28, completing marginalising the other 143 members present – many of those from the G-77+ (notably all of the BASICs were included in the 28). The periphery states were disregarded in favour of the more influential emerging economies. As J. Timmons Roberts (2011, p. 779) notes, there were thirteen different sub-groups within the G-77+ based on either shared economic, environmental or regional interests. This included long-time coalitions like OPEC and the LDCs but also included groupings like the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America or ALBA and the Association of Small Island States, which also included Bangladesh in their ranks and held strong environmental demands. As a collective, the G-77+ did not produce a unified position in the Copenhagen negotiations except an open resistance to their Western counterparts' demands to re-define Annex I and non-Annex I countries (Bodansky, 2010, p. 234).

The BASIC parties and the G-77+ presented their position as a common good based on *climate justice*. Climate justice alludes to acknowledging the historical context in which Western states and transnational corporations have profited from exploiting fossil fuels

for their development, while the developing world is both prevented from pursuing the same path and also must endure the climatic consequences of that exploitation. Climate justice relates to the need to redress this disparity through a variety of avenues including the need to rectify the *climate debt*, the compensation owed to the developing world based on the damage caused by colonialism, climate change and the costs associated with economic adaption in order to combat carbon emission reductions (Bond, 2010, pp. 15 – 17).

The fact that the United States could not reconcile this perspective or, at the very least, marginalise it to limit its impact upon the conference, is indicative of the changing conditions and contexts of these international meetings. Even though the BASIC countries were presented in the Western media as the blockers or wreckers at the Copenhagen Conference, what they achieved in relation to presenting a different narrative on climate negotiations was quite telling. These emerging economies continually reminded their Western counterparts of the long history of economic progress due to policies of imperialism, colonialism and unequal economic exchanges with the periphery (Delman, 2011; P. 196; Carter, Cleg and Wåhlin, 2011, p. 690; Roberts, J. T., 2011, pp. 777 – 779). The BASICs negotiating position pushed for increased commitments from Annex I countries, especially adaption financing and technology transfer to support climate change mitigation in the transition to a post-fossil fuel future. In their submitted comments on the Bali Action Plan leading up to Copenhagen, for example, China put forward that developed countries that were not signatories to the Kyoto Protocol (read the United States) ‘shall undertake commitments to reduce their GHG emissions by at least 25 – 40 per cent of their 1990 levels by 2020’ and ‘developed countries shall provide technology, financing and capacity building in a measurable, reportable and verifiable manner’ (UNFCCC, 2008, pp. 18 - 19). These public statements represented ideological resistance to the United States, and situated responsibility for climate change squarely at the feet of the West and Japan through their industrialisation over the last two hundred years.

The capacity to build an alternative to the US’ hegemony was not desired nor obtained by the emerging economies. However, it did form the earliest embryonic development of an alternative multi-nodal network that challenged the moral and intellectual logic of the core leadership in the multilateral management of climate change. This small grouping

had an agreed approach and had attempted to build inter-state cooperation to limit the negotiating capacity of the US. These tactics of the BASIC negotiating bloc indicated a changing dynamic in global institutions. A unified grouping from within the G-77+ now had the capacity to instigate substantial change and influence over institutions and negotiating frameworks due to the seismic economic shifts in the global economy. The BASICs was representative of a tentative undertaking to present a geopolitical alternative to the moral and intellectual leadership of the United States as the default position that the rest of the world must adopt. Even though it was limited in scope, the connections that were developed here and the premise of their arguments, disrupted the negotiating capacity of the United States and allied core states representing an ideological departure that functioned as a *strange attractor* within the multi-nodal network of the United States' hegemony. As discussed in Chapter 2, strange attractors are disruptions or instabilities in the complex networks of the world order that can build over time if the current system continues to be mired in dysfunction. A strange attractor acts to divert supporting social forces to a new emergent network, yet can only grow and expand with increased participation and the building of legitimacy across a substantial geo-political space. The BASICs and their alternative perspective at Copenhagen was one such strange attractor.

However, the expansion of their perspective to other state actors was limited. The BASIC members did not have the capacity to lead change and get other states to adopt a different agreement. China and India appeared to prefer maintenance of the stalemate in negotiations in order to protect economic interests. Nevertheless, Copenhagen saw the earliest attempts to build deeper cooperation among different state groupings. Networks expand and grow through positive feedback loops where other actors (both state and non-state) internalise the ideological perspective expressed by the leadership. This is undertaken organically by these actors that are genuinely engaged with or have internalised the ideological logic of the leadership. The incapacity to convince other parties to adopt their firm position of resistance to the US and allied core states ultimately led to an increased fragmentation within the negotiating process. The BASICs and the G-77+ were unable to achieve their policy goals of committing the Annex I states to the second-stage of the Kyoto Protocol or what was commonly referred to as the Kyoto Track. The increased economic weight of the emerging economies is quite significant, yet the EU, Australia, Japan and Canada still had the capacity to resist demands to increase their commitments to the second stage of the Kyoto Protocol.



## *The European Union*

At all previous negotiations on GHG reductions and other environment-related agreements, the EU has taken a leading role due to its substantial economy and successes in reducing carbon-intensive industries and other atmospheric pollution. Before Copenhagen, the European Union had already launched their Emissions Trading System (ETS), and many Western European nations were leaders in providing renewable energy to their populations. In their 2009 submission to the UNFCCC, the European Union actively pursued a course of obtaining agreement from the United States and other developed countries to a binding commitment in emission reductions based on GHG cuts of 30 per cent compared to 1990 emission levels and the need for global temperatures to not rise above 2°C.

At the Copenhagen Conference, Sweden, speaking on behalf of the European Union delegation, advocated for a global response with specific demands for developed and developing countries:

Let us agree to the 2 degree objective and to global emissions reductions of at least 50 percent as well as aggregate developed emission reductions of at least 80–95 percent by 2050 compared to 1990 levels, and in the order of 30 percent by 2020. Developing countries as a group should commit to actions that achieve a substantial deviation below the currently predicted emissions growth rate in the order 15–30 percent (Quoted in Dimitrov, 2010, p. 803)

The EU was in favour of a new agreement that combined the Kyoto Protocol with the objectives of the Bali Action Plan, which was centred on the US adopting legally binding reductions in carbon emissions (Houser, 2010, p. 5). The Bali Action Plan outlined a ‘shared vision for long-term cooperative action, including a long-term global goal for emissions reductions’ based on the ‘principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.’ Trevor Houser (2010, p. 2) notes that following the exponential economic growth of the developing world, especially the emerging economies of China, India, Brazil and South Africa, by the turn of the millennia Annex I parties no longer represented the 60 per cent of emission they had in 1992 and in the near future would only represent 3% of global growth in emissions. For the European Union, a new agreement that included clear obligations from the developing world was needed.

The Bali Action Plan also acknowledged that in order to implement policies to mitigate GHG emissions, finance and technology transfer would be urgently needed to support the transition away from carbon-intensive industries. The Bali Roadmap was a framework for a working party to develop an agreement that addressed: (i) An ‘enhanced national/international action’ to mitigate the factors that contribute to climate change, including review processes and new policy approaches to deforestation, especially in the developing world (Decision 2); (ii) Adaption processes including risk management, the deepening of multilateral actions and the development of ‘economic diversification to build resilience’; (iii) transfer of technologies to develop environmentally sustainable industries and economic growth (Decision 3); and (iv) financial mechanisms to support the transition away from carbon-intensive industries (Decision 6).

The EU was quite vocal in advocating for adaption financing from the developed world and supported strong mitigation policies during the transition to a carbon neutral future. The EU advocated for the goals of the Bali Roadmap as it would include all relevant parties in increasing accountability for reducing GHGs, while also providing adaption strategies like technological transfers and the diversifying of economies to address the changes that a post-fossil world would bring. This would benefit European green technology industries that had been nurtured through successive EU Strategic Energy Technology Plans (SET-Plans) that have targeted areas of growth – especially in renewable energy that could now expand to global markets. The European Union would have been perfectly situated to capitalise on a move towards a post-fossil fuel future that would see an expansion of economic linkages in low-carbon industries and trade between the EU single market and the periphery. Alas, for the EU such an opportunity did not eventuate in Copenhagen.

As the negotiations were framed by the resistance to fundamental change from BASIC parties, especially China and India, the EU’s opportunities to push their agenda of deepening commitments to reductions in carbon output and entrenching institutional monitoring systems did not gain much traction (Jayaram, 2015, p. 220). The European Union appeared to be perfectly positioned to be a global leader in formulating a global agreement on addressing climate change; however, due to the economic concerns of the

emerging economies and the domestically handicapped position of the United States, the EU's offer to lead by example was largely disregarded.

The European common market is the largest economy in the world, and the EU has been a key negotiator in all global agreements. Yet the relegation of such an important inter-governmental actor is indicative of a flattening or diffusion of power within the core vis-à-vis other states. As the EU was already a leading advocate for a more legally binding agreement and had domestically re-structured economically for a more carbon-neutral future, their ascent was not crucial in the negotiating process. Even though the European Union ratified the Copenhagen Accord, delegates presented a mixed narrative on the results of the conference. The EU Commission President, Jose Manuel Barroso was the most unequivocal in his assessment, stating that 'I will not hide my disappointment regarding the non-binding nature of the agreement here. In that respect the document falls far short of our expectations.' Conversely, the United Kingdom and France were far more supportive of the accord and its benefits in the long term. Then-UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown framed the document as a 'start' that needed a 'legally binding outcome'; while the then-French President, Nicholas Sarkozy, saw the inclusion of China, India and the United States as 'vital' and generously described the accord as a 'contract' (BBC Online, 2009). Germany understood the accord as a rejection of their long-term diplomacy in climate negotiations informed by scientific research, global obligations and support in adaption. Ultimately, despite their leadership in offering financial and technological aid for adaption and the moral argument that climate change represents an existential threat, the EU was ineffective in influencing the key players to adopt a strong mitigation agreement.

### *The Residual Hegemony of the United States in Climate Negotiations*

Following the obstructionist tactics of the BASICs, and the simple fact that China and India represented some of the largest carbon emissions in the world, the United States directly worked with this coalition in order to establish a deal that was mutually beneficial. Only the United States could have simply walked into a meeting of the BASICs to negotiate an accord, as its delegation did near the end of the conference. Even though the BASICs were successful in resisting a new agreement, the US relied on the

near-certainty that the EU and the other core state actors would support any document that emerged from this ad hoc meeting between the BASICs and the US. Despite an emergent multipolar reality, the EU remained a junior partner linked to the leverage of United States' hegemony. According to Wikileaks cables, the EU climate action commissioner, Connie Hedegaard, informed a US delegate that the Europeans had been 'muting their criticism of the US, to be constructive' and that financial aid would be an effective mechanism to garner support for the accord from periphery state members as the 'EU is a big donor to these countries' (Carrington, 2010).

The US had to use varying forms of coercion in the periphery in order to secure support for the accord. A promise of increased aid and a USD \$100 billion climate fund offered by Clinton was extended to non-Annex I negotiators to encourage their support. USD \$30 billion was earmarked to go to the least developed countries (Houser, 2010, p. 10). In the case of Ethiopia, the US threatened a cut to their aid if they voted against the US (Carrington, 2010). The Obama administration also put to use their considerable intelligence gathering network to collect information on the negotiating positions of the other delegates, as revealed in cables obtained by Wikileaks. The US did not want to be beholden to a universal emission cut that all states had to follow. Rather, they sought targeted reductions for individual countries (Carrington, 2010; Carter, Cleg and Wåhlin, 2011, p. 692). The passive revolution from the least-developed countries continued in the most part, but the uneven purchase of US hegemony was indicated by the fact that many delegates continued to resist through advocacy of climate justice, and that Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Sudan, Tuvalu and Venezuela did not agree to the accord.

Copenhagen serves as a good example of the tensions and impediments that can emerge from forming an ad hoc coalition without a transparent or inclusive process. The United States was able to achieve a minimalist face-saving document, widely criticised by the scientific and environmentalist communities for its lack of real action on limiting carbon emissions. According to Climate Analytics the accord's pledges were 'paltry' (Climate Analytics, 2009) while Bill McKibben (2009b) of 350.org lambasted the result as 'what's politically pretty easy but not what's necessary'. The United States could not reproduce hegemony in combating climate change at Copenhagen nor could it present itself as a leader framing the discourse or agenda for reducing GHGs. The rigid stance of the

BASICs and the last-minute nature of the Copenhagen Accord indicates that the United States compromised significantly to placate the co-draftees.

Crucially, the US was able to advance neo-liberal approaches to climate change, particularly carbon market mechanisms that have been an ongoing feature of UNFCCC processes. Since the Reagan administration, the US government has advocated for neo-liberal approaches to be extended to the world through global institutions. This form of ideological integration led the US to pursue a 'carbon market' approach to addressing climate change. In this context, the UNFCCC process has been ideologically conditioned by the US and other Western states to perceive market mechanisms as the most efficient and effective means to reducing carbon emissions. This approach was largely based on the advocacy of the United States and corporate lobbies since the formation of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. Banking firms like Goldman Sachs have been outspoken supporters of emission trading schemes as they create whole new financial markets through which different derivatives can be created, bought and sold. Carbon trade schemes were collectively worth around USD \$140 billion in 2008 and if Copenhagen had succeeded in expanding the cap and trade system to include the United States and the emerging economies, it was predicted to grow to a USD \$3 trillion market by 2020 (Bond, 2010, p. 19). Various types of emission trading schemes have been introduced across the world, including in Europe, Canada, China, India, South Korea, Brazil and within US states, most notably in California. Corporate polluters have found a variety of means to profit from these schemes, including selling carbon allowances after moving operations beyond the boundaries of the ETS, or through creating quick and cheap carbon-offsetting ventures (Bendell, Doyle and Black, 2009, p. 10 - 11). A number of climate scientists, most notably James Hansen, have been quite critical of the ETS model as the capacity to reduce carbon emissions has been quite weak and has only created opportunities for new avenues of global financialisation (Hansen, 2009).

Furthermore, carbon markets create a blurring between state and non-state governance roles in the regulation and interactions of this market mechanism (Böhm, Misoczky and Moog, 2012; Lövbrand and Strippel, 2012). This mixing of state and transnational corporate actors in regulatory frameworks creates further difficulties in ensuring that these market mechanisms are directed at maximising outcomes in reducing carbon emissions. Despite these complications and concerns about governance, the utility of

carbon trading mechanisms is ingrained so deeply amongst Western states and transnational corporate actors that it has been imbedded in the common sense of multilateral responses to climate change since the introduction of the Kyoto Protocol.

However, as Pearse and Böhm (2014, p. 5) have argued, carbon trading mechanisms are a ‘failure’ as they ‘have not delivered on their core aim: to reduce greenhouse emissions’. They go on to explain that Europe (the largest carbon market in the world) has not seen any dramatic reduction in emissions, except during the time of the Global Financial Crisis, where production (and emissions) was low across the world. New Zealand also saw negligible reductions in carbon emissions despite introducing a carbon trading scheme in 2008. This is largely due to carbon trading involving features like carbon offsets that include buying carbon credits from countries with low emissions while allowing domestic emissions to rise. Carbon trading has not had substantial success in reducing emissions in a number of countries simply due to the low price of carbon as a commodity.

In sum, the Copenhagen Accord was a product of the weakened negotiating position of the United States and the fragmented nature of inter-state relations. The results of Copenhagen are indicative of the hamstrung nature of US leadership. The fact that some kind of document was produced is evidence of the United States’ residual legitimacy and leadership, but such an achievement was weak and indicative of the rise of the emerging economies. The Copenhagen Accord incorporated a majority of support with 140 delegates committing individually set national targets to the document. Yet the means by which the Copenhagen Accord was drafted increased animosities for its exclusionary process and marginalisation of the majority of states. This frustration was compounded when the floor debate on the accord was given a significantly reduced time. Due to the financing offered by the United States and the non-binding nature of the agreement, many of the G-77+ capitulated and supported the accord. A number of Latin American parties including Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia called out the Copenhagen Accord as ‘untransparent and undemocratic’ in the plenary debate session. In a world undergoing a substantial diffusion of power, the US could not build a moral and ideological case for strong mitigation and could only gather support for the weak Copenhagen Accord through forms of coercion, most notably the use of financial aid.

The Copenhagen Conference demonstrated that multipolarity was a complex balancing act in which the United States remained an essential element, although its capacity to build consensus was significantly diminished. The failure of the United States to gain universal agreement from developing countries indicates the decreasing capacity of the United States to successfully deploy coercion and consent vis-à-vis their non-Western counterparts. The organic links in the multi-nodal network of the US hegemonic order were fragmented to the point where the process of consensus building was impossible. The diplomatic resistance present at the Copenhagen conference was the most obvious demonstration of the loss of moral leadership and control over institutional practices. The BASICs were not beholden to the US' financial aid and could resist the United States' diplomatic efforts. This declining influence was indicative of the changing role of the United States as the organic crisis became more entrenched. In this context, the hegemony of the United States became more reliant upon mechanisms of domination.

### **Non-State Actors and the Challenge to the US 'Common Sense'**

Non-state actors from global civil society form an integral role in reproducing hegemony. They ideologically internalise and disseminate the worldview of the hegemon so that it can be presented as 'common-sense'. However, non-state actors that resist the ideological paradigm of the hegemon can act as an integral element in challenging and even diffusing the power exercised by the hegemon. The Copenhagen Convention demonstrated how opposing non-state actors could disrupt the political and ideological imperatives of the United States.

#### *The Climate Movement*

The Copenhagen Climate Summit was attended by tens of thousands of NGOs, both inside and outside the Bella Centre. With the UNFCCC negotiating format and the backroom deal of the Copenhagen Accord, it would at first glance appear that non-state actors were largely marginalised from the process. Fisher (2010) notes as much, declaring that civil society was 'left out in the cold' due to the merging of movements, lack of a clear focus, and the poor planning of the Danish hosts and the UNFCCC in general.

However, such interpretations do not fully appreciate the complexity and depth of civil society nor of its influence both inside the negotiating process and outside as a platform to shape legitimacy, accountability and awareness-raising.

The climate movement ideologically presented an alternative to the neo-liberal common sense advocated by the United States and its allies. Gramsci (2012, pp. 108 – 110) would describe the tactics of this movement as a ‘war of position’ as there was conscious effort to ideologically integrate potential supporters into this social force. This movement was pivotal in redefining and reframing demands from the developing world to push for accountability from the developed world. The demands to repay the climate debt and for climate justice/injustice derive from global civil society and were adopted by the developing world, including the emerging economies. Actors from global civil society in both the North and the South have advocated for a number of key policies in the UNFCCC. For instance, Accion Ecologica, an Ecuadorian environmental organisation, promoted the concept of climate debt and the demand for USD \$400 billion annually until 2020 to rectify this injustice and to help the global South to develop green industries and abandon environmentally damaging practices. Even though USD \$400 billion was not achieved in negotiations, the USD \$30 billion over three years (2010-2012) and the USD \$100 billion annually until 2020 for the Copenhagen Climate Fund was secured (Bond, 2010, p. 21). The USD \$400 billion continued to be used as a benchmark to indicate how much aid is needed to fulfil the ecological debt from long term environmental degradation.

Despite the majority of states being ‘left out in the cold’, many members from the Global South used the language and the intellectual paradigms of the climate movement to resist the Copenhagen Accord and argued that it was demonstrably undemocratic and a misleading course of action. Many NGOs were unapologetically critical of the role of the developed world in producing a weak document. Nnimmo Bassey of the Friends of the Earth International bluntly stated, ‘By delaying action, rich countries have condemned millions of the world's poorest people to hunger, suffering and loss of life as climate change accelerates’ (BBC, 2009). Cuba, Bolivia and Venezuela’s open opposition to the Copenhagen Accord that blocked its official adoption by the UNFCCC used the same language as these NGOs and openly resisted the ‘business as usual’ model that can characterise climate negotiations. As McGregor (2011, p. 5) has argued, Copenhagen was



the cementing of a 'new and powerful alliance of environmental and climate justice groups with the vulnerable countries most at risk from climate change'.

This broad form of cooperation between states and non-state actors has developed over time and is indicative of an emergent capacity to build alternative networks where collaboration and discourse become more ingrained. Since the Bali Action Plan, organisations like 350.org actively lobbied national governments for a number of key policies to adopt as their negotiating position. 350.org along with the Global Climate Change Alliance and the Climate Action Network (which brought together over 450 environmental civil society actors to Copenhagen) were successful in gaining the support of 116 state actors to adopt the 350 parts per million target – a scientifically grounded and more demanding goal compared to the more common and vague objective of avoiding an increase in global mean temperatures of more than 2°C (McGregor, 2011, p. 2). Writing on the *Yale Environment 360* website, the founder and leader of 350.org, Bill McKibben, (2009a) noted that their campaign was so successful that 116 state governments attending Copenhagen adopted the resolution that 350ppm was the 'dividing line' in their negotiations and some even wore 350 neckties as a symbolic gesture in support of the target.

Networks of communication and agreed-to goals were developed between states and non-state actors centred on general agreement about climate science. As the non-state actors represented a coalition of over 450 in collaboration with 116 states, this had global significance with a capacity to build significant resistance to the neo-liberal logic of the United States' hegemonic world order. John Urry (2011, p. 101 - 102) describes this kind of emergent movement as cosmopolitan 'bridges' that are built between 'nations and localities, in systems of norms, in institutions, as well as within global politics'. This deepening cooperation between a diverse range of groupings can be understood as a 'cosmopolitan social force' that accesses global forms of media and available science to highlight the global impacts of climate change. This social force was in its emergent phase at Copenhagen but developed a capacity to build its own feedback loops across a multi-nodal network on a global-scale, especially in relation to its capacity to use mediated spaces, universally agreed social facts on climate science and an organisational capacity that is diverse but connected through these 'bridges' within publics. Resistance to Obama's agenda in the Copenhagen process was indicative of its organisational capacity

but its impact was limited. Of the 116 member states harnessing this network, not one of them came from the group of major GHG contributors in the world.

Under such circumstances, the environmentalist non-state actors undertook a critical role in resisting and undermining the neo-liberal approach of the United States and, thereby, acted as an oppositional social force disrupting the process of reproducing the hegemony of the United States. Due to the work and scrutiny of non-state actors, an informal accountability mechanism and alternative approaches were advocated in responding to the threat of climate change. With the varied NGOs lobbying, organising and publicly dissecting every aspect of climate change negotiation and agreement, the US was criticised for its role in failing to craft a grand bargain of deep and binding cuts, and the reproduction of neo-liberal approaches to addressing climate change stalled significantly.

### *Opposition from Corporate Lobbies*

Corporations form a key plank in the reproduction of hegemony. Their advocacy of the hegemon legitimates the capitalist order that has been built to service the networks of exchange that corporations actively profit from. As discussed in Chapter 2, hegemony is never absolute and competing class fractions expose the ongoing tensions and cleavages that exist. Corporations and their representative lobby groups are riddled with complexities and differences. At Copenhagen, numerous corporations were strong advocates of some kind of agreement and many European corporations lobbied hard to have more countries embrace legally-binding emission targets and to adopt a cap and trade scheme similar to that operating in Europe. Conversely, other corporations and their associations continued to resist any legal restrictions on carbon emissions and even denied the very existence of climate change. These competing class fractions were in direct competition in trying to shape the negotiating positions of key states. What emerged at the Copenhagen conference was indicative of the competing corporate social forces that have evolved into two opposed economic camps: one was concerned with protecting pre-existing economic processes, while the other was concerned with building the framework and infrastructure of the newly emerging low carbon world economy. These competing differences indicated the fracturing of the organic links between corporate interests and the hegemon. Rebuilding economic relations for a post-fossil fuel future required

direction and regulation under US political leadership. With the declining hegemon still dependent on fossil industries, this transition was problematic and inherently uneven.

Corporations do have a number of avenues to influence outcomes in summit negotiations but, as was the case in Copenhagen, they do not directly control the decision-making processes of state actors. Business and Industry NGOs (BINGOs) notably the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), International Emissions Trading Association (IETA) and World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) have official observer status at UNFCCC meetings. BINGOs have access to official documents and secretary communications and also the power to intervene in the plenary floor during debates. These associations also have direct access to meetings with a variety of delegations and even the leadership of the UNFCCC upon invitation. Just by sheer number these associations maintain a significant presence at UNFCCC meetings. The ICC alone represents hundreds of thousands of firms from over 120 countries. At Copenhagen, lobbyists from the ICC, WBCSD and the IETA accounted for 476 people collectively (ICC: 86, WBCSD: 133 and the IETA: 257).

A number of corporations from the United States were actively involved in limiting the legislation on climate change policies, both domestically and internationally. In 2009, the oil and gas industry invested over USD \$175 million to influence the outcome of US Congress climate change legislation that was defeated in the Senate (Fernandes and Girard, 2011, p. 7). Research from Delmas, Lim and Nairn-Birch (2016) found that lobbying expenditure increases both to oppose and advocate for regulations to reduce GHG emissions based on the competitive advantage (or lack thereof) derived from said regulation. Delmas, Lim and Nairn-Birch formulated a U-shaped graph that indicates that lobbying expenditure is the greatest amongst the highest and lowest GHG emitters. In 2008, Pacific Gas and Electrical, a US-based green utilities corporation spent USD \$27 million in lobbying, just under the USD \$29 million spent by Exxon-Mobil in the same year. However, lobbying against climate change legislation significantly outweighs their pro-regulation counterparts. In 2008, the other highest lobby expenditures came from corporations that either advocate for climate denial and/or donates significant funds to climate denial legislators in the US federal government, including General Electric (USD \$18.66 million), Southern Company (USD \$13.98 million) and General Motors (USD \$13.10 million). In that same year, the US Chamber of Commerce spent USD \$60 million

in lobbying against climate change legislation (Delmas, Lim and Nairn-Birch, 2016, p. 176). Internationally, the US Chamber of Commerce played a key role in limiting US negotiations in the UNFCCC through the constant reminder that any international agreement signed must be supported in the US Congress. The US Chamber of Commerce became so ingrained in the scepticism of climate change that Apple and Pacific Gas and Electrical actually chose to vacate their membership in protest over their position. Many members of the US Chamber of Commerce profit directly from exploiting natural resources or through the continued pollution of the environment (Bendell, Doyle and Black, 2009, pp. 8 – 9).

However other corporate lobbyists groups advocated for some kind of climate agreement. Corporations like Shell, Toyota, Coca-Cola all understood the global cultural shift and acted accordingly. The Prince of Wales' Corporate Leaders Group on Climate Change drafted the Copenhagen Communiqué that was signed by over 960 corporations from 60 different countries including Shell, Vodafone and Unilever. The Communiqué outlined the need for a 'robust' agreement in order to respond to the 'scale and urgency of the crises facing the world today'. It advocated for science-based goals between 2013 and 2050, acknowledging that emission cuts would have to be between 50 and 85 percent by 2050. It also discussed the global frameworks and adaption processes as necessary for the developed and developing world to respond appropriately (Corporate Leaders Group, 2009). The corporate support for an agreement came in more public forms as well, including the TckTckTck marketing campaign funded by a large number of transnational corporations.

The opposing positions and interpretations of these corporate actors demonstrated the changes taking shape in the world economy and how this transition was uneven and resisted by economic forces that profited substantially from the fossil-based economy. Those that sought no deal, epitomised by the US Chamber of Commerce, stood by such resistance based on their respective industries that gain competitive advantage by avoiding binding emissions targets and any kind of carbon regulation scheme. Corporations and financial firms that profit from an expanded carbon market shaped discussions in Copenhagen. These corporate voices had a number of avenues and opportunities to shape debate within Copenhagen, especially in relation to the US delegation. The failure to pass the Copenhagen Accord caused much consternation from

business lobby groups, due to the uncertainty it placed upon markets. Opposing corporate interests represented two class fractions competing for market opportunities to serve their own economic growth and expansion. Such divisions and contestation directly contributed to the fragmentation of the US' hegemony, both domestically and globally.

Domestically, many US industries were incapable of adapting to a post-carbon economy. Yet economic actors that have the capacity to profit from a carbon-neutral global economy were beginning to invest equal effort in shaping policy. Their different ideological narratives fed into the limited and contradictory stance of the United States in the Copenhagen Conference. The Obama Administration wanted to commit to an agreement but had to remain mindful of a backlash from corporate lobbyists and the US legislative branch of government. Indeed, the organic links between corporate USA and the executive branch of the government was fragmented by this situation. The tensions and challenges presented by the competing interests of class fractions within the United States exposed the limitations that were imposed upon the US as a hegemonic actor during organic crisis. The narrowing of the US negotiating position limited its capacity to express leadership and reproduce hegemony as a representation of global interests when it was quite apparent that national self-interest and domestic constraints were the primary factors in its negotiating position. Taking global leadership and committing to deep cuts in climate negotiations would have had reinforced some of the organic links of the United States' hegemonic world order, particularly with other states. However, the increased polarisation of the corporate state actors from the United States and beyond only accentuated the fractured nature of social relations within this hegemonic order. The feedback loops within the multi-nodal network of the US hegemonic order were undermined by competing discourses and an inability for the Obama Administration to provide an over-arching ideological leadership.

### **Structural Limitations and Contradictions of the UNFCCC**

The organisational structure of global climate change management is part of the hegemonic order established by the United States after World War 2. These organisations were founded on liberal principles based on the participation of state actors working within a rules-based system. Despite a relative decline in US material capabilities, the

organisational framework remained in place during the Obama Administration. According to Ikenberry (2015), despite the challenges facing the American-led hegemonic order state actors have an ongoing interest in engaging with an open international system that is – loosely – rules-based. However, it is the stasis of the institutions of the US hegemonic order that have been exposed by global crises like climate change. The rules and norms by which the climate change institutions operate has become gridlocked and ill-suited to addressing ecological and social crises posed by anthropogenic climate change. Despite the obstructions and impasse that emerged in the Copenhagen Conference, the United States was unwilling and incapable of implementing necessary reforms to make the UNFCCC more effective.

The outcomes of the Copenhagen Climate Summit have largely been presented as the consequences of realpolitik or game theory; for instance using neo-realist interpretations of the motivations of actors (Dimitrov, 2010; Bodansky, 2010). However, if we apply complex-Gramscianism to analyse the UNFCCC, a different explanation emerges. The UNFCCC is presented as a liberal-democratic institution premised on passing international legislation through consensus. According to Ikenberry (2015, p. 405), the international order established by the United States was ‘open and stable’ in that it was premised on cooperation and universally applicable rules. Yet even Ikenberry admits that ‘the diffusion of power and diversity of interests that mark today’s global system make it hard to envisage the construction of a coherent and well-functioning system of multilateral governance’ (Ikenberry, 2015, 410 – 411). Nevertheless, Ikenberry, like other neo-liberal institutionalists, still hold faith in the stability and rules-based system of global liberalism. The alternative is disorder.

Yet if we look at how multilateral organisations like the UNFCCC functioned during the Obama period, we can see that the rules – especially that of consensus-building – are contradicted by the actual practice of securing agreements. The UNFCCC’s negotiating process was dominated by the US and other emerging powers that negotiated behind closed doors, which contradicted the requirement to build universal consensus among all member states. In this context, the paper-thin consensus that was reached was not a meaningful contribution to addressing climate change, and in any case was achieved through financial inducements rather than moral and intellectual leadership.

From the beginning, the Copenhagen Conference was plagued by criticisms that the process unfairly favoured the developed world. On 8 December 2009 a leaked internal document worked on by Denmark, the US and the UK, titled the 'Danish text' proposed dramatic changes that would provide increased power to the core states and marginalise the UN. This included climate change financing controlled by the World Bank and the abandonment of the Kyoto Protocol, which was to be replaced by a new system that would impose increased restrictions upon the developing world. Some parties were aware of the text but the majority of the 192 members – especially those from the developing world – were not. With the divide between two tracks already quite entrenched, a document from the host nation that appeared to suit the interests of the developed world brought even more tensions to the conference. The chair of the summit, Connie Hedegaard, was replaced by the Danish Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who was then replaced by UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, following protests over the Copenhagen Accord proposal. The rotating chair was a manoeuvre to placate disgruntled parties but also indicated that those members had legitimate concerns over the process that marginalised so many state actors.

To circumvent the slow process of genuine consensus building the Copenhagen leadership chose to marginalise the majority of the delegates in favour of the richest member delegates. As highlighted above, when the negotiating process became gridlocked between the United States and other like-minded parties on one side, in direct opposition to the G-77+ along with China and India on the other, the chair decided to create a smaller group of 28 to work on a text that would elicit consensus from all 192 countries. This group consisted of parties mostly from the developed world with representation also from the emerging economies and those most vulnerable to the effects of climate changes like the Maldives and Bangladesh. This group whittled down a document of over 60 pages to that of 2 ½ pages, after going through it paragraph by paragraph. This process was unheard of, especially considering those negotiating were mostly heads-of-state. However, the key issue was the lack of representation; this small group represented less than a sixth of the parties in attendance at COP15. Furthermore, with the promise of substantial adaption finance from the developed world, a significant amount of leverage was imposed upon the least developed countries.

The Copenhagen Accord that came out of an eleventh hour meeting between Obama and the BASIC parties is further evidence of this process of marginalisation. This meeting revealed the façade of a consensus process and became an unconcealed exertion of power from these states. Leading core members like the EU, Australia, Canada and Japan as well as the remaining members of the G-77+ were side-lined while the United States and the BASICs negotiated an agreement on behalf of the rest of world. This act was indicative of the United States and the BASICs willingness to disregard institutional norms and procedures, especially the commitment to consensus building in order to lock-down an agreement that achieved their own policy goals. Yet this was also symptomatic of the broader array of global institutions that favour the powerful actors over inclusive and transparent processes. As a result of these institutional failings at Copenhagen, the legitimacy of the institution and its agreement was undermined. Liberal institutions can only operate on the basis of participation and legitimacy. The fact that so many of the delegates were marginalised and that the final document was drafted by a handful of member states destroyed any chance that the Copenhagen Accord and the UNFCCC process would maintain any semblance of legitimacy amongst the global community. The institution itself was tarnished by actions that took place at Copenhagen.

Crucially, this conference revealed how dysfunctional the UNFCCC had become. In previous meetings, the US, with support from other core states and key global civil society actors, could control the agenda, whilst appearing to respect institutional processes by garnering support from other state actors through its hegemonic capacities. In a more fragmented world order, characterised by a diffusion of power to other states and the fluid relations between non-state actors, this was no longer the case. Moreover, the United States as the hegemon was both incapable and unwilling to introduce substantial reforms to the UN consensus approach in the UNFCCC. It is incapable by the very fact that its leadership capacity was undermined and therefore could no longer rely on the legitimacy needed to advocate for and execute structural reform without the acquiescence of allied state actors from the core and emergent state actors like China, India and Brazil. The circumnavigation of the negotiating process for an ad hoc deal between the BASICs and the United States indicates that the Obama Administration abandoned any semblance of leadership in building consensus, and instead relied on techniques of marginalisation and coercion to achieve a deal. The failure of the Copenhagen Conference is evidence of clear dysfunction and the difficulties in building agreement, but also the dim prospects for



institutional reform. Because any change would substantially dilute the centrality of the US, structural reforms were an undesirable prospect for the United States and all it was left with were residual powers to achieve an ineffectual agreement.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter analysed the incapacity for the United States to reproduce hegemony in responding to one of world's most fundamental socio-economic and environmental crises facing humanity: climate change. The inability to produce a legally-binding result from the 2009 Copenhagen Conference was the a key example of the limitations and contradictions of the climate change management system and was emblematic of the morbid symptoms of the wider organic crisis of US hegemony. Internally, the United States' Congress and the fossil fuel industry resisted any direct legal limitations on carbon emissions, especially without reciprocal restrictions placed upon the emerging economies. Externally, environmentalist NGOs and corporate actors have exerted varying degrees of influence and thereby limited the agency of the United States within the UNFCCC. The influence of the United States diminished significantly vis-à-vis other actors, especially the emerging economies where economic leverage could not be exercised.

Multipolarity appeared to fill the void left by the United States' declining hegemonic role. However, although different groupings of state actors emerged, they have proved incapable of reaching consensus amongst a wider global community. These groupings were formed through shared interests, yet these interests came into direct opposition with other state-based coalitions. Building general agreement amongst such a fragmented situation is inherently problematic. Yet, during the Obama Administration, the United States remained the key player in this forum. It was one of the leading polluters and the largest national economy so its role in negotiations was crucial. The residual nature of its hegemony and the absence of any alternative allowed the United States to continue to play a role as leader by default, albeit without an ability to represent a general interest of the wider community. With the rise of multipolarity, competing self-interests returned and the capacity to build a consensus based on general interests was difficult. The Copenhagen Accord, at best, represented a symbolic achievement, and at worst, a non-

binding document that lacked a genuine consensus and was inadequate in reducing global carbon emissions. The multipolarity evident at Copenhagen did not represent an alternative to US hegemony, nor is it a stable condition of 'after hegemony', but rather it indicated the organic crisis afflicting US hegemony where oppositional social forces openly challenge the system and institutional dysfunction is commonplace.

Institutionally, despite the continuation of the rules, norms and ideological commitment to market-based solutions, state-based institutions like the UNFCCC presented only a façade of participation and consensus-building. Copenhagen demonstrated how the process favours the wealthiest states, yet also how many state actors are challenging and resisting the institutional legitimacy of this process. The Obama Administration could not and would not reform the UNFCCC. The structural inadequacies of this institutional framework were heightened under the hegemonic decline of the United States and the absence of any new hegemon and accompanying historical structure to replace it.

For a climate regime to achieve its aims of reducing GHG emissions it will have to involve all key actors – state and non-state – in a framework that prioritises the stability of the world's ecosystem. Overcoming the challenge of climate change will require the collective effort of state actors and social forces to transform how the world economy functions. In the final year of the Obama administration, the United States and China led an overwhelming majority of delegates to ratify the Paris Agreement. A key pillar of the new accord was a universal commitment by all signatories to reduce carbon emissions to avoid a global temperature rise of 2°C on pre-industrial levels. However, the agreement was characterised by the same flaws as the Copenhagen Conference. The absence of accountability mechanisms or clear mandates meant that states' commitments lacked substance. Obama still did not have the support of the Congress so ratified the treaty as an executive order in September 2016 (later overturned by a counter-executive order by his successor, Donald Trump). Carbon markets were a key element of the agreement. The climate movement was not included in the process and remained highly critical of governments' responses to reduce carbon emissions. This demonstrated that not much had changed. The Copenhagen Conference and multilateral responses to climate change during the Obama Administration were limited by the residual hegemony of the United States and the organic crisis of this hegemonic order.

## Chapter 5

### The Organic Crisis and the G20 Response to the Global Financial Crisis

The 2007 collapse of the American sub-prime mortgage market set off a series of aftershocks that led to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Due to the centrality of the US in the global financial system, a local banking crisis within the national boundaries of the United States could not be contained, resulting in the collapse of financial giants including Lehman Brothers and Northern Rock. From Wall Street, the *New York Times* reported that, on 29 September 2008, the New York Stock Exchange recorded a loss of USD \$1.2 trillion during the height of the crisis (Bajaj and Grynbaum, 2008). Meanwhile, the resulting bankruptcy of all three private banks in Iceland led to a complete economic meltdown and a long-term political crisis of legitimacy. Even though other national economies in Europe did not undergo a complete banking collapse like Iceland, they endured varying levels of economic downturn, leading to widespread corporate bankruptcies and government bail-outs. According to a working paper prepared for the World Bank (Ökter-Robe and Podpiera, 2013), approximately 28 million people worldwide became unemployed from 2007 onwards bringing the total of unemployed by 2012 to 197 million. The report further noted that since the GFC, 47-84 million were reduced to living in extreme poverty by 2012. Notably, the paper also raised concerns about political cohesion resulting from the declining capacity of governments to provide welfare for vulnerable people.

In this context, the GFC profoundly challenged the ideological mantra of neo-liberal financialisation and global deregulation led by the United States since the Reagan-era of the 1980s. Crucially, neo-liberal policies caused a wave of financial innovations that shifted power from traditional banks to financial markets (Cassis, 2010). Credit default swaps (CDS), for example, allowed financial actors to buy and sell financial derivatives against the default of a bond, and this practice sat at the heart of the shadow-banking world. Non-bank financial actors could independently buy and sell CDS directly and in private without a clearinghouse or an exchange. At the precipice of the GFC, CDS activity was valued at USD \$60,000 billion, and with very limited regulation financial actors, big

and small, were caught out when the crash came (Helleiner and Pagliari, 2009, pp. 278 - 279). The GFC thus exposed the vulnerabilities and weaknesses in the global financial architecture that was centred in the United States. For countries like China and Japan, it was in form of treasury bonds that propped up the deficits of the United States. Geoffrey Garrett (2010, p. 29), puts it another way: 'The global financial crisis (GFC) was born in the United States of too loose money and too lax regulation, aided and abetted by China's willingness to provide credit to America seemingly without limit.'

The United States and other core states in Europe that acted as financial magnets for the rest of the world, were so ravaged by the GFC that they alone could not address the financial demands necessary to correct the crisis. The advanced economies of the G7 looked to the G20 to become the 'premier forum' in addressing and co-ordinating a response. The forum would serve the dual purpose of coordinating policies of national governments and global institutions in order to provide stimulus packages and reform the fundamental flaws in the global financial system.

During the G20 summits beginning in Washington in November 2008, there was an increased role for and leadership from the emerging economies of China, India and Brazil. These states played key roles in developing a response through the G20. This was a situation where states from the core and semi-periphery were able to employ multilateralism to directly address the short-term challenges that the GFC presented, and, ideally, establish the foundations for long-term reform to avoid such a situation occurring again. Mark Beeson and Stephen Bell (2009) have argued that the involvement of the G20 in responding to the GFC is indicative of a change in relations between the emerging economies and United States. Beeson and Bell argue that the G20 represents the emergence of 'relational hegemony' that involves a fundamental shift in the power dynamics that exist within hegemonic institutions, diluting the dominance of the core states led by the United States and favouring the emerging economies. Cammack (2012) goes further in proposing that the G20 response to the GFC marks a fundamental shift in global management and exponentially increased the emerging economies' role and authority in the Bretton Woods' institutions. Furthermore, the inclusion of emerging states in addressing the deficiencies of the financial architecture introduced and managed by United States suggested that there could be an opportunity for fundamental reform or even wholesale re-structuring of the financial system.

However, the global response of the G20, the actions of the emerging economies and the reforms of the IMF did not unravel the neo-liberal project, but instead acted as fortification of global capitalism. Despite emerging states taking on a more prominent position in global financial institutions, they adopted the ideological logic or ‘common sense’ of global capitalism. As Beeson and Bell (2009, p. 68) write, the ‘G-20 does not mark a fundamental departure from US or group hegemony’; indeed, ‘the ideas and positions endorsed within the G-20 are broadly neo-liberal in character’. Absorbing subaltern actors into the leadership was characterised by Gramsci as *transformismo* and was used by the hegemon as a means of co-opting rebellion and resistance (Gramsci, 2012, p. 58). Although the emerging economies had a seat at the table, they did not significantly alter the turbulent and deregulated nature of the financial architecture.

In this chapter, I will argue that the G20 response to the Global Financial Crisis represents a shift from the centrality of the United States in global finance. However, the associated disintegration of the US’ moral and intellectual leadership also brought with it an act of *transformismo* as the fundamental framework of global financialisation remained intact. Despite the G20 representing a more inclusionary form of multilateralism, the limitations and contradictions of the system remained, and only served to further highlight the organic crisis of US hegemony. In the first section, I will examine how the GFC damaged the ideological logic of neo-liberalism and the Washington Consensus which saw the rise of state-based intervention in economic management as modelled by the emerging economies. However, as this model remained premised on the ‘common-sense’ of global capitalism, the ideological leadership of the US was simply replaced with competing approaches to capital accumulation.

In the second section, I will examine the role of non-state economic actors and civil society organisations in shaping G20 responses. The Business 20 or the B20 acted as an organic intellectual that was well regarded at G20 summits and worked towards buttressing the architecture of global finance. In many regards, the B20 acted as an ‘insider’, providing ideological advocacy and input into the positions developed within the G20 summits. Conversely, civil society organisations were largely ineffectual in the G20 response. As an oppositional social force, these organisations struggled to challenge US hegemony and its neo-liberal ideology in global finance. These non-state actors were

institutionalised by the G20 through the creation of Civil 20 or C20, but their role in comparison to B20 was minimal. Organisations that were anti-capitalist, rejected the legitimacy of the G20 and openly critical of the processes of financialisation organised protests and resistance to the G20 response, but their capacity to provide an alternative narrative or influence the decision-making of delegates was minimal as well. However, they did represent a growing counter-hegemonic movement that has rejected the neo-liberal project in notable flashpoints like the global Occupy Movement.

The third section will examine the significance of the G20 as an institution of economic leadership. Despite the G20 addressing the short-term challenges of the GFC, the structural limitations of this governance model was proven to be ineffectual in fostering the reform to national regulations needed to prevent future financial crises. The G20 was an attempt to evolve and expand a hegemonic institution (the G8). Despite some successes, by the end of the Obama Administration, the G20's influence and relevance had waned. The United States did not seek to revive its potency as it would invariably result in a shared or expanded form of global management. This situation would mean a diminished role for the US and that level of adjustment and accommodation of emerging economies was unacceptable. Ultimately, despite multilateral cooperation and ongoing acceptance of finance capitalism, the G20 response to the GFC simply revealed that US' hegemony was in a residual form, with its economic ideology discredited, and subject to an imperative to share power with emerging strategic rivals.

### **The Death of the Washington Consensus/Long Live Global Capitalism**

The G20 was an expression of the increased role of the emerging economies in the world economy and, therefore, the changed power dynamics in inter-state relations. The G20 was presented as a flexible forum with the capacity to evolve from a finance ministers meeting to a leaders' summit with relative ease. President Obama actively acknowledged that the crisis could only be addressed through collaborative action: 'I think there's broad recognition that in the midst of the greatest crisis we have seen since the 30s that governments are going to have to act, and certainly the US does not intend to act alone – and we are not' (Wintour, 2009). By incorporating states from the North and South, there was an increased legitimacy in the international community through a diversity of

representation. However, the emerging economies, especially China, India and Brazil, did not automatically yield to Western leadership. Rather, the leading members from the Global South sought to address the global crisis of unstable financialisation with regulatory reforms that reflected their state interventionist economic models. These three states were quite supportive of open markets and economic growth which meant that they sought reform of the financial institutional structure rather than a complete reimagining of how financial markets operated. The Brazilian finance minister at the time, Guido Mantega, spoke in favour of a collaborative approach: ‘there is consensus that we need coordinated action to deal with the crisis’ (UN, 2009). Andrew Cooper (2010) has argued that the G20 evolved into a ‘steering committee’ when responding to global crisis due to its expanded membership, which is reflective of the re-centring of the global economy from the West and towards the emerging market economies. This steering committee emerged from negotiated trade-offs, including an informal deal that promised reforms to the global financial architecture and to address the implicit imbalances within membership structures of the Bretton Woods institutions (Cooper, 2010, p. 751). Subsequently, the G20 became a forum to negotiate and build consensus in an expanded form that took on the shape of what Beeson and Bell describe as ‘relational hegemony’ based on general ideological agreement on fundamental principles, while allowing room for differing management strategies based on a shift in inter-state exchanges, revising perspectives on authority and changes in resource investment from member states.

The G20 summits brought the emerging economies to the table and with them different approaches to state intervention in the world economy. The G20 London statement included the need for increased voice for the emerging economies and leadership that was ‘open, transparent and merit-based selection process’ (G20, 2009, p. 6). This reflected frustrations with the exclusion of the emerging economies from the leadership in the IMF and the World Bank and the voting systems in these institutions. For years, emerging economies and developing countries pushed for IMF reform of the weighted quota voting system based on investment from member countries, with the United States holding default veto power over policy. The G20 provided an opportunity for countries like China and India to participate in steering the global economy and challenge neo-liberal approaches that held sway in global economic institutions. The inclusion of the emerging economies thus indicated an ideological movement away from the Washington Consensus, but an ongoing commitment to state-led forms of capitalism.

### *The End of the Washington Consensus and the Rise of State-based Capitalism*

In 1989, British economist, John Williamson, coined the term the ‘Washington Consensus’ to describe the economic policies that were commonly agreed to in addressing the economic deficiencies of Latin America, referring to the US city where the US Treasury, IMF and World Bank were headquartered. The Washington Consensus included 10 agenda items, most notably deregulation of trade barriers and the privatisation of state enterprises and public services. The IMF expanded the Washington Consensus to be a prescriptive recipe that had to be adopted by any heavily indebted government from the periphery and semi-periphery seeking a rescue loan package. This was a form of coercion as these indebted states had little option but to accede to these IMF conditions.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States and other core states triumphantly claimed that neo-liberal economic policies in trade, finance and national economic governance were superior to all other economic models. However, as a result of a series of economic crises culminating in the GFC, the moral and intellectual prestige of the Washington Consensus’ mantra of deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation was damaged and state-led forms of capitalism involving active intervention from the state, once again came to the fore. Critiques of the Washington Consensus were not new. Scholars have argued that the Washington Consensus worsened the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis rather than address the core problems (Stiglitz, 2002, pp. 89 – 132; Harvey, 2009, pp. 162 - 163). However, following the GFC, the reputation of the Washington Consensus was drastically tarnished. Based on these experiences with ‘structural adjustment’, the emerging economies and developing countries of the G20 rejected the Washington Consensus and adopted state intervention models supported by increased international regulation as the new common good.

The G20 summits became a forum where this new ideological logic was advocated and formally communicated. New initiatives included increased surveillance measures to the IMF strongly encouraged central bank governors and finance ministers to implement more comprehensive safety nets in national policy to address vulnerabilities to ‘financial



volatility'. State-based forms of economic governance from the emerging economies remained anti-protectionist and committed to open markets and growth, but the central idea was that governments must play a pivotal role in managing the structure of the global financial institutions. A key example of this shift away from the Washington Consensus was the increased regulation through Basel III, which brought about significant banking reform that included greater national oversight (including regulation of the shadow banking system) whilst maintaining the fundamentals of the capitalist world economy (Luckhurst, 2012, p. 745).

According to Randall Germain (2010, p. 105), the interactions of financial flows can be described as a 'duality of material *and* ideational' links (*italics in the original*) where international relations, the politics of globalisation and national regulatory power engage simultaneously to shape the global financial architecture. Material capabilities cannot be neatly separated from ideas because ideologies condition the appropriate use and movement of resources and the appropriate regulation of capital. This shift toward state-led capitalism was precipitated by the economic growth and robustness of the emerging economies during the GFC. However, the emerging economies continued with an ideological attachment to a broad capitalist agenda and maintained the fundamental structures of the financial architecture, with an increased role in providing liquidity, supervising the financial system and rebranding the IMF as a vehicle to support the LICs (low-income countries).

The plan put forth from the 2009 London Summit included increased USD \$850 billion funding to the IMF (USD \$250 billion for Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) allocations, USD \$100 billion for Multilateral Development Banks and USD \$500 billion for flexible borrowing arrangements) and the introduction of the Financial Stability Board (FSB) to replace the Financial Stability Forum (FSF). The increased funds included special support for the poorest economies to assist with growth and rebuilding their national economies. The transition to the FSB was to work with the IMF as a monitoring mechanism and to impose increased regulation upon the financial system and financial actors, including hedge funds. The FSB was also supposed to spell the end for the opaqueness of the banking world or as the statement read: 'the era of banking secrecy is over' (G20, 2009). This two-pronged strategy of increased liquidity and assurances of greater regulation

brought calm to financial markets and was combined with coordinated strategies by the financial ministers and central bank governors in stimulus packages.

The residual hegemony of the United States was evident in the reframing of the IMF and the plans for increased regulation. The push for greater regulation and the upgrading of the IMF to 'support growth in emerging market and developing countries' was indicative of the enhanced role of the BRICS in the G20 negotiations. The Leaders' Statement from the London Summit (G20, 2009) contained language worth sharing here. First, there was a reversal in focus and almost an admission that poor leadership and oversight from the core economies was the leading cause of the GFC. The statement read: 'Major failures in the financial sector and in financial regulation and supervision were fundamental causes of the crisis'. This statement could only be seen as rebuke from the emerging economies against the weak system implemented and managed by the core. This narrative was not voiced in past responses to crises because usually the focus was on poor decision-making of (periphery) governments. Criticisms of the system also extended to the poor and inconsistent management of the credit rating agencies that would now be required to adhere to an 'international code of good practice'.

The London Summit was intended to provide the FSB with increased regulation and monitoring of the financial sector that would include greater compensation, 'corporate social responsibility' and decrease excessive leveraging. The rise of this 'international code' is also an indictment of the neo-liberal approach of the United States and its ad hoc global management of the financial system, primarily through the decisions of the chairman of the Federal Reserve and the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). This shift away from the US model had been occurring since the late 1990s, with global institutions like the IMF, the Financial Stability Forum, as well as regional banking authorities in Asia and Europe developing a complex web of norms, rules and regulations. As Germain (2010, p. 75) notes, 'what unites these developments thematically is that in their own ways each new development incrementally dilutes American influence and further extends the international web of global governance'. The introduction of the Financial Stability Board and targeted criticism of past practices was a cementing of the need for more financial management and a rejection of the US-centric deregulation model.

The second reversal was in the economic focus on development led by the BRICS. The G20's push to maintain the fundamentals of capitalism in open markets, enhanced liquidity and prosperity was balanced with a mandate that economic growth must be 'indivisible', promoting a vision for inclusive wealth-creation 'not just in developed countries' (G20, 2009). The London Summit included USD \$50 billion in support for the poorest LDCs and increased investment in food security. This drive from the emerging economies for increased support for the poorest countries indicated a shift to 'developmental liberalism' (Cammack, 2012).

The 2010 G20 Summit in Seoul saw the introduction of the Seoul Action Plan that included representation and quota reform, initiating a 6 per cent shift in quota shares to the emerging and developing countries whilst not marginalising the poorest LICs. In December 2010, the IMF Board of Governors introduced a reform package based on the Seoul Action Plan where quotas were increased by 100 per cent and a six per cent reallocation of quota shares to the emerging and developing economies. This shift saw China become the third largest member in the IMF behind the United States and Japan, while within the top ten largest shareholders in the IMF four were now from the emerging and developing economies (China, India, Brazil and Russia). Despite this, the United States retained their veto rights with a 16.52 total voting share. In relation to the World Bank, an extra \$86 billion was allocated for loans to address the recovery from the GFC for low-income and developing countries and greater representation was granted to the emerging economies through increased voting power by 3.13 per cent (World Bank, 2010).

Third, the emerging economies model of growth and regulation became more attractive vis-à-vis the core economies that appeared unstable and stagnant. No longer would the world seriously accept the neo-liberal Washington Consensus as the panacea to financial crises. Neo-liberal globalisation as a project was in a condition of what Eric Helleiner (2010, pp. 627 -630) described as a 'legitimacy crisis'. The emerging economies, especially Brazil, advocated for the core states to consider the regulatory measures undertaken by the emerging economies as a model of growth and resilience during times of financial crisis. In an interview during the October 2008 Washington Summit, Brazilian Finance Minister, and at the time G20 Chairman, Guido Mantega, scolded the advanced countries for allowing the 'irrationality' of herd behaviour and panic in

financial markets, noting that ‘the advanced countries are facing that irrationality...[while] Brazil has solid financial institutions, and Brazil does not have a problem with subprime investments’ (IMF, 2008). He even claimed that the emerging economies would benefit in the post-crisis financial world: ‘After the crisis, these emerging countries can even be benefited by the situation, because we provide more opportunities for yields to solid investments and offer better conditions for investments than in advanced countries.’ The neo-liberal leadership of the US in global finance came to an end but clearly a commitment to global capitalism remained.

### *Transformismo in the Emerging Economies*

The act of co-opting opposition into an expanded form of leadership is described by Gramsci as the process of ‘transformismo’ or transformation. In his *Prison Notebooks* (2012, p. 58 – 59), he writes that this process ‘involved the gradual but continuous absorption, achieved by methods which varied in their effectiveness, of the active elements produced by allied groups – and even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile’. This situation cannot be separated from a ‘passive revolution’ in that the leadership have internalised the ideology of the hegemon but the masses or subaltern classes have not adopted similar organic links as they did not receive any of the benefits that the ruling classes enjoyed through *transformismo*. This process is not universal nor consistent in its absorption of resistant groups and these points of assimilation happen at the ‘molecular’ or individual level. This implies that the methods of *transformismo* and the experiences in that process are unique to the specific groupings. The broader outcome of the general adoption of the hegemon’s world view, or common sense, can be applied across the spectrum to the different groups joining with the expanded form of hegemony.

Since the 1980s, the United States and the other core states have used hegemonic institutions, most notably the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank, to coerce the emerging and developing economies into the neo-liberal economic framework. This process has been uneven, with resistance from the emerging economies to privatisation, deregulation of capital controls, and trade liberalisation, especially in relation to the treatment of agriculture in the WTO negotiations rounds, where China and India led walk-outs in the

Seattle and Doha Rounds. These tensions surfaced as a result of the double standards expressed by the US and the EU in maintaining agricultural trade barriers while demanding the opening of trade in areas where they had a comparative advantage. The IMF, and to a lesser extent the World Bank, under the leadership of the US and other core economies provided loans to periphery economies with the rigid conditions of the Washington Consensus. Loan recipients had to introduce Structural Adjustment Plans and later Conditional Loans, which included substantially reducing social welfare, investing exclusively in export-oriented industries and adopting the policy of trade barrier liberalisation (Stiglitz, 2002, pp. 89 - 132). These policies, along with the economic crises that followed, drove the periphery and the emerging economies away, resulting in many economies on the verge of squaring their debts or even paying back their loan in full early.

Before the GFC, the emerging economies had been pushing for an increased role in the Bretton Woods institutions, especially the IMF, while also advocating for a change in the quota system used in allocating board member seats. As result of the GFC, there has been a shift toward the emerging economies as it became apparent that they were vital in addressing the crisis and as the engines of growth in the global economic recovery. The increased role given to the IMF, especially in relation to monitoring co-ordination and in developing new loan packages, and the presence of the emerging economies in the leadership of the IMF have influenced the ideological direction and focus away from the Washington Consensus (Beeson and Bell, 2009, p. 78; Cammack, 2012, p. 9). Engagement with the Bretton Woods institutions and in the G20 has created an opportunity for molecular change that created mutual evolutions in the emerging economies and in hegemonic institutions.

First, despite their policies of selective protectionism, the emerging economies have used the G20 to issue communiques that have advocated neo-liberal measures including open borders, a rejection of protectionism and the application of austerity policies. One of the main pledges from the London Leaders' Summit was to 'promote global trade and investment and reject protectionism, to underpin prosperity'. This was supported with a commitment to provide USD \$250 billion in trade finance and to conclude the Doha Round of WTO negotiations that are 'ambitious and balanced'. The 'balanced' part of that line is important – it indicates the need to have a WTO and free-trade that works fairly for all parties, taking into account that the past disputes in trade negotiations need

to be settled but that the demands of the emerging economies also need to be respected. This commitment to open borders is a continuation of neo-liberal practices of the hegemonic institutions of the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. As Beeson and Bell (2009, p. 75) note, these emerging economies, despite their domestic practices of targeted protectionism, must compete in a global economy that is fundamentally based on capitalist principles: 'policies of neo-liberal openness are prerequisites for participation in trade and especially the financial flows of the world economy'.

As the emerging economies have expanded, they have sought market, land and labour access to continue their growth. Policies that promote free markets were beneficial for them due to their strong market position for tradable goods. The process of opening borders in the South for the emerging economies is a key point of reference. Before and after the GFC, China invested a lot of capital into parts of Africa, investing in productive land, cheap labour, and accessing burgeoning markets. According to the China Africa Research Initiative (2016) Chinese construction contracts in Africa brought in revenue of USD \$19 billion in 2008, USD \$28 billion in 2009, USD \$35 billion in 2010. Bi-lateral trade between Africa and China was over USD \$100 billion in 2008, dropping in 2009, but increasing to over past \$150 billion in 2011.

All members of the G20 have benefited from global capitalism and have a direct interest in maintaining the system's key components for further benefit. As Steven Slaughter (2015) has argued, in addition to functioning as a forum for policy co-ordination, the G20 acts as a platform to legitimise global capitalism. It may have moved away from the Washington Consensus after the GFC, but it did not depart from the fundamental principles of capitalism and therefore became a primary institutional node for its perpetuation. In the terms of complex-Gramscianism, as the economic policies of the emerging economies economic appeared to be superior in capital accumulation and in resilience to financial shocks – their type of capitalism became a lightning rod or a 'strange attractor'. Indeed, even the IMF shifted toward advocating this form of capitalism, partially renouncing its past neo-liberal policies. In 2016, an IMF paper posited that the economic benefits of neo-liberal economics have been 'oversold' and that such a system was prone to 'economic volatility and crisis frequency' (Ostry, Loungani and Furceri, 2016). Then-IMF deputy managing director, John Lipsky (2009, p. 349) praised the economic efforts of leading Asian economies: 'the resilience of Asian

economies in crisis, their substantial contributions to global growth in recent years and the region's importance in international capital flows are underpinning the transformation of international fora'. After the GFC, the IMF realigned its economic policies to reflect this model of capitalism, especially in relation to increased regulation and monitoring.

Yet, at the same time a continued commitment to some neo-liberal policies was evident in G20 communiqués, notably in the advocacy of austerity measures. At the Bussan, South Korea summit of financial ministers and bank governors in June 2010, the communiqué issued the necessity for governments to maintain 'sustainable public finances' and must 'accelerate the pace of consolidation' of these austerity policies (Reuters, 2010). The following 2010 G20 leaders' summit in Toronto reinforced the necessity of reducing deficits in the advanced countries by half by 2013, and of stabilising or reducing government debt to GDP ratios by 2016. Then-managing director of the IMF Dominique Strauss-Kahn announced in 2010 that public debt in the core states would increase to 35 percent on average and would reach 110 per cent by 2014. He then clarified the IMF's position that austerity would be the way forward for the next two decades: 'Therefore, for the next decade or two, cyclical upswings should be used to reduce public debt, rather than finance expenditure increases or tax cuts' (Waki, 2010). This commitment to austerity was representative of ongoing attachment to neo-liberal approaches in global institutions, but these austerity measures were now levelled at the advanced countries of the West. After the GFC, the most vulnerable European states like Greece, Portugal and Spain faced increased pressure from IMF and the G20 to dismantle welfare protections in the name of fiscal consolidation, economic growth and financial stability. As the target of neo-liberal policies were the advanced economies and not the periphery - in this instance - the emerging states were supportive of such measures and allowed the continuation of these practices.

The second mutual evolution between emerging states and global economic institutions was that they worked together to increase monitoring and reporting in an effort to make the financial system more accountable. The 2009 Pittsburgh Summit introduced the Mutual Assessment Process (MAP), a mechanism that would monitor how national governments are co-ordinating the recommendations of the G20 summits on a domestic level. MAP (IMF, 2011) would be monitored through the IMF with their staff providing technical analysis of policy co-ordination and providing progress reports from member

states. The work of the IMF in MAP involved providing a report to the meeting of G20 finance ministers, then following the decisions from this meeting, the IMF would provide more in-depth analysis of how medium-term goals can be achieved through policy co-ordination. The G20 ministers would then refine their policy co-ordination goals which would then be reported on by the IMF staff. This process of engagement increased the role of the IMF in national economies and created organic links between this Bretton Woods institution and the G20. But it was not a one-sided affair where one actor was ideologically absorbed into the other. The IMF was also changed by the process: the MAPs also examined social concerns, including providing support for unemployment and other safety nets. The GFC brought together Western states committed to neo-liberalism, emerging economies focused on state-led growth, and global institutions ruptured by financial crises. They were all changed by it.

In an IMF Umbrella Report to the G20 (IMF, 2011), there were some key points that indicated a changing perspective from the IMF and the emerging economies. The report criticised the core economies for financial instability: ‘In particular, there is now considerable uncertainty about how fiscal sustainability will be achieved in the United States, Japan, and some euro area economies.’ This assessment is based on poor policy implementation from the core through either policy jams in national democratic processes (as in the case of the United States) or in misguided policy decision-making (as in the case of Japan). The report praised the economic growth of the emerging economies, yet also warned against overly optimistic projections in the future. It called for action from the seven economies that had significant savings reserves to stimulate the global economy. The fiscal imbalances between these countries and the West, driven largely by trade imbalances, was a key factor in the lack of immediate recovery in many Western states and one of the reasons why the emerging economies maintained a more stable and resilient financial situation after immediate shock of the GFC. As the core economies suffered due to the collapse of their financial innovations, the more traditional forms of national banking in the emerging economies did not provide enough liquidity to save the world from the Great Recession. In the meantime, the IMF changed its neo-liberal tune, calling for increased state intervention to address financial imbalances and avoid market failures from distortions and incorrect pricing of risk.



Finally, after the GFC the G20 became an equalising forum as the larger group of states voiced their visions, concerns and shaped policy. Unlike the Managing Director of the IMF, which is usually a European, and the President of the World Bank, which is usually an American, the G20 has a rotating leadership depending on the host country and holds strong representation from the emerging and developing countries. This administrative process allowed a variety of states to work within the role and thereby provide an increased voice and agenda setting powers that shaped policy decision-making during summits. This was seen in commitments to support economic growth in low-income and developing economies through loans, investment and future opportunities in trade relations. Furthermore, the summit communiqués repeatedly provided clauses on sustainability and balanced growth that sought to bridge the growing economic divide between the advanced economies and the periphery/semi-periphery economies (G20, 2009; G20 2010; Cammack, 2011, p. 8).

This commitment to the Global South indicated a power-shift in relations between the core and the emerging economies. Yet this was not a universal and linear decline of authority for the US and other Western states. As Cooper (2010, p. 750) has argued, the G20 can be characterised by its adaptability and the fact that the members involved, especially the key actors from the global North and South, are willing to be pragmatic in order to achieve diplomatic results through carefully deliberated negotiations. The United States, the United Kingdom, China and India have all demonstrated flexibility and pragmatism while negotiating responses to the GFC in those first years. However, this flexibility and pragmatism is also indicative of the ideological convergence that has been achieved between the core economies and their emerging counterparts (Beeson and Bell, 2009, pp. 76 – 78; Kamel, 2014). There was a general acceptance of the capitalist structure, and the G20 evolved into a platform of managing, reforming and adjusting processes to facilitate the free flow of trade, financial flows and commercial ventures. The G20 has also endured much criticism for being an expanded club for the leading economies at the expense of the marginalised – low-income economies and even European economies like the Netherlands. During the GFC, the United Nations' more inclusive approach to addressing crises, offering to host a global financial response summit, was disregarded by the G20 members in favour of their club approach. *Transformismo* became entrenched in the G20 in its ad hoc and pragmatic approach that resolutely situated itself under a common ideological umbrella.

Following the devastation of the GFC, and the rise of the G20 to address this crisis, we witnessed an ideological shift from the neo-liberal Washington Consensus to the state interventionist approach of the emerging economies. This was uneven and incomplete, yet it degraded the moral and intellectual leadership of the US. The GFC exposed the inherent limitations and contradictions of the ideological logic of neo-liberal globalisation and the Western approach to economic management. The alternative approach of the emerging economies was not a radical departure from neo-liberalism, but rather a form of state-interventionist capitalism that clung to some of the same policies. Management of the global economy expanded to include leading emerging economies, most notably China, India and Brazil, but their integration did not lead to dramatic reforms to a capitalist system that benefitted them. The GFC and its aftermath demonstrates that the moral and intellectual leadership of the US was damaged, but its neo-liberal ideology continued to circulate through a residual hegemonic network. Yet, it also demonstrates the importance of non-state actors in challenging US hegemony and the structural contradictions of the financial system that the US was no longer able to reconcile.

### **Non-State Actors and the G20: Insiders and the Marginalised**

Global conferences and summits have been sites of resistance and protest for many organisations, most notably the G8, the World Economic Forum (WEF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiation rounds. Following the crisis meetings of the G20 when it formulated its response to the GFC, the G20 attempted to reach out to the various elements of civil society, and this process eventually developed into institutionalised groups or ‘social partners’. These groups have been categorised into various specialised fields – Business 20/B20, Civil 20/C20, Labour 20/L20, Youth 20/Y20, Think Tanks and Academics 20/T20 and last, Women 20/W20. Just like the G20, these groups do not have a permanent committee (other than the Labour 20 which has a formalised leadership structure through the global union movement) and are formed through the actions of the G20 presidency of the host government for that particular year.

The global organic crisis of the US hegemonic order has involved a severe decline in legitimacy provided by the subaltern masses. The creation of these ‘outreach partners’

were a response to address this legitimacy problem. The G20 was an expanded version of the G8, but despite representing over 80 per cent of the world economy, a representation problem remained as its membership was limited to just 20 leading economies and thereby excluded the majority of states and their populations across the world, especially in the periphery and semi-periphery zones. The G20's policy communications and subsequent implementation processes needed to be critically accepted by the wider social forces in order to be advocated and ideologically internalised within national contexts where these recommendations become government regulations. The G20 was still in its earliest stages of emergence and its legitimacy needed increased entrenchment within civil society to build what DeLanda (2006) has described as an 'assemblage'. As discussed in Chapter 2, assemblage theory describes how a large social institution is developed through different social practices (rules, norms, values) that are built up on different scales from the local to the global. This only occurs through critical consciousness and an ideological internalisation of the legitimacy of the institution or organisation. However, the G20 processes demonstrated that some social partners were more valued than others. During the GFC, the G20 partnered with the B20 in order to ensure support from key economic actors in the implementation of their policy recommendations. Conversely, other social partners, especially those critical of existing structures of global finance, were marginalised and their contributions limited. This uneven engagement with different social forces challenged the legitimacy of the G20 and its capacity to be recognised as a socially beneficial governance mechanism when addressing global crises like the GFC.

### *Engagement with the Business 20*

It was in 2009 at the World Economic Forum where the then-chairman of the HSBC, Stephen Green, proposed a global organisation or branch of the G20 for 'focused dialogue between businesses and international policy-makers on an international scale'. This proposition was backed by the British government and was seen as a means to avoid a return to protectionist economic policies (Larsen, 2009). By the Toronto summit in 2010, the B20 was formally institutionalised into G20 processes. The B20 is structured to have a chair with targeted taskforces led by co-chairs in issue-areas such as trade and investment, energy, climate and resource efficiency and financing growth. For instance,

the 2014 Brisbane B20 chair was then-Wesfarmers CEO, Richard Goyder with taskforces in trade, infrastructure and investment, financing growth, human capital and the anti-corruption working group. The B20 membership is not limited to the banking sector, rather participants are from varied corporate sectors. From a logistical point of view, the B20 is co-ordinated to maximise influence over world leaders in their deliberations during a G20 summit. That is, the B20 has either met close to the same time as the world leaders, to ensure access and direct lobbying, or they have prepared their agenda months in advance to clearly communicate to these leaders where they stand on policy priorities. Since 2010, host governments have increased and deepened their partnership with the B20 to ensure a collaborative relationship with key corporate actors.

During and after the GFC, the B20 functioned as a network of organic intellectuals connected to the G20, which was ideologically integrated as a partner and advocate of global capitalism. Participants of the B20 considered their relationship with the G20 to be a critical avenue for developing policy in a global context, and for ensuring that proposed regulations do not curtail capital accumulation in cross-border economic relations. Rimmer (2015, pp. 188 - 189) argues that the 'B20 process is seen by the business community as an investment, and is consequently the best-resourced engagement group, usually by several orders of magnitude...The quality of the policy interventions it makes is invariably strong'. Considering the global reach of corporate actors and their close relations with national governments, the economic leverage that the B20 holds is significant and ideologically aligned with the agenda of the G20 to safeguard ongoing economic growth. These organic links, established through a shared 'common sense', fostered a deep partnership between the B20 and the G20.

This deepening collaboration between government and corporate elites is nowhere better demonstrated than in the person of Bill Gates. Cooper (2013, pp. 186 – 187) describes Gates as the 'ultra-insider' whose role in the G20 grew substantially, beginning in his position in the 'crisis committee ambit (with a focus on detailed proposals for a financial transaction tax)' to the 'Gates Foundation reaching the point of having a *de facto* sherpa [a personal representative in the G20, usually only reserved for heads of state or a national government] in the G20 process (Geoff Lamb, a former senior official with the World Bank). Bill Gates was further commissioned by French president Nicolas Sarkozy, to write a report on innovative financing for development.' Even though Gates is only one

individual, he is emblematic of the access afforded to leading corporate elites and their close workings with governments in developing policy. Scholar Nicole Aschoff (2015) has described elites like Bill Gates as the new prophets of capital and the work with his wife, Melinda Gates, through the Gates Foundation as ‘philanthrocapitalism’: a form of charity work that provides a social good that is also profitable. This charter is quite appealing to political leaders, especially because Bill Gates has framed his approach as one that will ‘generate profits for business and votes for politicians’ (quoted in Aschoff, 2015, p. 108).

The intellectual value and political capital of the B20 can be demonstrated by the number and identities of its attendees. No other G20 engagement group has been attended by a range of world leaders. Notably, at the 2010 Seoul G20 summit Korean president Lee Myung-Bak, Australian prime minister Julia Gillard, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, British prime minister David Cameron, German chancellor Angela Merkel, Japanese prime minister Naoto Kan and South African president Jacob Zuma were all present at the B20 meeting. In the context of the G20, the global business community emerged as a transnational class fraction with a broad set of common objectives in shaping the G20 response to the GFC in ways that maintain open trade borders, and ensure any financial regulation does not stifle ready access to credit. At the 2014 Brisbane G20 summit, the B20 Financing Growth Taskforce was quite forthcoming: the ‘B20 would like to collaborate with the global standard setters to address the immediate issues and also set out a longer-term framework for ensuring more co-ordinated implementation of current and future globally-agreed standards.’ The B20 thus contributed to and legitimised the G20’s responses to the GFC and its the ‘steering’ of the global economy. This was possible because of the insider status afforded the B20 and the economic leverage that corporate actors hold over the global economy and with national governments. As Madeline Koch (2016) phrases it, ‘one aspect of the B20 is that it can hold the G20 responsible for its promises’, which involved a scorecard that the International Chamber of Commerce produces to rate G20 initiatives. This privileged treatment was not lost on the other G20 social partners. Slaughter (2019, p. 43) notes that many of these delegates were well aware that their inclusion was primarily because ‘G20 needing to include business to be effective with its policy agenda which necessitated civil society and unions needing to also be included for the G20 to be perceived as legitimate and fair’.

### *Civil Society 20: Co-option and Marginalisation*

As an oppositional social force that challenges US hegemony, civil society organisations and social movements turned their attention to the G20 when it emerged as the centre of crisis policymaking. Of the alphabet soup of social partners in the G20 (Labour 20, Youth 20, Think Tank and Academics 20, Women 20), the Civil 20 has the greatest capacity to build broad public legitimacy (Labour 20 does have a broad appeal to workers but the changed social relations with unions in industrial economies have weakened their reach). Civil society organisations informally engaged with the G20 from the time the summits became a meeting point for world leaders to address the GFC. This was largely in the form of protests and ad hoc meetings that took place between large global civil society organisations like Oxfam. However, in 2013, in a stroke of profound irony, Russian president, Vladimir Putin, institutionally established a C20. Putin saw an opportunity to work with global civil society organisations to develop a dialogue and build broader legitimacy for G20 initiatives. That is, the C20 was created as a strategy to defuse challenges to the legitimacy of a global actor that could be perceived as exclusive and unrepresentative. Consequently, these ‘social partners’ were used as a means to legitimate the G20 without fundamentally reforming it to address key social issues like poverty, climate change and labour insecurities, including mass unemployment. Or as Slaughter (2013, p. 76) puts it, ‘the G20 has offered few structures for public engagement of the public’s member states or NGOs. In short, avenues of public participation, consultation, or input into the ‘G’ system have been minimal.’

According to Tristen Naylor (2012), at the 2012 Los Cabos summit in Mexico, ‘civil society’s inclusion remained limited. CSOs remained relatively marginalized in the summit process, particularly compared to the relatively new B20.’ And this is where the C20 remained during most summits – on the fringes with minimal input and due regard from the G20 participants. The more marque civil society organisations, including Oxfam and the International Red Cross, did have opportunities to meet with delegations or leaders to discuss key issues, but this did not translate into tangible policy results in the G20. The C20’s most significant victory came in 2013 when the G20, urged by the emerging economies and civil society organisations, adopted the narrative of ‘inclusive growth’ in their communique. Slaughter, who interviewed a number of C20 delegates, noted how this was universally perceived as a substantial victory in changing the language

of the G20 (Slaughter, 2019, p. 43). Relatively speaking, this language of inclusion was a significant step compared to the first G20 summit meeting in Washington, where the NGO alliance, the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) were completely denied any form of access to not only world leaders but to the actual conference itself (Cooper, 2013, p. 184).

Over time, the C20 became an institutionalised feature of the G20 summits. At each summit meeting, they released their own communiques that focused on what can be done in the future to improve the conditions of marginalised people, but also how the C20 can work with the G20 to achieve improvements in these areas. Access was still an ongoing issue, especially in comparison to the insider status of the B20, but the leading C20 organisations like Oxfam were afforded opportunities to meet with leading delegates of the host governments at G20 summits and occasionally to meet with world leaders to discuss what issue areas needed to be addressed by the G20 as a steering committee. Yet, the inclusion of a few large civils society organisations creates its own problems of representation. During the GFC, the only organisations that were afforded insider status were those that acknowledged the legitimacy of the institution and did not overtly criticise the ideological logic or ‘common sense’ of the G20. As Slaughter (2019, p. 46) puts it, ‘while the [C20] made their impact felt on particular policy issues, they certainly did not have the power and influence to challenge the overall framework of power and ideology which informed G20 deliberations.’ Unlike the NGOs that successfully changed the language and worldview of delegates at the COP15 climate change negotiations, the organisations of the C20 did not demonstrate a capacity to provide a challenge to the moral and intellectual authority of the G20.

In sum, these civil society organisations were incapable of fundamentally challenging or significantly impacting the policy process as their contributions were severely limited and narrowly defined within an ideological paradigm suited to the needs of the G20. The civil society organisations that worked with the G20 were absorbed into an integrative process to develop a controlled multi-layered network of legitimacy that would feed into the summits, yet would not function as authentic contributors nor have the capacity to directly hold the G20 to account. The C20 was primarily a vehicle to legitimate the G20 in the public sphere by presenting these summits as more inclusive and representative of the global community. Yet by limiting the scope and influence of the civil society

organisations, their role was so hollow that their capacity to extend the social currency of legitimacy to the summits was also quite minimal. Social partners like the C20 were created to address accusations that the G20 functioned as an exclusive club primarily concerned with economic growth instead of addressing the harsh economic realities for ordinary people created by GFC. By marginalising and limiting the C20, the G20 in many regards continued to perpetuate this persona.

### *Marginalisation of Resistance Organisations*

On the outside of the G20 were the organisations and individuals that rejected the legitimacy and ideological common sense of these summits. These protest movements attempted to build a broad alliance of non-state actors committed to social justice and challenged the role of the G20 in perpetuating capitalist exploitation. However, as I will argue below, despite representing broad social resistance to the global financial system and the continuation of this form of capitalism, the movement itself was limited in scope and had minimal impact upon the G20 or in reforming the global financial system.

These movements against the G20 struggled in their ‘war of position’ as attempts to ideologically integrate supporters beyond their targeted protests were not successful. Despite maintaining some connections to transnational movements (notably members from the World Social Forum), the protests that met each summit were decidedly local in character. For each summit, local social justice groups would meet, co-ordinate and decide upon the different actions that they would take. These have included direct protests against the summits at their locations, marches through the streets, alternative meetings that would offer alternative solutions to those offered by the G20 in the communiqués, workshops and even short concerts (Staggenborg, 2015). Even though these protest events would take on different forms in the different cities of the host governments, they were united by a few common threads: (i) rejecting the undemocratic and unrepresentative nature of the G20; (ii) a concern that this forum was not addressing the fundamental problems in the system – mass inequalities of wealth, the marginalisation of minorities and the existential threats to the environment; and more generally (iii) that the G20 was a powerful capitalist actor that needed to be resisted. The protests in 2012 Los Cabos, Mexico led by the alter-globalisation movement succinctly summed up this



notion: ‘we do not recognise the legitimacy of the G20...we are aware that this group is a fact of world power and, for this reason, Mexican and world society must organise in order to ensure that its voice is also heard in this space.’ (quoted in Ulfgard and Jaime, 2014, p. 1537).

The first world leader G20 summit in Washington, 2008, did not elicit a strong political response from these social movements. However, by the London summit the following year, large-scale protests met the G20 leaders in full force. These actions targeted the financial district of London, including the storming a Royal Bank of Scotland branch. Running battles between a portion of the protesters and riot police came out in force across the streets of London. The Toronto summit was also plagued by clashes between protesters and police, where over 1,000 people were detained (Poell and Borra, 2011). These protests rejected not only the legitimacy of the G20, but also the capitalist solutions of economic growth and the maintenance of free trade (Ulfgard and Jaime, 2014). Indeed, protests movements that have targeted G20 are part of wider social force that is seeking to challenge the power structures of the US hegemonic order and present an anti-capitalist alternative path.

In many regards, the G20 protests shared some similarities to the protests that have plagued the climate change COP meetings, especially at Copenhagen. These protests were large with a diversity of organisations involved that collectively sought a reframing of the ideological common sense of a multilateral organisation. Unlike the environmental protests that targeted the COP meetings, however, the G20 protests were weak in key areas. The G20 summit protests were very localised and disjointed from a larger global movement that could organise masses on a transnational level. The climate movement was an ongoing movement that used COP meetings to target as a means to promote their agenda and scrutinise political outcomes. Conversely, the G20 protests formed coalitions and different activist groups for the specific purpose of opposing the G20. As the G20 summit was the primary focus, these coalitions and activist grouping struggled to maintain momentum following the end of the summit beyond a year (Wood, Staggenborg, Stalker and Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2017). Each summit would be met by protests that were organised by local committees that would devote months to preparations on the different actions they would take. In some circumstances, these local groups would organise competing and different actions, reflecting their lack of communication and different

political priorities. This lack of coordination and communication was epitomised at the Pittsburgh summit where different organisations organised actions simultaneously, which meant that G-6 Billion organised a march and rally at the exact same time as the Bail Out for the People rally in a different location. At this same summit, organisations built three separate tent cities to highlight different issues of concern (Staggenborg, 2015, p. 400). Rachel Kutz-Flamenbaum and Brittany Duncan (2015, p. 189) have countered that the local approach to the G20 protests may in fact have been a positive strategy. They argue that portions of the Pittsburgh G20 protests organised by local anarchist groups were intentionally local in order to build an open community and engage with an alternative form of cosmopolitanism that ‘embraced diversity and inclusivity but focused on the local’. These grass-roots actions achieved local success in building community awareness on the issues of economic justice. Despite such locally specific success, the global movement itself during these years had a fragmented character that struggled to build transnational links to become a global counter-hegemonic social force.

Another weakness of the G20 protests was the absence of a coherent unified over-arching message. Initially, the G20 protests had a clear objective of combating neo-liberal capitalism and the financialisation of the world economy. These protests evolved into a broad spectrum of acts of resistance that focused on different areas including the mistreatment of women, the marginalisation of indigenous peoples, the destruction of the environment and growing concerns over climate change, world poverty and labour rights. For instance, at the Brisbane 2014 G20 summit there was a pro-Ukraine protest and a counter pro-Russia or Ruستراليا rally, an anti-capitalist People’s March and pro-capitalist Tax Payers Alliance rally, as well as a Brisbane Sovereign Aboriginal Embassy occupation (Ouldin, 2014). This diversifying of the protest movements’ narrative ultimately led to a substantial diluting of what these protests represented other than being against the legitimacy of the G20. A diversified movement that resists G20 was inevitable, and there is strength in bringing together social justice organisations that narrow-cast into niche issue areas as contributors to the greater whole. But without some level of co-ordination at such rallies, their impact cannot reach into shifting G20 policy.

The complete rejection of the legitimacy of the G20, the localised nature of these protests and the absence of specific objectives had a direct impact upon the capacity to influence the summit’s delegates. These protests took on a combative paradigm between activists

and the summit. Subsequently, host governments sought to contain the protests and minimise their impact. The 2010 Seoul Summit exemplifies this approach of containment by controlling the space where activists could protest and ensuring that this location was at least two kilometres away from the summit (Cooper, 2013, p. 194). With the absence of a global movement that could evolve into a consolidated social force, the delegates of the G20 had no motivation to listen and consider the demands of these protesters.

Yet these movements did not have much interest in influencing the G20 outcomes. Instead their focus was on challenging the undemocratic and unrepresentative existence of the G20 itself. But they were not very successful in fostering a mass movement and building a global multi-nodal network that could discredit the institution. In order to evolve into a social force that can significantly challenge the G20, they needed to develop an alternative narrative and ideology that can be organically internalised and communicated to a mass audience. For a movement to develop into a social force that has the capacity to present alternative visions to the subaltern groups of the world, multiple feedback loops must be developed through the building of common narratives, shared ideological values and global communications that strengthen local movements. These social relations create a global network that can organisationally and ideologically challenge the existing world order through presenting alternatives.

However, the early G20 protests had some success in disrupting the reproduction of an expanded form of capitalist hegemony. Not least, it contributed to an environment of resistance that helped to spawn other protest movements, most notably, the Occupy protest movements that began at Wall Street, New York in September 2011. Within a month of the occupation in Wall Street protests exploded across 900 different cities around the world (Addley, 2011). The movement articulated a divide between the '1%' representing the global elite and the '99%' that are exploited for profit. The anger in these cities across the world was profound and surfaced the growing distrust of political elites and the perception that they were beholden to corporate interests. The GFC thus exposed and deepened the organic crisis of the capitalist hegemony. It revealed that the US' weakened economic position in this context did not mean the end of capitalist hegemony, but rather its morphing into an expanded and more state-led variant that would do little to address issues of social justice. Consequently, the structural contradictions and limitations of global finance were left largely unchanged.

## **The Structural Limitations of the G20**

The establishment of the G20 was an attempt to develop positive feedback loops in the multi-nodal network of capitalist hegemony with the clear intention to establish an ingrained institutional process for leading the world economy through a flexible but unified multilateral organisation. It sought to be a new governance model that ideologically guided states in reforming national regulatory frameworks that extended the hegemonic network built by United States. However, the fact that the G20 was incapable of fundamentally reforming the global financial system indicates that the organic crisis of the US hegemonic order was not ameliorated by its creation. Despite a relative decline, Wall Street remained the epicentre of the global financial architecture. Despite Obama's loud pronouncements of fixing Wall Street, ultimately he decided to bailout the banks and introduced only limited reforms (Stiglitz, 2010, pp. 109 – 146). After the GFC, it became quite apparent that Obama was incapable and unwilling to reform the G20 or create an alternative global institution to address the current problems in global finance. Consequently, the G20's loose institutional structure hampered its efforts and it lost relevance as a so-called 'steering committee'.

During the Obama Administration, the G20 had little institutional structure. Unlike established multilateral institutions, epitomised by the United Nations and its six principal organs, the G20 did not have a permanent location, permanent staff or ongoing leadership structure to maintain monitoring and implementation of its recommendations. Its relevance was solely based upon its yearly meetings and summit statements. It lacked substance in the most literal sense of personnel or an executive board. Each year the host government (with support from the previous host government and the next host government – the 'troika') took on the presidency and set the institutional structure, engagement with social partners and focus for the summit. The G20 did not even have its own website – each year a new one had to be created by the host government. The influence of the G20 can only be measured through the meetings and the post-summit communiques and/or statements in relation to participation and conscious acknowledgement that these events hold long-term implications. As the host country was also the chair, it was up to that national government to provide the infrastructure and communications necessary for the summit. This ad hoc system was very flexible, but was also lacking in organisational direction and depth. Even though the host country was the

chair, this was a rather empty title when considering the real substance of the summits came from the negotiations between the member states, invitees, international organisations and the so-called G2: the United States and China.

Garrett (2010, p. 37) notes that the G20 suited both the United States and China quite well. China could take on a global leadership role through a multilateral platform as its material capabilities grew. While, conversely, the United States, could use the expanded group hegemony that the G20 provided as a means to maintain leadership while sharing and coordinating the burden of fixing the global economy. Both states exercised unofficial veto power in negotiations without appearing as a roadblock to diplomacy. The relevance of the G20 during the GFC years was twofold: (i) it was a forum for policy co-ordination in maintaining the global financial architecture; and (ii) it was a representation of co-operative state power where neither the US nor China could hold total authority. The absence of a formal leadership, institutional depth and accountability measures resulted in the G20 producing inconsistent results that are largely associated with how far and how well states implement the recommendations from the communiqués. This looseness undermined its capacity as a steering committee for the global economy. The G20 contained a declining hegemonic core and emergent state actors tentatively testing the boundaries of their increased role in multilateral organisations. By the end of the Obama Administration, the relevancy of the G20 declined considerably, which is indicated by the uneven implementation and national regulation of policy recommendations.

Implementation of G20 recommendations has been protracted, uneven and the reform initiatives have been geared towards a refinement of the financial system rather than an overhauling to address its systemic risks and crisis-prone structure. For instance, Basel III offered an opportunity to ensure that banks were sufficiently capitalised to avoid or absorb financial shocks. However, resistance from Europe and the United States to implementing such measures undermined the capacity for Basel III to be effective, especially considering they represented two significant poles in the global financial architecture (Helleiner, 2011, p. 3). As Angelique Leondis (2009, p. 318) notes, national regulators struggle to implement reforms when they run counter to the domestic interests of national financial systems. During this time of organic crisis, it was more beneficial to the core states and the emerging economies to maintain an unstable system rather than

introduce reforms that would disadvantage their respective domestic financial systems in the short term.

Multilateral actors including the IMF and the FSB were given increased powers in relation to monitoring yet this did not translate into regulation that could curb behaviour or reduce risk through ongoing financial innovations. In the absence of global treaties, these safeguards could only be realised through the actions of national governments. Member states from the G20 acted individually to provide stimulus packages and undertake regulatory reforms. As noted by Germain (2010, p. 91), the main work in addressing financial crises in the long-term lies in national policies. The G20 summits introduced increased supervision, an increased role for the IMF, and a more proactive FSB, but accountability for financial markets and financial actors through networked flows and processes could only come from national regulatory practices. According to Giulio Napolitano (2011, p. 326), the United States led by example through the introduction of legislation like the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, which attempted to close opportunities to leverage credit through non-traditional means, provide greater regulation on financial firms, increased oversight, and empowered regulators to make firms and/or individuals accountable for acts of financial fraud. Europe followed suit with the introduction of a European System of Financial Supervisors. In the developing world, as well as providing stimulus packages, governments also engaged in counter-cyclical fiscal spending through expanding social security, shoring up social sector spending, and with high fiscal savings they were able to target social spending through re-directed fiscal resources (Harrison and Sepúlveda, 2011, p. 436). The emerging economies already had strict regulation of their respective national financial systems and, unlike their core economy counterparts, relied on more traditional forms of banking and finance. However, these actions did not result in a decrease in financial risk nor has it limited fluctuations and fluidity of global financial markets (Roubini and Mihm, 2011, pp. 276 – 301). Patchy national regulation of financial markets was no substitute for global financial reform, and, even with the increased role of the FSB on capital requirements on banks, there remained a decided absence of formal supranational authority to intervene to stem damaging volatility and turbulence of financial markets.

In relation to rejecting protectionism, these promises were not forthcoming from a number of state members of the G20. Between 2008 and 2011, 356 discriminatory

measures were introduced worldwide, with detrimental acts outnumbering favourable by four to one (Napolitano, 2011, p. 331). A tit-for-tat case emerged between China and the United States when Obama imposed a 35 per cent tariff on Chinese tyre imports. China responded by taking the US to the WTO over anti-dumping laws in relation to chicken and auto parts (Garrett, 2010, pp. 35 -36). Non-tariff forms of protectionism increased in popularity amongst the core economies, including subsidies. Ha Joon Chang (2009) has noted that since the GFC a number of Western countries provided 'green' subsidies to bailout car manufacturers, using loopholes in WTO rules to do so. These actions exposed the double-standards of the core economies in their protectionist measures, but also demonstrate 'that the present world trading system is not working'. Ultimately, the G20 efforts to reduce protectionism were uneven; they avoided a global seizure in trade flows but discriminatory measures also increased worldwide, including between the two largest economies – the United States and China. The residual hegemony of the United States, carrying the baggage of its discredited neo-liberal prescriptions, was indicated by its reduced capacity to influence state actors to avoid protectionist measures. China, in particular, could now easily withstand the coercive tactics of the United States.

Regulation of large-scale financial actors that transcend national borders was also an ongoing concern for the G20. These global systemically-important financial institutions (G-SIFIs) including JP Morgan Chase, the Bank of China, Barclays, BNP Paribas, Morgan Stanley, Royal Bank of Canada and the ING Bank are financial actors that were so large, complex and integrated that they were seen as being essential to the ongoing maintenance of the financial system. G20 summits proposed macroprudential reforms that increased regulation and monitoring of these institutions to avoid a repeat of financial volatility from increased moral hazard and drastic bailouts that would overly-burden government budgets. The 2011 G20 Cannes summit introduced an initiative where the FSB would closely monitor a list of 29 identified G-SIFIs and require them to: (i) hold increased levels of capital; and (ii) have 'recovery and resolution planning' to avoid financial shock.

This initiative was flawed on two counts. First, the requirements placed upon the G-SIFIs needed to be implemented through national legislation rather than international law. That required full co-operation from host governments, which was not forthcoming, especially in Europe. Second, the monitoring system allowed these G-SIFIs to remain 'too big to

fail’, which increased the likelihood of a return to moral hazard as these institutions enjoyed the fail-safe option. A more effective alternative would have been to break up these institutions to ensure that no financial actor is ‘systemically important’. This proposal would require a global treaty, and would be waylaid by significant diplomatic tensions and confrontations, but would directly address the problem posed by G-SIFIs rather than rely on a system of supervision that will struggle to be accountable on a global-scale (Helleiner, 2011, pp. 3- 5).

Imposing regulations and restrictions upon large-scale financial actors was quite problematic when considering how the national governance of the financial architecture is undertaken as a public-private enterprise. Germain (2010) has discussed how this situation has emerged and has argued that financial market regulation require supports from private corporate actors. This public-private cooperation created a difficult role for governments in imposing proposed rules and regulations. As Germain (2010, p. 96) writes: ‘The financial system is becoming more hybridized in terms of its institutional makeup. Where private authority ends and public authority begins is exceedingly difficult to ascertain’. Given that financialisation has globalised, and operates perpetually, day and night, across the globe, these financial actors could easily avoid restrictive national regulations. Only a global system of financial regulation could address these concerns, yet the US and China chose not to lead in this direction. The United States is both incapable and unwilling to introduce necessary global reforms and the G20 is lacking in the structural depth to introduce regulations to dismantle the G-SIFIs. In so doing, they allowed the continuation of the contradictions and limitations of the financial system to continue relatively unabated. In this context, Sara Hsu (2012) has argued that the GFC and the ongoing absence of meaningful global regulations has created ‘larger vulnerabilities’ (Hsu, 2012, p. 496). Mauro Guillén (2015, pp. 181 - 183) agrees, arguing that the financial systems in the United States and Europe are ‘architects of collapse’ due to lack of regulation and the continuation of financial innovations that increase exposure to moral hazard.

The state intervention and leadership required to implement an institutional framework to control financial flows and provide a more stable global system was largely absent during and after the GFC. The G20 proved not to be structurally equipped to directly address this crisis nor did the leading delegates indicate a capacity to definitively respond to the GFC.



This institutional dysfunction meant that there were no significant initiatives taken to reduce the likelihood of another crisis or to develop a global response plan to minimise damage. The organic crisis in global finance remained because neither the US nor the emerging economies, individually or collectively, had enough power and legitimacy to develop and enact these initiatives. Yan Liang (2012) has argued that, since the end of World War Two, the ongoing maintenance of the financial system has been a burden placed upon the United States through the need to provide two essential functions: (i) to provide ongoing liquidity; and (ii) to manage that liquidity efficiently and effectively. When the GFC unfolded, the United States simply did not have the ability to provide the liquidity necessary to address the crisis. Sharing the responsibility through the platform of the G20, accompanied by negotiated trade-offs with the emerging economies, did redress this issue of liquidity and demonstrated the potential for the G20 to be a ‘steering committee’ for the Bretton Woods institutions. However, the G20’s lack of institutional structure and the uneven approach adopted by national regulators following summit statements indicates that the financial system remained exposed to future crises.

The response to the GFC, despite the policy co-ordination efforts of G20 and the IMF, was ad-hoc and dependent on national governments with different approaches and economic situations. Consequently, it did not address the inherent limitations and contradictions in global finance. Providing an alternative to the G20 approach, Gills asserts that:

This situation can only be rectified by radical measures that go to the real root causes of the crisis, that reverse the negative trends of the past several decades in terms of over-concentration of wealth, over-exploitation of labour and nature, and over-accumulation of capital combined with underconsumption for the majority. The crisis can only be rectified by restoring and rebuilding the necessary countervailing social forces that embody the socially self-protective responses to capital logic, and by re-establishing communal and social solidaristic ethos and identity at global level (Gills, 2010, p. 176).

Thomas Piketty (2014) concludes in his seminal book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* with the argument that private wealth reproduces itself faster than output or growth, which leads to generations of the wealthier rentier class dominating the labour classes but also resulting in reduced economic growth outcomes. Put another way, Piketty (2014, p. 746) claims that ‘the past devours the future’ – the generational wealth of the global elites will

continue to impose limitations upon economic growth *and* the working-class which will eventually prompt another economic crisis based upon this uneven system of exploitation and capital accumulation. The G20 as a forum for global economic governance did not make progress in addressing the gross concentration of wealth present across the world, nor did it reduce global imbalances between the deficit prone-West and the surplus-heavy emerging economies. The G20 was ultimately ill-equipped to provide global leadership in addressing the inherent problems that resulted in the GFC.

## **Conclusions**

The G20 response to the GFC has provided insights into inter-related areas of the organic crisis of United States' hegemony. The ideological common sense of the Washington Consensus was degraded and state-led global capitalism rose to prominence. In relation to the distribution of power, the emerging economies were able to secure increased representation in the IMF, World Bank and the FSB following the GFC and the response from the G20 summits. Furthermore, they have contributed to reforming these institutions to create increased powers in global financial supervision and in providing increased liquidity.

However, this shift in moral and intellectual leadership and in institutional representation should not be viewed as a dramatic overhauling of the global financial architecture or global capitalism in general. In fact, the G20 was effectively used as a forum to legitimise global capitalism; the initiatives proposed by the G20 only acted as incremental reforms. National implementation and co-ordination was only piece-meal in some areas. The emerging economies were absorbed into the broader ideological logic of capitalism in a process described by Gramsci as *transformismo* where emergent or rival actors are co-opted by the hegemon through promises of future rewards. The compromises negotiated in the G20 favoured the emerging economies but also allowed the financial architecture to remain largely intact.

The involvement of non-state actors was uneven in the G20. The B20 provided a central role in the G20 and its 'insider' status allowed it to reinforce the ideological legitimacy of the G20 communiqués. The B20 evolved into a key intellectual site for supporting

global capitalist responses through its organic linkages with governments. In contrast, the C20 was largely marginalised and afforded limited space to influence the policy developments of the G20. Any narrative from C20 organisations that diverged from the ideological common sense of the G20's was not welcomed and, therefore, the C20 had to tread a very careful path in working within the ideological paradigm of the G20 while also attempting to achieve their social justice objectives. Resistance movements that completely rejected the legitimacy of the G20 directly challenged this emergent global actor, but their internal limitations and marginalisation from host governments contained their impact as an oppositional social force. However, if we look beyond the G20 protests, these localised protests were part of wider protest movements that have some potential to form a counter-hegemonic social force.

In terms of the institutional function of the G20, its achievements were uneven, and regulation in shock-proofing the banking industry, eradicating the shadow banking industry and reducing the role of globally systemically-important financial institutions were not forthcoming. The G20 was a forum where co-operation and a broad ideological commitment to capitalism emerged. The structural absence of clear leadership and the lack of accountability in how national regulation was implemented reveals a key economic dimension of the organic crisis of US hegemony where the world is still residually bound by the imperatives of the declining hegemon while alternatives remain in their earliest stages. The G20 did not address the inherent problems in the financial architecture which has allowed the system to remain vulnerable to future financial crises. The imposition by the IMF and European Central Bank of harsh austerity measures indicates that neo-liberal prescriptions remained salient in some quarters. During the Obama Administration, the US hegemonic order was in organic crisis, and the emergent economies were ensnared by *transformismo*, which meant that the G20 summits were incapable of reforming the global financial system. All that the G20 was able to do was precipitate molecular changes in the world's biggest economic players that has opened up more possibilities for state intervention and regulation to deal with future crises.

# Conclusion

Complex-Gramscianism is an attempt to provide greater insight into the social relations that underpin hegemony in international relations. It applies Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony to the complex global and transnational networks and processes that have emerged over recent decades. At different times, all hegemonies experience crises that expose its structural contradictions and limitations and challenge their ability to apply consent and coercion to stabilise the system. Gramsci memorably described discrete crises that contribute to the broader organic crisis as 'morbid symptoms.' These morbid symptoms can come in varying and complex forms that emerge in one field, yet cascade across others through networks that are linked through social relations. This approach highlights that the institutional structures established by US hegemony in the post-war era have struggled to adapt to the emergent complexities in relations across the globe.

This thesis began with a central research question:

What do the Obama Administration's responses to global crises reveal about the condition of US hegemony in this period?

From the analysis of the previous case studies, it has become apparent that the organic crisis of the US hegemonic order is evident in the ways in which the Obama Administration exercised a residual form of hegemony when responding to multiple global crises. Obama made a conscious effort from the beginning of his campaign for presidency to be a global leader defined by liberal-democratic values, global co-operation and a progressive approach to addressing global challenges, including humanitarian intervention, climate change, and financial regulation. After eight years of the Obama Administration, the promised change did not materialise, limited by the realities of a US hegemonic order in organic crisis. Indeed, Obama's approach to leadership on the world stage both acknowledged the material limitations of American power by seeking accommodation and cooperation, and by deploying forms of coercion (with varying degrees of success) to sustain its primacy and achieve political goals. The missteps in Libya and the structural shortcomings of NATO and the UN Security Council resulted in

a failed Libyan state, increased terrorist activity, and undermined global responses to the Syrian Civil War. The inability to build consensus in the 2009 Copenhagen United Nations Climate Change Conference by bridging the competing interests of states at different levels of development, transnational corporations and civil society actors indicated an ideologically damaged and domestically hamstrung hegemon. The Global Financial Crisis of 2009 exposed the flaws in the neo-liberal logic of the Washington Consensus and the unregulated financialisation of the global economy. These global crises intersect and reveal a residual US hegemony plagued by diminished and disjointed ideological leadership, overt opposition to its hegemonic goals, and dysfunctional multilateral institutions.

The morbid symptoms of global crises manifest in varied forms and coalesce in an organic crisis that ultimately affects all layers of social relations, from the local to the global. In mapping the nature of this organic crisis, there are common patterns that indicate its severity during the Obama Administration: (i) the residual capacity of the US to exercise moral and intellectual leadership and increased levels of coercion to achieve its agenda and suppress emerging alternatives; (ii) the increased global complexity resulting in a multiplicity of challenges to US hegemony, namely oppositional social forces acting as emergent attractors with distinct alternative networks; and (iii) the inability and unwillingness for the US to reform multilateral organisations to adequately respond to global crises. In this conclusion, I will explain the condition of US hegemony during the Obama Administration using these three themes.

### **A Residual Capacity for Moral and Intellectual Leadership**

The reproduction of hegemony is largely based on the exercise of moral and intellectual leadership. Such leadership must be legitimated through the perception that the hegemon enjoys a *prestige* of material superiority and is providing a *common good* through a worldview that can be *ideologically integrated* with subaltern and allied groups. As the case studies have shown, the United States' moral and intellectual leadership was challenged and resisted in multilateral organisations from both an ideological and functional standpoint. Ideologically, the advocacy of neo-liberalism and the inherent benefits of the free market have been undermined by a history of financial crises. Neo-

liberalism was advocated as superior to Keynesianism because, ironically, it applied a form of governance upon economic, political and social relations that imposed the common sense of the market upon all interactions. However, following the Global Financial Crisis, as well financial crises in Asia, parts of Latin America and in the Eurozone, the ideological logic of neo-liberalism unravelled. The technocratic application of deregulation to allow a global free market based on the promise of endless growth could no longer be seen as an inherent common good. The GFC revealed how global financialisation increased economic instability and risk, with the world's biggest economy at the centre of the storm. As the *prestige* of the US' financial superiority declined, the emerging economies took on an increased role in directing and reforming global institutions, most notably in the World Bank and the IMF. These reforms rejected the Washington Consensus (especially in relation to the periphery), yet reinforced the continuation of global capitalism. In global finance, the emerging states, including China, India and Brazil, were integrated into a form of expanded hegemony or 'transformismo', adopting the same broad capitalist orientation of the core but with the United States' leadership role reduced dramatically. The Washington Consensus was on its deathbed but global capitalism endured.

The *ideological leadership* of US organic intellectuals was also diminished amongst subaltern actors. Take, for example, former Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, whose management of the global financial architecture created ripe conditions for the GFC by overseeing two financial bubbles – in financial assets and in housing. Krugman notes that Greenspan and other neo-liberal economists have refused to acknowledge the gaps in their analysis despite the history of financial crises. As Krugman (2012, p. 100) writes, 'For either Greenspan or Fama to admit how far off the rails finance theory went would be to admit that they had spent much of their careers pursuing a blind alley'. Greenspan's capacity to act as an organic intellectual for the United States was severely limited in the aftermath of the GFC.

Furthermore, the IMF, the central global institution that advocated for applying the principles of neo-liberalism to debt-ridden periphery and semi-periphery economies, had a change of heart. In 2016, the IMF declared on its website that the supposed common good of neo-liberalism had been 'oversold' and that policies like open markets and austerity have led to vulnerability to crises. Or as Jonathon Ostry, Prakash Loungani and

Davide Furceri (2016) put it, the difficult to measure benefits of neo-liberalism do not outweigh the ‘costs in terms of increased economic volatility and crisis frequency.’ In relation to austerity, this only increases inequalities: ‘Austerity policies not only generate substantial welfare costs due to supply-side channels, they also hurt demand—and thus worsen employment and unemployment.’ Neo-liberalism was no longer considered the panacea to the world’s ills and its former chief architects were either discredited or have acknowledged (some of) their errors in the past. This did not entail an existential challenge to capitalism, but instead a redirection towards increased state interventions and regulations, following the example of the emerging economies.

During the Obama Administration, the United States’ military interventions resulted in increased blowback that diminished its capacity to credibly present itself as acting for the *universal goods* of human rights, and international peace and security. During the 2011 civil war in Libya, the rebels welcomed US military support, but outright refused visible ground troops to work in collaboration with their cause. In this case, the use of the Responsibility to Protect principle was misleading as the intervention quickly morphed from protecting civilians into regime change. Consequently, the United States’ humanitarian leadership lost much credibility in the UN Security Council, damaging the prospects for intervention in Syria and the operation of the institution more broadly. Consequently, the Obama Administration was unable to revive the legitimacy of the United States as a defender of liberal-democracy, human rights, and peace and stability in the world, after decades of military interventions that have resulted in support for authoritarian regimes, human rights violations, and the rise of violent reactionary movements.

The intellectual defenders of the United States’ as the World’s Policeman were in steep decline. Human Rights Watch, an organisation with a history of being sympathetic to the Democratic Party (Weisbrot, 2016), provided a systematic critique of Obama’s human rights record, noting that: ‘The hopes behind his early receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize — that he would lead a new kind of U.S. foreign relations, built to a large extent on defending human rights — were left unfulfilled’ (Roth, 2016). *The Atlantic* similarly was sympathetic to Obama, publishing long-form interviews between the President and editor Jeffrey Goldberg between 2008 and 2016, including the much-discussed ‘Obama Doctrine’ (Goldberg, 2016). However, in April 2016 (the same month as the ‘Obama

Doctrine' interview) *The Atlantic* published a piece by Dominic Tierney (2016) highly critical of the Libyan Intervention and how Obama had followed the mistakes of past presidents, noting 'The Libya intervention marked the third time in a decade that Washington embraced regime change and then failed to plan for the consequences.' The article's central premise was that the United States cannot engage in regime change if it is not prepared to be part of a long-term stabilising process.

Yet, during the Obama Administration the United States remained the most military dominant state in the world. No other state had the capacity to maintain hundreds of military bases overseas, sustain involvement in multiple conflicts, and use its significant military advantage vis-à-vis the rest of the world for diplomatic leverage. The Obama years demonstrated, especially in the case of Libya, that no other state is capable of leading and managing a sustained large-scale conflict. The fatigue from long-term commitments to multiple conflicts and growing reluctance to engage in an on-the-ground war was also quite evident in the Obama years.

In a world of global complexity, material capabilities that outstrip all other state actors can put hegemonic power in dangerous positions. The global reach of US military bases, the leading role the US played in interventions and occupations, meant it was an attractive target for violent non-state actors that emerged from the global Salafi jihadist movement. As Urry (2003, p. 130) puts it, 'global complexity can thus be seen in the power of the powerless to inflict the most harm upon the institutions of imperial power'. The increased access to globalised networks of transport, technology and communications resulted in a multiplicity of challenges to the traditional forms of power, including military power. The utility of military material capabilities was no longer as clear in this context.

The Obama era will be remembered for witnessing the early attempts by state and non-state actors to diverge as strange attractors from the multi-nodal network of US hegemony. A multitude of alternative sources to the US' moral and intellectual leadership sought to challenge the capacity for the United States to re-build legitimacy as a world leader. This was demonstrated in WTO meetings, the UNFCCC and in the UN Security Council. China, along with other emerging powers formerly associated with the developing world, challenged United States' global leadership by presenting alternative approaches to their Atlantic counterparts. This was evident during the Copenhagen



Conference when the BASICs advocated an alternative ‘Kyoto Track’ model. In another instance, in late 2011 Brazil put forward the proposal of improving the norm of Responsibility to Protect by adding increased accountability to practice – Responsibility *while* Protecting (Kenkel and Stefan, 2016; Herz, 2014). This demonstrated the willingness of states to challenge the ideological leadership of the US by addressing the deficits of the Responsibility to Protect. After the Global Financial Crisis, the state interventionist approach, most closely associated with China, became the model of choice in economic management for governments around the world.

Furthermore, non-state actors demonstrated that the US, and state actors in general, do not hold a monopoly on moral and intellectual leadership. Non-state actors, especially in the area of global justice, have highlighted the plights of people around the world suffering under the policies of successive US administrations, gaining access to global institutions and attempting to hold governments to account. Organisations like Amnesty International were pivotal in defending human rights by investigating the actions of the United States, as well as other state actors through public scrutiny of human rights violations, building grass-roots letter writing campaigns and increasing their presence in multilateral institutions like the UN (Martens, 2011, pp. 52 – 57). Environmental NGOs were crucial in building a movement that educated publics across the world on the threat of climate change and the means by which this global crisis can be addressed. The World Social Forum (WSF) attempted to bring disparate movements together to build an umbrella group that is inherently anti-capitalist with the maxim ‘another world is possible’. As an alternative world order, this movement was in its infancy, but it represented an attempt to develop the social forces necessary to challenge the United States’ hegemonic order. At almost every major multilateral meeting of the G8, G20, WTO, IMF and the World Bank, delegates were met with protests demanding that multilateralism be couched in terms of human rights and global justice. Many civil society organisations and protest movements did not have a seat at the table of multilateral organisations, but they had the capacity to disrupt the ideological integration of US hegemony.

## **Global Complexity and Oppositional Social Forces**

Hegemonic orders are hierarchical multi-nodal networks reproduced by state actors and social forces that support and legitimise this order. The international order established by US hegemony was founded on inter-governmental institutions like the UN Security Council, NATO, the IMF and World Bank, yet their capacity to function was premised on the organic integration and legitimisation from key states, non-state actors and social forces (notably class fractions). During the Obama Administration, the development of heightened global complexity challenged the stability of these structures, as non-linear forces disrupted the institutions that underpinned the United States' hegemonic order. With the advancements of communication technology and transportation, oppositional social forces had the capacity to inflict severe damage to the networks of the US' hegemony whilst remaining fluid, transnational and resilient to traditional state responses.

The global insecurity caused by terrorist groups during the Obama Administration was indicative of how complex networks could undermine the hierarchies of US hegemony. In what Gramsci would describe as a 'war of manoeuvre' terrorist networks sought to directly confront key aspects of US hegemony as a form of open rebellion to the hegemonic order. The mobility or fluidity of these violent counter-hegemonic social forces completely defied the logic that mass violence is the monopoly of states. Global terrorism was the most dramatic example of the emerging over-lap between different 'worlds' or zones. Previously, in the post-World War 2 era, the core enjoyed peace and stability within their national borders whilst the periphery and semi-periphery continued to sporadically descend into forms of violence or were victims of external military aggression. The United States has engaged in many conflicts across the world, yet before the al Qaeda attacks upon the World Trade Centre in 2001, war had never been visited upon the US mainland. This trend of bringing violence upon the civilian populations of core states continued throughout the Obama's years in office. Many of these attacks were carried out by 'lone-wolf' terrorists, American citizens inspired or indoctrinated into the Salafi Jihadist movement online and carrying out terrorist attacks on unsuspecting civilian populations. Urry (2002, pp. 61 - 64) describes these acts of terror as the blurring of 'safe' and 'wild' zones. States (even the most powerful states) have found it more difficult to impose control over territorial space, especially when enemy combatants emerge from their own citizenry.

Global complexity is characterised by non-linear relations in far-from-equilibrium networks of ordered and disordered spaces that overlap and engage with each other in numerous and diverse settings. Power is now mediated through these networks and, despite the best efforts of neo-realist scholars, cannot be seen solely in terms of material capabilities between state actors. A call to arms for global justice or global jihad can equally be communicated across borders through various social media networks. The emergent qualities of strange attractors in differing contexts have the capacity to build alternative movements and challenges to the established world order. The depth and massification of a strange attractor indicates the magnitude of change this alternative movement can bring.

During the Obama Administration, emergent attractors overtly opposed the US, pulling away linkages in its hegemonic network. The Libyan intervention created a vacuum for global Salafi jihadism to flourish as a strange attractor with an ideology that transcended national identity. Terrorist organisations in Libya were not only able to disrupt state-building processes but expanded across the region to challenge neighbouring governments. They created instability and insecurity across the region, virtually guaranteeing that the new Libya could not integrate into the US hegemonic order. Furthermore, non-state actors and social forces now have an increased capacity to shape narratives and influence the actions of states in multilateral organisations. These global movements represent an ideological challenge to the hegemony of the US – providing alternative approaches to societal organisation. Gramsci would describe this as a ‘war of position’ to characterise how social forces build movements on an ideological basis in order to establish organic links with supporters who can consciously defend the movement. In relation to climate change, the global environmental movement systematically advocated for alternative solutions to the global climate management that unfolded in the UNFCCC. By the end of the Obama Administration, the legitimacy of the movement and their science-based alternatives, framed through the language of climate justice, significantly strengthened. Despite the G20 protests being highly localised and fragmented from a wider global movement, they were representative of a growing current of opposition to economic injustice. During the Obama years, the G20 protests were part of the building blocks that led to protest movements such as the Occupy movement. The expansion and vitality of these movements were representative of a growing distrust of

representative government and global capitalism generally. These social forces gained momentum as the legitimacy of the hegemonic order disintegrated from a cascade of multiple and enduring global crises.

Despite the changing conditions of power relations between actors, states remain key nodes in global networks of social relations. Yet, as Urry (2002, p. 67) notes, ‘states are forced to act as regulators, or gamekeepers, of networks and fluids’. States cannot act in isolation when they are responding to transnational forces that have the capacity to circumvent national borders. Global multilateral organisations must act cooperatively to address the challenges posed by global complexity as they have the capacity to limit, shape and guide global fluidity based on their capacity to develop laws, institutions and social systems around the world. From this angle, in addition to oppositional social forces, the US hegemonic order was undermined by the inability of multilateral institutions to address global crises.

### **The Dysfunction of Global Institutions and the Failure to Reform**

Multilateral organisations serve as an extension of hegemonic reproduction providing stability to historical structures through established rules and norms and ideological integration into the multi-nodal network of hegemony. As the previous case-studies have shown, in times of organic crisis the legitimacy and structural limitations of multilateral organisations are exposed to varied challenges. During the Obama Administration, the multilateral organisations formed by the US in the post-war world were severely limited by their incapacity to adequately address global crises. For the entirety of the Obama Administration, the United States remained central to multilateral management of global crises, but was not willing or able to carry out the necessary multilateral reforms to address global crises. The UNSC was plagued with inertia whilst conflicts and human-rights violations took place in places like Yemen, Palestine, Syria and across the world in the War on Terror. Global climate management was administered through the practice of carbon markets – a neo-liberal mechanism with a proven record of being inadequate in reducing GHG emissions. Global financial regulation was weak and inept in reducing financial risk in markets. As the central actor with the most experience in leadership, the United States and the Obama Administration were ideally placed to combat these

challenges through cooperative and transformative acts in multilateral institutions. Instead, the approach taken was one based upon the maintenance of US primacy and resistance to any reform that meant a diminished role for the United States. Obama reluctantly adapted to the changed geo-political realities of inter-state relations, especially in relation to the rise of China and other emerging state actors. However, he only did so by abandoning claims to the universal good and turned to coercive strategies to protect American economic and political interests.

From the cases, we can see that the cause of multilateralism was not advanced by the Obama Administration. The ratification of the 2015 Paris Agreement in final years of the Obama presidency was considered a triumph, especially in contrast to the Copenhagen Accord. However, upon closer investigation the Paris Agreement maintained similar flaws to its predecessor. The accord did have countries commit to restrain global temperature rises from exceeding 2°C of pre-industrial levels, yet policy-makers did not introduce adequate cuts to emissions. It evolved from the Copenhagen negotiations and contained many of the same limitations. It was the responsibility of signatories to manage their own carbon reductions – many did not live up to their commitments. The Libyan Intervention transformed the UNSC into an impotent security organisation. The Obama Administration never recovered its damaged reputation from the Libyan Intervention, resulting in the failure to pass any resolutions through the UNSC to intervene in the Syrian Civil War. And, finally, the fluctuations and erratic nature of global financialisation continued despite the devastation of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. The regulatory framework introduced through the stewardship of the G20 was structurally flawed and institutionally weak. As Paul Mason (2015, p. 5) noted, seven years after the GFC, the shadow banking system has been reassembled and expanded whilst global debt reached USD \$199 trillion growing by USD \$57 trillion.

From the perspective of US hegemony, the effectiveness of multilateralism was limited by the rise of emergent state actors, most notably China but also others including Brazil, India and South Africa. As the cases demonstrate, these states developed a capacity to resist American leadership and coercion in multilateral institutions – something that took place in global economic institutions such as the IMF and World Bank following the Global Financial Crisis, the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties at Copenhagen (COP15), and in the UN Security Council in addressing security crises. The emergence of

multipolarity within multilateral organisation did not induce more productive cooperation but rather hindered the capacity to address global crises.

Yet, the United States was determined to cling to its positions of privilege in multilateral institutions despite their dysfunction and global shifts in power relations. Minor reforms were introduced in the IMF and World Bank. China carved out an increased role, but the processes of capital accumulation were left unhindered by global regulation. There were ongoing discussions and varied proposals for reforming the UNSC but nothing concrete materialised. This is largely due to the United States and other members of the Permanent Five resistance to such propositions especially in relation to relinquishing veto power rights (Mahmood, 2013, pp. 130 – 131). The G20 provided the emerging states with a leading role but this forum waned in influence by the end of the Obama administration.

Major reforms to these organisations would invariably result in a diminished role for the United States— an adjustment that the Obama Administration never pursued with any commitment, despite much rhetoric on the need for enhanced cooperation. Consequently, forms of coercion were employed by the Obama administration to advance their agenda in multilateral organisations as its ability to build consensus declined. Economic inducements were used to buy consensus at COP15, fraud or the misrepresentation of intentions was used to facilitate the intervention of Libya, and the US’ considerable economic leverage was used within global economic institutions, including the G20, to ensure global regulations were off limits.

In sum, the organic crisis of United States’ hegemony was revealed most starkly in the dysfunction of multilateral institutions as a result of handicapped leadership and the absence of strong alternatives to guide reform. These multilateral institutions remain centred on state actors while social relations had become more complex and transnational in nature. Non-state actors gained an increased role in these institutions but rarely beyond an ‘observer status’ or as experts providing important technical advice. Non-state actors and the complexities of fluid movements of social, political, economic, financial and even climatic forces exposed the limitations of US hegemony. The Obama Administration was unable to resolve conflicts fought against relatively weak, yet globally connected enemies. The US was unable to correct financial instabilities that threatened to bring

down Wall Street. And perhaps most significantly, the Obama Administration was unable to lead the world toward the necessary action to address climate change.

### **Final thoughts on Residual Hegemony and the Obama Administration**

On 16 November 2016, Obama and his German counterpart, Angela Merkel released an op-ed in the German newspaper, *WirtschaftsWoche*, a German weekly business magazine (Obama and Merkel, 2016). The intention of Obama and Merkel was clear. Donald Trump had just won the presidential election based on a campaign of protectionism and right-wing populism. Even though the piece primarily focused on German-US relations, it essentially acted as a call to arms for core Western states to maintain their commitment to global liberalism and cooperation in security, migration and, most importantly, free trade. Obama and Merkel argued that: ‘the scope of global challenges has never had higher stakes, such cooperation is now more urgent than ever’ and that the world could not ever return to ‘a pre-globalized economy’.

It was understandable that Obama chose to write the piece with Merkel. Just over eight years previously, in Berlin, Obama had outlined what kind of global leader he had intended to be to a crowd of thousands that warmly welcomed his message of hope and cooperation. His first speech in Berlin, back in 2008, and his last joint statement with Merkel perfectly encapsulate the residual hegemony of the US and its organic crisis. This was one of Obama’s last attempts to present moral and intellectual leadership to a global audience premised on a worldview that advocated for Western-centric liberal-democracy and cooperation. The public façade presented by Obama lay in stark contrast to the realities of hegemonic decline during his two terms. Obama exercised coercive mechanisms on a regular basis when consent was increasingly not forthcoming. Furthermore, he was unable to overcome the fundamental challenges of providing leadership during times of organic crisis, namely addressing the most disruptive elements of global complexity through cooperation and rebuilding networks of consensus. This was largely due to the combined problem of resistant internal fragmentation from social forces within the United States and a clear unwillingness to make accommodations for cooperative actions that would inevitably entail diminished standing within key multilateral organisations.

In 2008, Obama's message of hope and cooperation was a catch-cry that enticed many to election booths. Once in power Obama was confronted with numerous challenges that he could not surmount during his time in office. The crises examined in the case studies provided a snapshot of the Obama Administration's responses when faced with challenges that required an inclusive form leadership. Cooperation with other states *and* non-state actors became increasingly important in addressing global crises. The diffusion of power and the increased challenges in managing globally complex networks undermined the capacity to exercise hegemony in the processes of global security, environmental management and global finance. The crises in these fields created severe ruptures that highlighted the broader organic crisis of US hegemony during the Obama Administration. By 2016 the message of hope had been revealed as a false promise. Effectively resolving global crises can only come from leadership willing to accommodate the changed power relations between states and non-state actors to build a new order premised on increased cooperation and the inclusion of actors at all levels. These accommodations were not present in the Obama administration and as a result the US was left with only a residual capacity to respond to global crises when the world required so much more.



## Appendix 1

### Annex I Countries to UN Framework Convention on Climate Change:

Australia	Monaco
Austria	Netherlands
Belarus	New Zealand
Belgium	Norway
Bulgaria	Poland
Canada	Portugal
Croatia	Romania
Czech Republic	Russian Federation
Denmark	Slovak Republic
European Union	Slovenia
Estonia	Spain
Finland	Sweden
France	Switzerland
Germany	Turkey
Greece	Ukraine
Hungary	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Iceland	United States of America
Ireland	
Italy	
Japan	
Latvia	
Liechtenstein	
Lithuania	
Luxembourg	

### Non-Annex I Countries to UN Framework Convention on Climate Change:

Afghanistan	Bahamas
Albania	Bahrain
Algeria	Bangladesh
Andorra	Barbados
Angola	Belize
Antigua and Barbuda	Benin
Argentina	Bhutan
Armenia	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)
Azerbaijan	Bosnia and Herzegovina

Non-Annex I Countries to UN Framework Convention on Climate Change continued:

Botswana	Guyana
Brazil	Haiti
Brunei Darussalam	Honduras
Burkina Faso	India
Burundi	Indonesia
Cabo Verde	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Cambodia	Iraq
Cameroon	Israel
Central African Republic	Jamaica
Chad	Jordan
Chile	Kazakhstan
China	Kenya
Colombia	Kiribati
Comoros	Kuwait
Congo	Kyrgyzstan
Cook Islands	Lao People's Democratic Republic
Costa Rica	Lebanon
Côte d'Ivoire	Lesotho
Cuba	Liberia
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Libya
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Madagascar
Djibouti	Malawi
Dominica	Malaysia
Dominican Republic	Maldives
Ecuador	Mali
Egypt	Marshall Islands
El Salvador	Mauritania
Equatorial Guinea	Mauritius
Eritrea	Mexico
Eswatini	Micronesia (Federated States of)
Ethiopia	Mongolia
Fiji	Montenegro
Gabon	Morocco
Gambia	Mozambique
Georgia	Myanmar
Ghana	Namibia
Grenada	Nauru
Guatemala	Nepal
Guinea	Nicaragua
Guinea-Bissau	Niger
	Nigeria

Non-Annex I Countries to UN Framework Convention on Climate Change continued:

Niue	Trinidad and Tobago
Oman	Tunisia
Pakistan	Turkmenistan
Palau	Tuvalu
Panama	Uganda
Papua New Guinea	United Arab Emirates
Paraguay	United Republic of Tanzania
Peru	Uruguay
Philippines	Uzbekistan
Qatar	Vanuatu
Republic of Korea	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Republic of Moldova	Viet Nam
Rwanda	Yemen
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Zambia
Saint Lucia	Zimbabwe
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	
Samoa	
San Marino	
Sao Tome and Principe	
Saudi Arabia	
Senegal	
Serbia	
Seychelles	
Sierra Leone	
Singapore	
Solomon Islands	
Somalia	
South Africa	
Sri Lanka	
State of Palestine	
Sudan	
Suriname	
Syrian Arab Republic	
Tajikistan	
Thailand	
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	
Timor-Leste	
Togo	
Tonga	

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