
The struggles for hegemony and the new virtualized world

Manolo Eduardo Villagra, Lieutenant Colonel of the Peruvian Army. He has a degree in Military Sciences from the “Coronel Francisco Bolognesi” Military School of Chorrillos, as well as a degree in Business Administration from the San Agustín National University, with a second specialty in Human Resources. Likewise, he has completed the Diploma in National Security and Defense at the National University of Callao and has a Master’s degree in Military Sciences from the Higher School of War of the Peruvian Army. Lieutenant Colonel Eduardo is a Master in Management and Technological Innovation from the Scientific and Technological Institute of the Army of Peru, as well as a Master in Educational Sciences from the Enrique Guzmán y Valle National University.

Translated by CIVIME and Claudia Iwasaki

Summary

In this article, the author analyzes the hegemonic struggle as a cyclical social phenomenon in which the countries with greater power use different instruments and strategies to gain dominance. Currently, these struggles are developed within the framework of a new paradigm such as virtual society in the context of COVID-19, against which competing countries have had to adapt, generating a process of global restructuring.

Keywords: hegemonic struggle, struggles, paradigm, virtual society, multipolar world.

Introduction

The capacity for socialization is a natural quality of the human being. Aristotle defined man as a homo politikon (a political man) but, beyond the term, he meant that the individual is made in the dynamics of dialogue, requiring a community for this; In other words, no human being can forge himself without taking into account everything that

The struggles for hegemony and the new virtualized world

February 11, 2021 - The Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies

society offers him (values, education, ethics, knowledge, technological development, etc.).

Formerly, the most important thing was to ensure the resources for the subsistence of the members of the group. This situation generated greater competitiveness not only because of being superior to others, but also because of being the one who controlled all those resources. This struggle is called hegemonic struggle, the same one that in terms of Blanco and Sánchez (2014) constitutes "the struggle to fill [a] void, through the presentation of a partial content" (p.406). Therefore, the confrontations -in this context- have the objective of being able to establish themselves as the leader concerning others.

One should note that conflicts are events that are part of the development process of societies and, therefore, skirmishes are inevitable. Conflicts could even be considered positive (Contreras, 2006), since they are also opportunities for development and technological advances, constituting valuable contributions in various areas of research.

During the historical process, especially in the 20th century, the world was demonstrated the need to establish parameters to safeguard the individual.

These parameters were established in Human Rights (HR) and in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), since the wars showed that it was not only the military, but also civilians, who suffered the consequences of these acts of war. On the other hand, although the relevance of the rules of Public International Law was already being discussed to regulate armed conflicts and protect people who do not participate in them. In 1949 these proposals found greater support (Contreras, 2006), through the approval of the four Geneva Conventions, two of its protocols entering into force as of 1977.

The latter, due to the decolonization process in the area of Asia and Africa, which began in 1960 (Contreras, 2006). Consequently, these events are the sources of current International Humanitarian Law.

However, one must add a new event: the global pandemic. This new virus has forced all powers to compete for the discovery of a vaccine. An achievement that, far from being just an antidote, becomes one more instrument of the national power of the country or countries that manage to develop these vaccines, producing changes in the

The struggles for hegemony and the new virtualized world

February 11, 2021 - The Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies

existing regular confrontation for world hegemony. In this sense, this article analyzes the new warmongering behaviors by the power in the context of COVID-19, as well as the virtualized world and International Humanitarian Law.

The struggles for power or hegemony

The hegemonic struggle is a cyclical social phenomenon in which a force uses various instruments to establish its dominance. According to Laclau, hegemony is understood as a type of political relationship that temporarily invests a group with power to guide or establish moral, political and intellectual leadership, ensuring that its interests prevail over others (as mentioned above). in Ramírez, 2011). This type of phenomenon has occurred constantly throughout history, as is the case with the Sumerians, Egyptians, and Greeks, among others. On the other hand, after World War II, the United States of America (USA) and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) competed to assume the role of a hegemon, creating a bipolar world. This competition, known as the cold war, not only drove technological advance, but also generated the establishment of alliances to protect their interests. After the fall of the ex-USSR, the USA assumed the leadership of the political, economic, military, and technological power, becoming the hegemon country.

Paradigms and hegemony

The power struggles develop in a paradigm. According to Kuhn, an epistemological philosopher, a paradigm is a model that involves a system of principles, values, beliefs and premises that influence each subject to perceive reality (González, 2005). Therefore, a paradigm is a system composed of substructures, which exist cyclically. Although paradigm shifts are constant throughout history, it should be noted that moving from one to the other takes a long time. As mentioned, a paradigm is a space in which power struggles take place, the same one that translates into the exercise of political, economic, military, and technological power, because if a country only gains control of one of them, it would not become a hegemon (Oscoco, June 2, 2020). Just as, at the time, the wheel and the Copernican turn marked the change of the world, at present, the current paradigm is that of the virtual society, which has been established as a rule of social dynamics.

The struggles for hegemony and the new virtualized world

February 11, 2021 - The Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies

Each time a new way of seeing the world appears, the previous structures change. Consequently, the hegemon countries will have to take it into account and update themselves to stay in power; otherwise, it will lead to the establishment of new world leaders. In this sense, the power of a hegemon over other cultures is consolidated with globalization. Regarding globalization, it can be affirmed that this is a phenomenon that mainly involves economic, social, and cultural processes (Espinosa, 2007), with capitalism being the most expanded economic proposal, which has impacted practically all social sectors.

This situation has also facilitated the configuration of a world market society (Espinosa, 2007) and has generated a transformation in the social relations of production (Espinosa, 2007, p.18).

In this context, the process of insertion into the virtual world has become more acute in recent decades. According to the Yiminshum portal, based on data from research conducted by GSMA Intelligence DATA and Ericson Mobilitu Report Data, 67% of the world's population owns a mobile phone. So it can be said that the new paradigm is that of virtual society.

COVID-19 and the virtual society

Amid this new model, the world stage is in a restructuring process due to COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), humanity had not previously faced a crisis like this (WHO, n.d., para. 1). This entity recommends that people keep -at least- one meter of distance between them, as well as the constant use of a mask when interacting with other people. All this, as part of "the new normal" (WHO, n.d.) to prevent the spread of the virus. In this sense, it should be noted that technological resources are a great ally to maintain social distancing and avoid contagion. Thanks to this, the Internet became the main bastion for maintaining social communication and global economic exchanges.

Virtualization started in the 1960s; however, in recent months it has intensified so that the country with the greatest technological power could become the new hegemon. According to public opinion, this role has been fulfilled by the United States, in part thanks to its famous Silicon Valley (California). In this place, you will find most of the large companies in this market, such as Facebook and Amazon. However, when the media

The struggles for hegemony and the new virtualized world

February 11, 2021 - The Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies

began to present news about the advance of the pandemic worldwide, it became known that hospitals in the United States had also collapsed. In other words, a developed country was in the same scenario as other developing countries (Oscoco, June 2, 2020). Since then, public opinion has been questioning the leadership of the United States to confront this global pandemic and its role as hegemon.

Scopes in the new paradigm

The current pandemic has evidenced the existence of a multipolar world, marked by strong competition between powers such as the United States, China, and Russia, as well as an intense smear campaign between them. This situation would allow us to infer that whoever obtains the vaccine first would emerge as the power with the greatest prestige and, to a certain extent, as the power with the greatest power compared to the others.

In this scenario, Russia was the first to patent its COVID-19 vaccine discovery, which places it slightly ahead of its competition and invites us to think about the return of previous battles. To this competitive scenario are also added the interests of many medical transnationals that are watching with attraction the millionaire business of mass production of vaccines against COVID-19. Due to the contagious characteristics of COVID-19, many countries have decided to close their borders, restricting migratory flows. However, this situation can affect those populations that suffer crises of different kinds and that are - up to a certain point - forced to mobilize in search of a safer environment. In this scenario, the importance of international organizations that contribute to peace and protect human rights (through IHL) makes sense, as well as the importance of the development of a trial for the discernment of action, which weighs on the educational process or training provided to those who will be responsible for maintaining order under humanitarian principles. As Contreras (2006) refers, there are four basic norms on which this training should be based: "(1) distinguish between combatants and non-combatants; (2) that combatants respect and protect non-combatants; (3) welcome and care for the wounded and sick; (4) respect and treat the detainees with dignity" (P187)

The struggles for hegemony and the new virtualized world

February 11, 2021 - The Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies

The first of them aims to conduct hostilities conveniently and limit the use of force, while the second aims to protect civilians and, at the same time, combatants (Contreras, 2006), helping to reduce the difficulties that arise in a conflict.

However, these norms cannot violate the right to sovereignty that each State has since the establishment of the Peace of Westphalia. As Kissinger (2017) maintains, "the premises of the Peace of Westphalia were the first attempt to institutionalize a world order"; meaning that these rules and limits are intended to prevent the hegemony of a single actor who owns the world order.

Conclusion

Throughout history, struggles between countries to become hegemon have developed cyclically. This phenomenon has been constantly framed within some paradigm, the virtual society currently predominant, the same one that has been consolidated as a social dynamic rule due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This new virtual practice of social interaction has been growing steadily in recent decades, which - added to safety regulations to prevent the spread of the virus - now constitutes "the new normal".

Likewise, globalization is the dynamic social phenomenon that has allowed intercommunication and the development of large-scale economies. In this context, economic and cultural practices have been virtualized and maximized thanks to the use of the Internet. However, these new opportunities also present challenges for the armed forces of any country, since they must develop capacities in fields such as cybersecurity and cyber defense, if they wish to contribute to national security and well-being.

Finally, COVID-19 and the biosecurity regulations that each State has established have had an impact on the current migration phenomena. The need to close borders to reduce the speed of contagion has reduced migratory flows. In this sense, helping those who require it is an ethical and legal demand; however, this situation should not violate the sovereignty of each country, meriting that the members of the armed forces have a thorough knowledge of IHL so that they act to protect and respect human life when they exercise their control tasks. Both the teaching of Human Rights and IHL among the members of the armed forces are of vital importance if a state wants to have professional military institutions respectful of humanitarian principles.

The struggles for hegemony and the new virtualized world

February 11, 2021 - The Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies

References:

1. Juan Fernando Contreras, "El Derecho Internacional Humanitario: principio de una educación para la paz," *Educación y Educadores* (9, N°.1,2006), 177-189
<https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=83490113>
2. Ana Belén Blanco y María Soledad Sánchez, "¿Cómo pensar el afecto en la política?: Aproximaciones y debates en torno a la Teoría de la Hegemonía de Ernesto Laclau," *Revista de ciencia política (Santiago)* (34, no. 2, 2014), 399-415
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2014000200003>
3. Oscar Espinosa, "Los pueblos indígenas de la Amazonía peruana frente al proceso de globalización," in *Apertura a la globalización* (Lima: Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, 2007), Ed. Bernardo Haour, 15-36.
4. Henry Kissinger, (2017). *Orden Mundial* (Buenos Aires: 2017) Debate
5. Fredy Gonzáles, (2005). "¿Qué Es Un Paradigma?: Análisis teórico, conceptual y psicolingüístico del término," *Investigación y postgrado* (20, no. 1, April 2005), 126-137
http://ve.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1316-00872005000100002&lng=es&tling=es
6. Fondo de Respuesta Solidaria a la COVID-19 de la OMS Home Page,
<https://covid19responsefund.org/es>
7. Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, "El mundo multipolar," *Address to CEA Digital Law* (Lima: 2020) video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4dT2cTgYXs> , Walter Ossco's youtube channel (accessed June 2, 2020).
8. Carlos Andrés Ramírez, "Consensos fracturados: Hegemonía y teoría de la argumentación," *Revista de ciencia política (Santiago)* (31, no. 2, 2011), 227-245
https://scielo.conicyt.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0718-090X2011000200004&lng=es&tling=es