

THE UNITED STATES: IS IT STILL A SUPERPOWER?

AMERİKA BİRLEŞİK DEVLETLERİ: HALA BİR SÜPERGÜÇ MÜ?

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ABSTRACT

The study argues that although the US power is in decline, it is still a superpower thanks to its allies, friends, economic tools like US dollar and even its adversaries. In other words, not Americans but other countries including rivals keep the US as a superpower. They have done it voluntarily since the US has the desire to act globally, and any loss in its power would cause more losses in other countries. However, particularly during the Trump administration, the US withdrew from the leadership of the like-minded countries, opening the way for China and Russia to be more active in world affairs. Besides reluctant leadership of the Trump administration, generally the U.S administration prefers confrontation to cooperation and escapes from soft landing, accelerating the end of its superpowerhood. The result, as the study argues, might be a more dangerous world order, where there is no superpower ensuring peace on the earth. Methodologically, the concept of superpowerhood is elucidated from a historical, security and international political perspective.

Keywords: United States, Unipolar System, Superpower, China, Security.


JEL Classification Codes: Y80, Z00, Z19.

ÖZ

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Soğuk Savaşın bitmesinden bu yana tek süpergüç olarak kaldı ve dünyayı tek kutuplu bir hale getirdi. İstatistiklere göre Amerika güç kaybediyor ve hemen hemen süpergüç ünvanını kaybetmek üzere. Ancak detaylı incelendiğinde gerçeklerin sanıldığından çok farklı olduğu görülebilir. Amerika, dostları, müttefikleri ve Dolar gibi ekonomik araçları sayesinde halen süpergüç olmaya devam etmektedir. Başka bir deyişle, Amerikalılardan çok rakipleri de olmak üzere diğer ülkeler Amerika'nın süpergüç olmasını sağlıyorlar. Bu sayede çok kutuplu bir dünyada tek kutupluluk devam etmektedir. Bunu gönüllü olarak yapıyorlar çünkü Amerika'nın küresel olarak hareket etmek gibi bir isteği var ve onun güç kaybetmesi diğer ülkelerde daha fazla zarara neden olabilir. Ancak bu durum Amerikan gücünün eridiğini ve dünyanın bir geçiş döneminden geçtiği gerçeklerini değiştirmiyor. Eğer Amerikan yönetimi çekişmeyi işbirliğine tercih edip yumuşak inişe razı olmasa süpergüçlük devrinin sonunu hızlandırmış olur. Tam tersi, eğer yeni şartlara adapte olursa Amerikan devrini uzatmayı başarabilir. Bu makale mezkur konuyu araştırarak ülkeler arası güç dengesinde ülkelerin birbirlerinin gücüne gönüllü veya zorunlu olarak nasıl destek vermek zorunda kaldıklarını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Makalenin yazımı için literatür taramasının yanı sıra istatistiklerden istifade edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ABD, Tek Kutuplu Sistem, Süpergüç, Çin, Güvenlik.

JEL Sınıflandırma Kodları: Y80, Z00, Z19.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Amaç ve Kapsam:

Bu çalışma ABD'nin artık bir süper güç (superpower) değil, sadece üstün bir güç (superior power) olduğunu ve fakat dost ve hasım ülkelerin onu hala bir süper güç yapmaya çalıştığını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca tek kutuplu ve çok kutuplu dünya sistemi üzerinde yapılan tartışmaları ihtiva etmekte ve kendi ilgili tezlerini arz etmektedir.

Yöntem:

Çalışma için literatür taraması yapılmıştır. Ayrıca ülkelerin kıyaslanması amacıyla daha önce yapılan istatistiklerden istifade edilmiştir.

Bulgular:

Sovyetler Birliğinin yıkılmasıyla birlikte ABD tek süper güç olarak kaldı. Bir süre dünyanın jandarmalığını yapan bu ülke, Çin'in hızlı yükselişi ve Rusya'nın yeniden toparlanmasıyla birlikte kendine yeni rakipler buldu. Rusya birçok alanda geri kalsa da savunma bağlamında süper güç olmaya devam etti. Çin ise yıllık %10'ları bulan ekonomik büyümeyle kısa süre içerisinde dünyanın ikinci büyük ekonomisine sahip oldu. Çin'in önümüzdeki 10 yıl içinde dünyanın en büyük ekonomisine sahip olması bekleniyor. Çin ayrıca silah sanayisinde de hızlı bir ilerleme katetmiş ve 5. nesil savaş uçakları, uçak gemileri ve sofistike füzeler üretmeye başlamıştır. Çin'in silahlanma bağlamında da Amerika'yı dengelemesi öngörülmektedir. Bu çalışma, Çin'in henüz istediğini zorla yaptırma gücüne sahip olmadığını (ki bu güç türlerinden biridir), ancak başka ülkelerin dayatmalarına da boyun eğmeyecek kadar güçlendiğini (bu da diğer bir güç türüdür) iddia etmektedir. Öte yandan Avrupa Birliği (AB) de yeni üyelerle dev bir devlet üstü yapıya bürünmüştür. Ancak AB, ekonomik ve yumuşak güç bağlamında ABD ve Çin'e rakip olsa bile ortak bir dış politika belirleyememesi ve üye ülkelerin savunma bağlamında münferit hareket etmeleri sebebiyle süper güç olmaktan uzaktır ve muhtemelen de olamayacaktır. Diğer yandan büyük devletlerin güç pastasından daha büyük pay kapması Amerika'nın gücünde azalmaya neden olmuştur. Bugün ABD dünyadaki askeri harcamaların %36'sını tek başına yapmaktadır. Ancak kalan %64'ün diğer ülkelere yapılması Amerika'nın diğer ülkelerle tek başına mücadele etmesi halinde baş edemeyeceğini göstermektedir. Ekonomik bağlamda ise dünya ekonomisinin sadece %23'ü ABD'nin elinde bulunmakta ve yakında Çin tarafından geçilmesi beklenmektedir. Dolayısıyla ABD süper güç tanımını hızla kaybetmektedir denilebilir. Obama döneminde dünya siyasetinde durulan Amerika, Trump ile birlikte kabuğuna çekilmiştir. Amerika'nın çekilmesi Rusya ve Çin'e alan açmış ve bu ülkelerin Ortadoğu ve Afrika gibi bölgelerde nüfuzlarını artırmalarını sağlamıştır. Bu çalışma Amerika'nın başka ülkelere müdahalesini doğru bulmamakla birlikte ABD gibi bir ülkenin en azından diğer enstrümanlarla (diplomasi gibi) varlığını hissettirmesinin Çin ve Rusya gibi ülkelerin dengelenmesi bakımından yararlı olacağını düşünmektedir. Örneğin ABD'nin Suriye'deki varlığını yanlış bulmakta ve fakat bu ülkede diplomatik yollar veya ekonomik yaptırımlarla barışın teminine katkıda bulunmasının doğru olduğunu düşünmektedir. Ne var ki Obama ve Trump dönemlerine bu tür bir politika gözlemlenmemiştir. Öte yandan Biden'in Obama dönemine benzer bir politika izleyeceğine dair oluşan emareler onun da dünya siyasetinde beklenen etkiyi vermeyeceği kanısını uyandırmaktadır. Ayrıca Biden'in izleyeceği dış politikanın Amerika'nın dostlarını yanında tutacağını ve fakat rakip ülkelerin nüfuzunu artırmasının önüne geçemeyeceğini iddia etmektedir. Bu durumda Biden'in yönetimi devralmasının sadece bahsedilen süpergüç ünvanının elinden biraz daha geç alınacağını vurgulamaktadır. Çalışmamız ayrıca çok kutuplu bir dünyaya dönüşmesi halinde dünyada bir güvenlik sorununun olacağını iddia etmektedir. Çünkü barışın temin edecek ve yaptırımlar uygulayacak güçlü bir devletin olmaması halinde küçük ve orta büyüklükteki devletlerin birbirleriyle savaşmalarının kuvvetle muhtemel olduğunu öngörmektedir. Dolayısıyla tek kutuplu dünyanın çok kutuplu dünyadan daha barışçıl olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Ancak barış için ile de ABD'nin gerekmediğini, barış için liderlik yapabilecek herhangi başka bir süper gücün de aynı işlevi göreceğini öne sürmektedir.

Sonuç ve Tartışma:

Çalışmamız bu yüzden ABD'nin bir süper güç (super power) olarak değil de üstün güç (superior power) olarak değerlendirilmesinin daha doğru olacağını iddia etmektedir. ABD belki hala bazı alanlarda (teknoloji, eğitim, vs.) çok üstün olabilir ama rakip ülkelerin hızlı yükselişi mezkur alanlarda da bir gerileme olacağına işaret etmektedir. Ancak bu çalışma, an itibarıyla üstün güç olarak tabir ettiği ABD'nin yine de süper güç ünvanına sahip olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Çünkü ABD'nin dostları ve dahi düşmanları ABD'nin süper güç olarak kalmasını gönüllü veya zorunlu olarak desteklemektedir. Öncelikle batı dünyasında liderlik yapacak daha güçlü ve gönüllü bir ülke bulunmamaktadır. Batı ülkeleri ABD'nin liderliğine razı ve devam etmesini ister bir görünüm arz etmektedirler. Mesela kendi savunma ittifaklarını kurmak yerine NATO'nun devamından yana tavır göstermişler ve ABD'nin tabiri caizse komutan olarak devam etmesini istemektedirler. Öte yandan Çin gibi yükselen ülkeler ve diğer birçok ülke ABD dolarını rezerv olarak tutarak Amerikan ekonomisini ayakta tutmaktadırlar. Bugün Çin'in 3 trilyon dolardan fazla rezervi bulunmakta ve doların düşüşünün ekonomiye darbe vuracağını bildiği için dolardaki istikrarını temin etmede belki de ABD'den daha fazla çaba sarf etmektedir. Ancak dost ve düşman, ABD'nin liderliğine bu kadar razı olmasına rağmen Amerikalıların kendilerine verilen bu açık çeki pek de iyi değerlendirdikleri söylenemez. Başka bir deyişle çaba sarf etmeden dünya liderliği hayali kurduğu gözlemlenmektedir. Çalışmamız son olarak tek kutuplu bir dünya sisteminin çok kutuplu sistemden daha iyi olacağını iddia etmektedir.

1. INTRODUCTION

When the Cold War ended in 1990, the bipolar world order became unipolar, making the United States the winner of the war and the only superpower on the earth. Francis Fukuyama even declared the end of history as American values such as democracy and liberalism won against socialism (Fukuyama, 1992). The US undisputedly enjoyed being the most powerful country in the world for the following ten years, literally until the September 11 attacks in 2001. From that time onwards, the US Army fought in Afghanistan and Iraq directly, deployed soldiers in many other countries, and fought via proxies. However, the wars the US got involved in still continue, and there is anarchy in the intervened countries (Engelhardt, 2018). While the world's only superpower was struggling for its ends, the people of the victimized countries and the world audience, in general, did not approve of the US policies. Therefore, its soft power was damaged due to the excessive use of hard power. Many analysts interpreted the situation as such that the world was not secure in a unipolar moment. On the other hand, other countries gained more power simultaneously and challenged American supremacy. While Russia got recovered thanks to oil revenues and Putin's presidency, the EU grew with new members. Yet, it was China that was seen as the real rival of the US. Growing 10% on average in the last thirty years, the Chinese could surpass the American economy in terms of GDP (PPP), and soon it will have the biggest GDP (nominal) in the world, replacing the US economy. Besides developed countries, the emerging countries also have got more share in the world economy.

Since the US power has been in decline, discussions about whether the world is unipolar, multipolar, or apolar have become one of the top subjects in literature as the type of polarity will determine how secure the world will become. While American scholars claim that the US is still the sole superpower, Chinese ones argue China is already a superpower. Also, Europeans fit the superpower title to the European Union (EU). In addition, Russia and India are seen as candidates for superpowerhood. Moreover, some scholars like Etzioni (2013: 13) underlines the importance of regional powers. This article's distinctive argument is that the world is unipolar in multipolar circumstances but the Trump administration threatened the current order. Normally, the US is a 'superior power' sitting in the superpower seat thanks to its alliances, friends with ideological affinity, the dollar, and the desire to act globally. In addition, its adversaries also help the US to continue to be a superpower due to dependence. On the other hand, despite China's growing economy, military as well as big population, the general view is that China is not expected to be a superpower in spite of having enough power since leadership is not something only related to power but attributed to some other features such as the leadership instinct, aggressive policies and the desire for a ruling. To explain with animals of a forest, an elephant is the biggest animal but it is a lion that is the king and ruling other animals. Therefore, as per future projections, we may see more lions (great powers) and an elephant (China) in the world (forest). Yet, this study estimates that, despite the blank check given by the world to Americans, the reluctance of the US to lead the world during the Trump era, and even Biden's eagerness to return back to world politics may not save the unipolar order and open the way for China, Russia, and other assertive countries to have more influence in the world politics. Assuming that Donald Trump never became the President, China would still not be brought to the terms of America and other countries. In other words, American withdrawal or involvement may not stop the Chinese to get the superpower title. Overall, the world wants to see the US as the sole superpower but the latter is about to make China replace itself and let other great powers act unilaterally.

In fact, what matters more is whether the world will be in peace if Americans withdraw from world politics either voluntarily or with a retreat against rising powers. Based on Trump's term, it can be contended that the world without a leading country, whether it be America or any other country, is not safer than it is in unipolar and bipolar orders. While two blocs were avoiding fighting during the bipolar world, no countries could dare to challenge the US during the unipolar years that continued until recent years. In fact, America's unilateral interventions did distort world peace but few countries were affected by it. On the other hand, in the circumstances without a leading power, the world seemed to be parceled by China and Russia since the Trump administration (and partly the Obama administration) pulled the US from ongoing conflicts. Therefore, the world order looked multipolar, where great powers acted relentless, tough, selfish, destructive, and exploitative. In the same vein, military alliances like NATO became dysfunctional as the US did not run them. If the momentum goes as it is during the Biden era, China and Russia might gain more areas of influence, from where they may never be ousted. Even if the US reactivates its leadership, some parts of the world might have already been lost, e.g. Syria and perhaps Libya to Russia, and African countries to China. Overall, the world is becoming multipolar where there may be multi actors as well as multi conflicts and wars.

In terms of the method, in accordance with literature review, articles, books, news reports, and statistics concerning military, economic, demographic, and financial strength of countries were utilized and used for comparison. Besides, personal observation of recent developments in world politics taking place in front of our eyes has been quite beneficial to suggest arguments stated in this article. The article is expected to contribute to both American and security literature with its arguments that (1) superpowerhood can be sustained not only by the superpower but also by its friends and adversaries, and (2) despite acceptance and support to the US superpowerhood, America's current power shows that there is multipolarity, where there is a state of insecurity. However, this study does not argue that the US ensures security. What upholds peace is not a specific superpower but a unipolar environment created by any great powers.

2. SUPERPOWERHOOD

History is full of hegemonic struggles between states aiming to dominate the world. Romans, the Chinese, Arabs, the Dutch, Turks, the British, the United States, and so many other great powers tried to be the superpowers of their eras. The term 'superpower' has various definitions. For Brooks and Wohlforth (2016: 94), it is the ability to operate globally. Similarly, Huntington's definition is that "a superpower has to stand for an idea with appeal beyond its borders (Huntington 1988). On the other hand, Bremmer (2015) equates 'superpower' with 'power' and argues that a superpower must have enough economic, military, and political might to convince other nations to do things they otherwise would not do. Another criterion is to involve in hard security issues like war and peace (Moravcsik, 2002). In this sense, economic power and soft power do not make a country a superpower. Another definition argues that a superpower must influence and dominate more than one region and sustain its hegemony there (Miller, 2006). For a while during the cold war, the criterion for becoming a superpower was to possess nuclear weapons. Moreover, Dellios (2005: 5) claims that a superpower should be traditionally a great power, have considerable military strength, and perform transnationally. Shiraev and Gibson (2009) add soft power and internal stability to military and economic capabilities to become a superpower. Also, Champion and Leung (2018) point out the cost of being a superpower and argue that a country should afford to be a superpower in terms of expenses. Overall, almost all scholars agree on certain criteria to be a superpower such as; (1) military capability with nuclear weapons; (2) having a high GDP being in the top five; (3) a sizeable population; (4) to act globally; (5) stability in political administration; and (6) soft power. Meeting only a few conditions will not be enough to be a superpower but sufficient to be a great power.

Among all factors stated above, we argue that the most important criterion needed to become a superpower is the 'desire' to spread its hegemony all over the world, i.e. acting globally. Power is not enough to be a superpower although the word is the combination of the words 'super' and 'power'. As will be discussed below, countries may want to be powerful but stay away from world politics, which was the case for China in ancient times. In other words, it may accumulate the power to defend itself rather than attacking and invading other countries. Hence, it must want to lead the world. Therefore, there must be a 'leadership instinct' inherent to the administration of the hegemonic country. In line with this, a country or a group of states like the EU can not be a superpower if it does not have imperial goals, which it can fulfill only by hard power. In other words, a superpower is the one that fights for its goals worldwide. Furthermore, if a country is not interested in what is happening in regions thousands of kilometers away, and does not get provoked by resources there, it will not be a superpower. More explicitly, there should be some triggering reasons such as ideology and resources. Thus, Huntington's above definition best fits the term superpower. In fact, the character of a nation is also important for hegemonic behaviors. If history is a mirror to the future, it can then be contended that those not being a superpower at least once in their histories in the last a few thousand years should not be expected to become in the future as well. Like there are leaders among people, there are leader nations among nations. However, sometimes the small population becomes an impediment to becoming a hegemonic power. Otherwise, a nation with a leading character is always likely to be a superpower.

Actually, being a superpower would not be a matter of debate, had it not been concerning world security. Whether the world system is bipolar, unipolar, multipolar, and apolar directly affects wars, conflicts, and terrorism. According to Waltz (1964: 884), in a bipolar world, everyone knows who will oppose whom as there is a certainty. Yet, in a multipolar world, he argues, there are unclear responsibilities and diffused dangers, thereby there is uncertainty, which may cause an insecure environment. Unlike Waltz, Serfaty (2008) argues that bipolarity is dangerous since a likely clash may result in unwanted international confrontation. Regarding unipolar world order, Waltz also sees it as transitory and undesirable since a superpower (referring to the US) will face an unbalanced power that forces it to expand and override its power (Jiang and Baig, 2013:). Our argument is that Americans are

the most powerful country but they can not counter the whole world. Therefore, they can enjoy superpowerhood only when other countries do not combine their powers against it. Indeed, other countries do not merge their powers against the US and even help them to keep the title since they are voluntarily or forcibly dependent on the US in military and economic terms. Thus, the unipolar world order is maintained by the will of a majority of countries and this order generally ensures security as experiences show. However, the US no longer wants to uphold unipolar order, which causes a de facto multipolar order.

As for the multipolar system, the division of the world into multi poles might be riskier than unipolar and bipolar systems since there is no gendarmerie(s) ensuring peace. If there is not a superpower, chaos may spread across the world in a multipolar system, where greater states will act freely to intervene in domestic politics of other countries since there is none to complain or to interfere with. History shows that the multipolar system after The Vienna Congress of 1815 did not uphold peace, and culminated in two world wars. If there is not a unipolar or bipolar system, none can guarantee that rising powers or those 'under-control' powers like Germany with a far-right government will resume revisionist policies. There are also scholars thinking that the world is 'apolar' as the world is moving to an era of non-polarity, claiming that none will fill the vacuum after America's decline (Etzioni, 2013). Ferguson (2004) even claims that there will be an absence of power and the world will enter into an anarchic dark age. Yet, it can hardly be argued that the power is absent since China, Russia, India, the EU, and regionally North Korea, Iran, Brazil, Turkey, and even the UAE have enough power to affect world politics with their power. A power vacuum occurs only if there is no power or the whole world is devastated. Therefore, Ferguson's opinion does not seem realistic. Overall, it can be contended that the world is more secure only if there is one superpower and that country's power is more than the combined power of the rest. Alternatively, the bipolar system during the Cold War also proved to ensure world security thanks mutually assured destruction (MAD) doctrine. Finally, a superior power might be chosen as the leader of the world or an ex-superpower might be allowed to maintain its superpowerhood, which is the case for the US but President Trump rejects it.

3. RIVALRY FOR SUPERPOWERHOOD

The military and economic power, population, soft power, and sometimes the size of territory (as complementary to other factors) are numerical indicators for the greatness of a country. The below table shows the military spending of great powers in the last seventy years.

Table 1. Military Spending per Country (mln USD)

Country	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2018
USA	14307.0	45380.0	79846.0	138191.0	306170.0	301697.0	648798.3
China	10085.1	22929.8	249996.9
Saudi Arabia	..	140.9	471.6	20724.5	16355.5	19964.3	67554.7
France	1598.8	3881.2	5882.4	26427.2	42589.9	33814.3	63799.7
Russia	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	9228.2	61387.5
UK	2328.2	4587.8	6074.4	25363.4	38943.8	35254.8	49997.2
Germany	..	2884.5	6167.3	26692.6	42318.8	28150.0	49470.6
Japan	..	480.6	1575.3	9711.7	28800.5	45509.7	46618.0
Italy	501.3	1009.3	2216.8	7915.7	20734.6	19878.7	27807.5

Source: (Sipri, 2019).

As Table 1 shows, the United States has been at the top in military spending since 1950 except between 1970 and 1988, when the Soviet Union was the leader (since the Soviet Union no longer exists, it has been excluded from our discussion.) In addition, the total spending of all countries is approximately \$1.78 trillion. As per the above statistics, the US spends 36% of total spending alone. China, the second country in the queue, has a 14% share. What makes China's rank distinctive is its fast rise in the sequence in the last thirty years. While its expenditure was just \$10 billion in 1990, it rose 25 times and became almost \$250 billion in 2018. No country, including the US, had increased its budget for the military so much in the mentioned period. However, with the invention of nuclear weapons, not quantity but the quality of weapons has become a more decisive indicator of military strength. Therefore, if a country has nuclear warheads, it does not have to spend so much money on its security. As an

example, Israel is more advantageous in a likely war against a non-nuclear country that spends more on weapons. Regarding the nuclear power of superpower candidates, Russia (6490 warheads) has more nuclear bombs than the U.S (6185 warheads). On the other hand, China (290 warheads) is the fourth after France (300 warheads) (Arms Control, 2019). Yet, although the US is the second after Russia, when all other weapons including ships, fighters, bases, etc., are counted, it is indisputably number one in terms of military strength.

However, Wyne (2018) argues that China's military spending may overtake that of the US by the mid-2030s. In fact, the fast-rising trend in Beijing's expenditure supports this forecast. Yet, even if the Chinese spend more, the technological superiority of American weapons and more than 700 military bases spreading all over the world will still make the US army superior to the Chinese one (Queri Analytics, 2016: 1; Bischof, 2009: 18). On the other hand, Russia is the only country that can challenge the US with its weapons thanks to its intercontinental missiles and nuclear warheads. Nevertheless, having sophisticated arms does not make the Russian army superior to the US Army as it is weak in terms of other weapons and has no allies against the US. For example, Russia is absent in the drone industry. Actually, measuring military strength with numbers is generally misleading as numbers change over time. For example, while Uckert (1995: 14) said China could not buy an updated weapons system in 1995, the Chinese army is now producing fifth-generation stealth fighters. Moreover, Cox (2012: 376) said China had just one aircraft carrier while the US army had eleven in 2012 but, in 2019, China commissioned its second aircraft carrier and the third one was under construction. Probably, it will have at least five carriers by 2030.

What is missed or rarely considered in military comparison is alliances. The above table shows that the US has a share of 36% in military expenditure but, when reading reversely, the rest spends 64%. Besides, the US share is in decline though its spending increases year by year. But America has allies with sophisticated weapons including nuclear bombs, well-trained armies, and high technology under the umbrella of NATO, which it leads. Thus, when Americans decide to fight a great power like Russia or China, tens of developed countries will join the war to fight alongside the US. Although the Eastern bloc is dead, the Western bloc led by the US is alive and active. Even non-western countries will likely side with the US if they are forced to choose either side. This is all about ideological affinity, soft power, and image. Therefore, other factors can fill the deficit of hard power, and can still enable a country like America to keep the superpower title. This view can be cemented by looking at the situation of rival countries Russia and China. These countries have few friends that can join their war against the Western bloc or any other (group of) countries. When they act alone, they will find many enemies on the opposite front. Being friendless will also impede their expansion across the world as other nations will not want to accept their hegemony, thereby they may remain a regional power in spite of having the power of a superpower.

Regarding economic power, the United States has the biggest economy in the world since the Second World War. As Table 2 and Table 3 shows below, it has a global share of 23.6% when GDPs are compared with each other. However, China's fast growth in the last forty years has made it the second and hints that the US will not be able to hold the championship for 100 years, literally by 2045. If China grows with this percentage (over 6% annually), it will catch the US in the mid-2030s. In fact, it already lost to China in terms of purchasing power parity. Hence, the US has already fallen to the second rank in some areas.

Table 2.Top 11 GDPs

Country	GDP Nominal (2018)	GDP PPP (2018)	Global Share (2018)
USA	\$20.49 trln	\$20.49 trln	23.6%
China	\$13.41 trln	\$25.27 trln	15.5%
Japan	\$4.97 trln	\$5.60 trln	5.7%
Germany	\$4 trln	\$4.36 trln	4.6%
UK	\$2.83 trln	\$3.04 trln	3.3%
France	\$2.78 trln	\$2.96 trln	
India	\$2.72 trln	\$10.51 trln	
Italy	\$2.07 trln	\$2.40 trln	
Brazil	\$1.87 trln	\$3.37 trln	
Canada	\$1.71 trln	\$1.84 trln	
Russia	\$1.63 trln	\$4.21 trln	

Table 3. USA vs. China Global GDP Share

Year	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2018
USA	40%	36%	26%	27%	31%	23%	23.6%
China	4.4%	3.1%	2.78%	1.78%	3.67%	9.35%	15.5%

Tables also indicate that the US economy is losing its share in the global economy but resisting fast falls. For instance, while the percentage was 26% in 1980, it rose to 31% in 2000. Therefore, the decline is not gradual. However, the decline is inevitable in the long term as others are rising. This decline is not because the US economy is waning but others are growing. In other words, the US economy is still growing but other economies grow faster than it. In any case, the above statistics can not affirm America's superpowerhood in economic terms but only shows it is superior to its rivals. Plus, it will lose its rank to China within 20 years.

Analysts divide about the American economy. Adams (2018) argues that the US can no longer contain Chinese power or slow down its growth. Indeed, China is too big to be swallowed neither by Americans or any other country. President Trump tried it but failed as his country got damaged by sanctioning China. Metla (2015) admits that US power is declining but she emphasizes that the US economy is technologically advanced than any other country. Technological superiority is still in the hands of the US but there is no guarantee that it can be surpassed by others. On the other hand, Zakaria (2012: 194) gives the example of Britain, which led the world for decades despite losing its economic dominance. If the US keeps other variables unchanged, in fact, it can still maintain its leadership since the economy is just one factor among many others to make a country a superpower. Even Chinese scholars are aware of this fact and avoid saying that China is a superpower just because it has a large economy as there are other complementary elements such as justice, political stability, and military power (Yao, 2007: 2).

However, despite the waning economy, the US is still a superpower due to its currency, the dollar. American dollar is the most used currency in international trade and kept as a reserve in central banks. Like the US economy, there are different views about the future of US dollar. According to Wallerstein (2006: 18), the world will give up using US dollar and switch to a multi-currency model. Cox (2012: 374) argues that it is a good tool in the hands of the US and gives the country a broad range of privileges. Bremmer (2015) and Metla (2015) rely on the dollar as 87% of foreign exchange transactions and more than 80% of financial transactions are conducted in US dollars. Needless to say, its use is related to the strength of the American economy. The stronger the American economy is, the stronger dollar is. Thus, the dollar and the American economy strengthen each other. According to IMF (2019B), 61.63% of the world's foreign exchange reserves are US dollars while 20.35% is Euro, 5.41% is Japanese Yens, 4.43% is British Sterlings, and 1.97 is Chinese Renminbis. When looked at which country holds more dollars, it can be seen that China holds \$3.1 trillion, Japan \$1.33 trillion, Switzerland \$784 billion, Russia \$537 billion, and so on. The dollar reserves in central banks are estimated to be around \$7 trillion (65% of total dollars in the world including the US).

Countries that save US dollar as a reserve in their money boxes are so dependent on the US currency that if one day Americans decide to devalue it, they will oppose it and keep the dollar to be the world currency since the loser, at least in the short term, will be themselves. Think of China, for example. A 10% devaluation in the dollar rate means a \$310 billion loss, which the Chinese economy can not afford. From the US perspective, the dollar is like a nuclear weapon among all weapons. It enables the US administration to control the world economy, sanction evil countries, and make other economies dependent on itself. Such a wizard tool, in our opinion, prolongs the unipolar moment and strengthens American superpowerhood. Yet, the US should work hard to keep the dollar as the world currency. Historically, British Sterling accounted for more than 80% of reserves before 1945 (Eichengreen, Chitu and Mehl, 2014: 25). Then, US Dollar became the main currency with more than 50% in the 1950s. While the dollar's share peaked in 1977 by rising up to 80.3%, its percentage was 65.1% in 1985, 55.6% in 1993, 68.3% in 2001, 65.5% in 2006, 62.2% in 2011, 64.1% in 2015 and 61.63% in 2019 (Melvin and Norrbinn 2017). The dollar's position in the market is still brilliant but Trump's aggressive and panicking policies against China and other countries frightened them and led them to find alternative currencies to dollars as their foreign exchange reserves. For example, while China had \$3.27 trillion in 2017, it declined to \$3.1 trillion in 2019. Russia, Turkey, and some other countries also replaced the dollar with gold and other currencies. Thus, the US is damaging its currency itself and accelerating its demise. If Trump and next Presidents do not cause a loss of confidence in the dollar, it will continue to hold the American economy at the top of the rank.

Meanwhile, if economic power is an indicator of superpowerhood, besides the US and China, some scholars regard the European Union (EU) as a superpower as well. The EU's GDP is \$18.7 trillion, second in the world after the US. This amount is the sum of GDPs of 28 member states, among which Germany is at the top. In addition, 20% of the world's foreign exchange reserves are Euro. Economically, the EU is a real rival to the US and China in terms of the race for superpowerhood. Yet, since economic might is not sufficient to become a superpower, there are clashing views about the EU. Moravcsik said in his article written in 2002 that being an economic giant is not enough to be a superpower. The Union must get involved in the politics of war and peace (Moravcsik, 2002). Yet, he said in his article he wrote in 2010 that there are two superpowers; the US and the EU (Moravcsik, 2010: 91). He claims that only America and the EU can exert both hard and soft power globally and calls the EU as a 'quiet' superpower. Nevertheless, it is hard to say that the Union is a superpower in terms of military strength. The EU members indeed account for more than 20% of the world's military spending but they all do it separately. Excluding symbolic ones, there is not a united military force of the EU except for peacekeeping forces. It is not clear whether the union's members will defend each other in a likely war. On the other hand, the Union's military weakness arises from the fact that it does not need a strong united army since many of its members are NATO members. In other words, since NATO protects the continent, they do not need to form a military alliance. What if NATO had dissolved itself? Probably, members could feel insecure and create their alliance. However, another option is the resumption of wars among European countries, which is one of the reasons for the creation of NATO. Therefore, the EU's military might and unity are controversial.

However, in terms of soft power, which is the third factor over which this study discusses superpowerhood, the EU is indeed a superpower. The EU has 17 countries in Soft Power Top 30 Index (McClory 2018: 46). The United Kingdom is the first, France is the second, Germany is the third, and the United States is the fourth in the index. Hence, the top three are EU members. The EU has gained hearts by its respect for human rights, promoting democracy and a liberal economy, providing social security to its citizens, education, an environment free of conflict, carrot diplomacy, and so on. As a result, the union has a better reputation than the US, China, and any other country in terms of soft power. Regarding America and China, according to a survey conducted in 2013, 63% of the world audience favor the US while the percentage is 50% for China (Pew Research Center, 2013: 1). The same survey also shows that those favoring the USA are mainly Western countries (Ibid: 2). In addition, the survey indicates that those arguing the US was the leading economic power is 47% in 2008 and 41% in 2013 while those favoring China was 20% in 2008 and 34% in 2013 (Ibid: 4). In another survey conducted in 2018, China's favorability rose while America's declined (Pew Research Center, 2018). If the trend goes like that, China will be more attractive to foreigners, particularly in Africa, anti-Western countries, and trading partners.

Soft power is really significant to get the adherence of foreigners. If a superpower is disliked by other nations, its hegemony may not last long. Nazi Germany's aggressive behaviors and fascist ideology were not welcomed by other countries and eventually, Hitler's regime collapsed. Even if he had won the Second World War, his hegemony would not last long or Germans would face more resistance as the regime had nothing to give to invaded nations other than the propaganda of the superiority of the Arian race. Japanese Empire would also probably fail to gain the attraction since they used excessive force, invaded countries, killed people and raped women. As a contemporary example, Russia's image is not so good since it has nothing to offer other nations except for weapons. The importance of soft power is that if hard power is bricks, soft power is cement. Without cement, you can not piece bricks together. If the US and the EU are successful, one reason is the implementation of soft power. Yet, we should note that there was a decline in the US soft power due to the Iraqi invasion (Schiffer, 2009: 15). It must do more to gain the hearts of foreign people, particularly those of Arabs. Because China is in a race with the US not only in hard power but also in soft power (Ping and Li, 2015: 154).

The fourth and final criterion that should be discussed for comparison is 'to act globally'. Currently, only the US operates globally, enjoying to be the 'indispensable nation' in the world as former State Secretary Madeleine Albright termed (Schiffer, 2009: 5). As Champion and Leung (2018) express, it is expensive to be a superpower as it requires to afford to deploy a large military across the world, providing aid to other countries, waging wars, etc. If a great power accepts to bear the costs, then it has to seek legitimacy, which is related to soft power rather than military power. In the past, the Ottomans, the Dutch, the French, and the British became present anywhere they could reach. From 1945 onwards, it was the United States that influenced the whole world. The Soviet Union shared the hegemony for a while but later withdrew as it collapsed. Currently, it is a fact that American global power is eroding. As scholars predicted correctly, the Chinese economy has surpassed the US economy in terms of GDP (PPP) (Ozkan, 2008: 118). China's GDP (Nominal) is also expected to pass that of America soon.

However, China does not seem to want to dominate the world. When China was a strong country in the past, it did not interfere with the internal affairs of tributary states (Dellios, 2005: 4). It did not colonize other countries like Western countries did, either. The Chinese adhering Confucian and Buddhist theologies have not an aggressive and exploitative character. During a conference held in Istanbul in 2006, Malaysian Premier Mahathir Muhammad was asked whether they fear to be invaded by China. He said they have been living with the Chinese as neighbors for the last 1000 years but never invaded by them. In addition to China, another power that can act globally is the European Union. Europeans have enough military, economic, and soft power to get their strength felt but they do not. One reason might be the fragile structure of the union stemming from 28 members with different agendas and interests. Yet, since unity brings more benefits than losses, the EU can still operate all over the earth provided that they do not hesitate to exert their military power. It is probably the reluctance of not benefiting from military power that does not make the EU a superpower. Normally, they have ideals for which they can act, verifying Huntington's theory mentioned above, but they do not have a desire to act.

4. SUPERPOWERHOOD AND POLARITY; TODAY AND TOMORROW

The debates about the polar system are not without biases and prejudices since people are polarized like states, too. It is not a coincidence that American pundits claim the indispensability of their countries while anti-American, anti-Western and anti-Capitalist people declare the demise of the American era. Therefore, it is difficult to find neutral comments about the polarity, American superpower, or China's rise. In fact, when only numbers are considered, everyone can prove his/her claims. For example, America is the leader almost in any aspect of superpowerhood. It has the strongest military, the highest GDP, a considerable population, vast territories, ideals, desire to act globally, the strongest currency, political stability, higher education, etc. Yet, the world is too big for Americans to maintain their hegemony. Besides, its rivals are getting stronger. The Chinese in the economy, Russians in the defense industry, and the EU with its soft power challenge the US. They are not the best in every area but always in the top 10 and mostly in the top 3 of lists. Besides, if the power is also not to do what the other wants you to do, it is clear that none can force the EU, China, Russia, Japan, Germany, the UK, and India to kneel. Thus, all these great powers are superpowers in some aspects and create a multipolar system.

In such circumstances, as statistics show, the US is not a superpower but a superior power as its military, economy, population and other assets are not more than those of the whole world. In other words, the US is not bigger than the whole world. However, despite being smaller than the world, it should be regarded as a superpower since a great portion of countries side with America and accept its leadership. For example, Europeans, some Arab states, commonwealth countries, many Asian states, and some old members of the Communist bloc voluntarily accept the leadership of Americans. For instance, when America's military power is computed, NATO's power should be added. It is only the US that can gather Europe's great powers behind itself. In addition, America's technological superiority and leadership make other economies dependent on itself. Currently, if American IT firms do not sell software to technology companies in other countries, they will be paralyzed. Therefore, no countries (alone or together) will be willing to challenge the American economy. Further to technology, it also has the biggest trump card against the whole world; the dollar. US dollar is the world currency and not only friends but even enemies will not target it as they will lose more than America. The Dollar is such a big and cheap tool for the US that the cost of printing a \$100 bill is just 12.5 cents.

Nonetheless, with Trump's presidency, the US administration began to punish countries that make America great again. In addition, the Trump administration withdrew from world affairs, which America was leading. In fact, when Obama was in power, he introduced the 'Obama Doctrine', by which the US withdrew from the states it invaded, and began to support proxy groups. Like Trump, Obama was also indifferent to ongoing conflicts. For instance, he was not good at managing dangers originating from the Arab Spring. The parties America supported caused outrage due to human rights abuses, e.g. the UAE and Saudi Arabia in Yemen. In addition, the Obama administration did little to stop blood in Syria. While it focused on defeating ISIS via its proxy, namely Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), it did not punish the Assad regime for its massacres. Whereas, America had rescued Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion, Bosnians and Kosovars from Serbians in the 1990s.

Although the US was reluctant to act, its allies continued to support its leadership during the Obama era. However, when Trump came to power in 2016, he tore up the blank check given by like-minded countries and frightened its allies rather than adversaries with American power. Besides, the indifference of the American administration peaked during his term. Since America was absent in world politics, Russia has expanded its sphere of influence

in many regions and countries. For instance, while the US army was present only in eastern and partly in north Syria, Russia combatted with its army alongside the Assad regime, and obtained perpetual privileges from the Syrian government. Russia will not probably withdraw from Syria unless it wants. In addition, Russians are in Libya through their mercenaries. Haftar forces could not destroy the legitimate government but Russia could get a military base and deploy aircrafts and jets, targeting Europe. Bases will also enable Russians to control the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, China is using its financial strength to find new friends, including Europeans, e.g. Italy. If there is no leader, certainly there will be another leader that will fill the vacuum, and China has been replacing the US in some regions in recent years. Referring to the Trump administration, Wolf (2020) explains; “On the one side, then, we have a rising despotic superpower, but one with real frailties. On the other, we have an incumbent superpower that has lost its way”. Regarding the Biden era, it can be contended that Biden’s foreign policy will probably be the same as the Obama administration, as he recruited mostly former Obama aides. Therefore, more involvement in world politics can be expected from Biden but it may not be enough to maintain America’s superpowerhood.

Consequently, if the US continues to pull itself into its shells, its allies will probably withdraw their support and take the superpowerhood title from America, allowing the world order to be multipolar. As the increasing influence of Russians and the Chinese in world affairs show, if the world’s like-minded states become headless, the world might miss current state of peace soon. The pity aspect of America’s friends is that none is eager to take leadership or plan to form an alliance without America. Therefore, all liberal countries will have to act alone in case they encounter China or Russia. Yet, none of them is strong enough to confront world’s authoritarian superpowers. Thus, while America’s friends voluntarily helped it to maintain its superpower, the US voluntarily gave up leading them during the Trump era. Joe Biden looks more assertive in foreign policy but the already declining US power and rising Chinese power may limit America’s maneuvers despite the support of its allies.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that although America is no longer a superpower, its friends, allies, and economic tools keep Americans at the top. In other words, America is still a superpower because many countries, including adversaries, want it to be. However, the US withdrew from world politics in recent years, particularly when Donald Trump came to power. The US wanted to hold its superpower title but, contradictorily, did not intervene in international politics. Besides, it estranged other friendly countries by punishing them through exclusionary policies. Joe Biden may reverse Trump’s policies but he will hardly compensate Trump’s damage. In addition, since US power is already in decline, Biden’s efforts might be insufficient. While its reluctant leadership and punitive policies have caused worries among like-minded countries, there is no apparent candidate for leadership in terms of eagerness to take responsibility and strength. On the other hand, Russia and China are increasing their influence across the world, and, in terms of influence, probably what they have got until now will be theirs. These being the facts, the unipolar system given as a gift to America by its allies is about to turn into a multipolar system, where great authoritarian states will act fearlessly and dominate more areas as there is no leading country that will oppose them. What has been witnessed in recent years shows that insecure circumstances might replace the current order, which was generally peaceful except for a few instances.

DECLARATION OF THE AUTHOR

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