Mark C. Draggi

Draggi wrote this exam answer (transcribed here from an actual "blue book," with brackets indicating subsequent changes) for Dr. Hart's Introduction to World Politics course (Pol 10410) during the Fall 1998 semester. His submission was based upon a question that asked students to "peruse any of the wonderful and insightful issues that have been assigned from John T. Rourke's Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in World Politics."

Upon Rourke's Issue #3, America's Superpower Status

While reading Rourke, I found that the most interesting, debatable, and insightful issue from Rourke was Issue #3. "SHOULD AMERICA ABANDON ITS SUPERPOWER STATUS?" This is presented by Doug Bandow and Anthony Lake, in which Bandow takes the affirmative side of the issue and Lake the opposing stance. To fully explain this issue, I will not only look at the authors, but their stances on the issues, how their stances fit into the World System, Hegemons, and basic Perceptions. I will then go into the future looking at such items, as well as some thoughts of my own. Basically, I will show that a simple 'yes' or 'no' question is much more complicated and in-depth than one might think. So, with no further ado, let's get Rourking!

I will first look at the 'Yes' [America should step down as a superpower] answer to our question, as presented by Doug Bandow. He presents a situation where America is the "Big Protector" and the source for assistance (in many situations) throughout the world. But, in a time when there is no war, no Cold War, and no need for a U.S. policeman, why should we continue on this path? Bandow wants us to bring our troops home who are on foreign soil, change our 'worldly' ways and concentrate on America. Sure, there may be people in the world who need our help, but there are people right here in America who need that same help. He wants us to step down as a superpower. This does not mean to become Isolationist, but certainly more self-centered. His
situation is one where you are not a superpower, but just a (non-influential) power: a partner in the world and not its savior.

With that said, we will move on to Anthony Lake. Lake is quite different from Bandow because Lake is a current Clinton administrator who gave a speech to the press and Bandow is a former Reagan administrator who wrote for a foreign research institute. [Bandow writes with educated intent; Lake writes/speaks to confirm current foreign policy.] Lake’s speech does not dive deep into its own theory: Not to step down as a superpower. Lake presents a situation of America being one of two things. The first of which is an Isolationist country, which keeps to itself. This, of course, is not good because it leaves no room for trade, world relations, a prosperous America, or an up-beat Global Political Economy. The second choice is Lake’s version of a sugarcoated Non-isolationist U.S. This of course follows that it allows for prosperity, justice, and the Good of America to be spread throughout the world. In his own argument, he wins. Non-isolationist is better than just Isolationist. Yet, when compared to Bandow and other categories, not just Lake’s argument, but both arguments find fault.

Now is the time when I agree or disagree with either side. As always, I am going to disagree with both. My first point can be seen by putting on our hegemonic goggles™. With these we will analyze Bandow and Lake’s arguments as applied to the Hegemonic Theory. Let us first look at Bandow. If we know that a Hegemon, by definition, will rise and fall, then the only chance to save it is to change the Hegemon itself. The problem we run into is the World System created by the U.S. Bandow suggests we “pull out” our military, aid, and foreign endeavors; this all goes against America’s own Hegemonic System and Perceptions. When looking at Self-Interest-Cooperation, those troops and aid are there specifically so that other countries will take part in our World System and get a share of the benefits— while the U.S. gets the lion’s share [of the benefits]. Moving on to American perceptions and [American] Capitalism, we cannot step down [as a superpower]. Capitalism’s [underlying] goal is to always get more. If we step down, then how can we get more if we do not control the World System and the Global Political Economy [which is the route to getting more]? Moving on to Perceptions, however you label it...Limited Assimilation Expansionism, Iso-organic Expansionism, etc., it has always been our intent to expand and civilize, or to make people like us [westward expansion of the U.S.]. Especially during the Post WWII era, we rebuilt those who showed the most promise to be like us. So why would we pull
out our troops and our aid, when ultimately — we want everyone to be like us? Once that happens, we can incorporate them into our World System. Let’s move on to Lake.

With our Hegemonic Goggles™, we also see major flaws with the argument by Lake. His argument of Isolationist vs. Non-isolationist [U.S.] is convincing, but the Non-isolationist conclusion has faults. He preaches that what has worked in the past fifty years will work for the next fifty years. PAST 50 = NEXT 50. Going back to part of the definition of a Hegemon, what creates its rise will create its fall. So his simple equation for success is actually the key to America’s fall. Unfortunately, it coincides with the path of Capitalism as well as our own perceptions.

O.K., so now what? If the answer is not Bandow’s, ‘yes,’ and is not Lake’s, ‘no,’ then what is it? Is it the mid-point between their arguments? Is there a way to save ourselves from our condemned fate? Ultimately this questions the systemic cycle of the Hegemonic System, and the perceptions which create the American Hegemony. Only by stepping down can America save itself from the final fall. But that will not and cannot happen. By definition, as Liberal-Democratic, Capitalist, Limited Assimilation Expansionism people, we must be ahead and in control. So the only way to save ourselves is through Change and Continuity. As Americans we must remain the Hegemon, but change what it is to be a Hegemon, thus breaking the cycle and saving ourselves. As Dr. Hart once proposed, “Hegemons have not always been around, who is to say that they will always be around?”

The only problem is my Back To The Future theorem. Basically, you’re damned if you do and damned if you don’t. First, remember that in Back to the Future, when they went into the future they saw problems. So they tried to change the future in the present. The only problem is, are those changes you tried to make the actual cause of the problems in the future? Let’s apply this to Hegemons. We know that we will fall. If we do not do anything, then we will fall (PAST 50 = NEXT 50 [=FALL]). So if we try to change now, perhaps we will cause our fall in the future. For example, America tries to change the World System and in doing so changes its status as a Hegemon. It is no longer a Hegemon, but a power insuring that there is and will not be another Hegemon. But, some country rises up and opposes the U.S. and [the opposing country] wants to be a superpower/Hegemon. This goes against the World System of the U.S. and causes what? WAR. The exact Global War which was supposed to end the original U.S. hegemony.
[On another thought, is it better to act and do something, then to never do anything at all? If one does nothing, then the already known and inevitable will happen. So, by doing something to change the known outcome, the worst one can do is only as good as doing nothing, meaning that if you do something, that outcome can only turn out as good, if not better, than doing nothing at all. Besides, the future has yet to come and yet to be written; what it holds no one truly knows nor can predict.]

In conclusion, I have not yet conquered the Hegemonic System; neither have Bandow and Lake. But ultimately it falls onto Perceptions, Economics (capitalism), and the Hegemonic System [with times and events still to come].

Works Cited