



The Circulation of Civilisations

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19543193>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 27-03-2026

Published: 10-04-2026

Keywords:

Circulation of Civilisations;
US Hegemony;
Multipolarity; De-
dollarisation; Global South

ABSTRACT

This paper challenges the notion of the “end of history” by proposing the concept of the “circulation of civilisations,” wherein global power evolves through recurring shifts rather than reaching a final stage. Drawing on the theories of Kenneth Waltz and Samuel P. Huntington, it critiques Francis Fukuyama’s claim of the universal triumph of liberal democracy after the Cold War. The study examines the rise of the United States as a dominant global power sustained through military strength, economic control, and cultural influence, while highlighting patterns of coercive intervention. The removal of leaders such as Che Guevara, Muammar Gaddafi, and Saddam Hussein is analysed as part of broader tensions between hegemonic power and efforts at autonomy in the Global South. The paper further explores the gradual erosion of US dominance through de-dollarisation and the rise of alternative power centres such as BRICS. It argues that the global order is shifting toward a multipolar structure, reaffirming that history remains dynamic, contested, and continuously unfolding.

The idea of history reaching its endpoint has long been debated, challenged and reinterpreted. The end of the twentieth century witnessed a dramatic shift in global politics. It transformed from a multipolar world order that survived both the world wars to a bi-polar one during the Cold War. The period ranging from 1969 to 1979 saw a phase of ‘*detente*’ i.e peaceful co-existence through cooperation, diplomacy and arms control.



In 1979, from a neorealist standpoint, Kenneth Waltz's seminal work - *Theory of International Politics* emphasized that the international system is inherently anarchic, compelling states to seek power and security. In such a system, no single hegemon can maintain dominance indefinitely. The rise and fall of great powers is not an anomaly but a structural inevitability. The USA, despite its unparalleled post-Cold War supremacy, is subject to the same systemic pressures that once constrained previous hegemony such as the British Empire. After the end of the Cold War finally in 1991 with the collapse of the USSR, Francis Fukuyama famously argued that liberal democracy represented the final form of human government and supremacy of the USA from there on. This assertion, articulated in *The End of History* and the *Last Man*, rested on the apparent triumph of the United States and its liberal capitalist model over the Soviet Union and ultimately the world order. For a brief historical period this claim appeared convincing but history is far from ending and has a tendency to evolve in cycles rather than culminate in finality.

The contemporary global landscape increasingly reflects what may be called as the "circulation of civilisations" - a process in which power, influence and ideological dominance shift from one civilisation core to another over time. This perspective not only challenges Fukuyama's thesis but aligns more closely with the structural and civilisational analyses offered by thinkers like Kenneth Waltz and Samuel P. Huntington. Parallel to Waltz's understanding we have Huntington's civilisational thesis articulated in *The Clash of Civilisations and Remaking of World Order*. As per him, the future conflicts would not primarily be ideological or economical but civilisational. Cultural identities, historical experiences and civilisational; affiliations would shape global politics in profound ways. While Huntington stressed on the idea of cultural conflicts, his work implicitly supports the idea that no single civilisation can permanently dominate the global order. The multiple civilisations rise, interact, compete and reshape the international system over time.

The Coercive Cooperation

The US ascent to global dominance was not accidental. After World War II, while Europe lay devastated in ashes and colonial empires crumbled, the US emerged as an economic powerhouse with unmatched industrial capacity. It institutionalised its influence through organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, shaping the global financial architecture in its own image. The end of the Cold War era thus consolidated American power. American dominance operates through multiple channels like military superiority, economic control, cultural hegemony and institutional leadership.



The US possesses the most advanced and far reaching military apparatus in the world. From interventions in Iraq, Vietnam and Afghanistan to maintaining military bases across continents, its power projection capabilities are unparalleled. Operations like the Gulf War demonstrated its ability of mobilising global coalitions, but also set a precedent for unilateral interventions. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 carried out without UN approval is often cited as an example of its violation of established international norms. Beyond its hard power, the US exercises soft power through media, technology and heavily via its culture. Hollywood, Silicon Valley and global islands export American values worldwide, subtly shaping aspirations, lifestyles and even political ideals.

Moreover, in the contemporary era, the relation of each state with the US is seen to be based on obedience of the former to the latter. Economic sanctions, though presented as diplomatic tools, often disproportionately impact civilian populations while enforcing US geopolitical interests. From Latin America to the Middle East, the US has been accused of supporting or orchestrating regime changes to maintain favourable governments. Such actions challenge the notion of the US as a benign hegemon and instead portray it as a power willing to bend rules when convenient. A recent event where India was warned of increasing US sanctions if it didn't cut off oil imports from Russia demonstrates its coercive and controlling nature in the global order. These sanctions are primarily rooted in the US laws and are enforced through dollars.

The Declining Dominance of Dollar

The dominance of the US dollar is increasingly under threat due to a combination of geopolitical, economic and structural shifts in the global order. Countries such as China, Russia, India and other BRICS members are actively promoting de-dollarisation by conducting trade in local currencies, largely to reduce dependence on the US and avoid the impact of sanctions, ultimately avoiding obedience to it. The rising US debt, political instability and trade conflicts have weakened global confidence in the currency, encouraging investors and states to diversify into alternatives like gold, the Euro and the Chinese Yuan.

The US is not a global governing authority, yet it is able to impose sanctions on other countries because of its overwhelming economic and financial power rather than any universal legal mandate. It exercises its control via international banking networks, access to technology and markets and most importantly the US dollar. Since a large portion of global trade is conducted in dollars, countries engaging with the sanctioned states like Russia after the Russia-Ukraine War risk losing access to these essential systems, making compliance a practical necessity. While institutions like the United Nations hold the formal



authority to impose multilateral sanctions under international law, US sanctions are unilateral and operate through coercive economic influence, illustrating how power shapes global economic behaviour.

Power Projection and Impending Threat : The US in the Middle East

Repeated interventions of the US in other countries have sparked global criticisms for one simple reason - sovereignty. The recent escalation in the Middle East has taken a dramatic turn with the killing of Iranian leader Ali Khamenei during the ongoing conflict involving Iran and Israel by the US special force. This development reflects the unprecedented level of direct intervention, where targeting the highest political authority of a sovereign state signals not just military engagement but a powerful assertion of dominance in global politics. For many observers, such actions reinforce the perception of the US as an international 'bully' whose interests are far fetched and deviant from its statement. It might be a way of clearing out the regimes posing as threats to its liberal agenda and forming an utopian boundary dividing the world again into two - the Rightists and Europe and Asia.

At the same time, this escalation deepens global tensions, as countries like China and North Korea watch closely, often perceived as holding back their full capabilities, thereby contributing to an increasingly uncertain and volatile international order. The horror of the unknown is more than what is already known to us.

Leaders, Legacies and the Cost of Defiance: A Chronological Perspective

The story of resistance to global dominance is not confined to a single region or era; it unfolds across time through leaders who, in different contexts, sought to challenge prevailing power structures.

Che Guevara emerges earliest in this trajectory. A central figure in the Cuban Revolution of 1959, he became a global symbol of anti-imperialist struggle. Guevara believed that nations in Latin America, Africa, and beyond could free themselves from economic dependency on powerful capitalist states, particularly the United States. His revolutionary efforts extended beyond Cuba to regions such as the Congo and Bolivia. In 1967, he was captured and executed in Bolivia with the assistance of US-backed forces, an event widely interpreted as part of Cold War efforts to contain revolutionary movements (Anderson, 1997).

Muammar Gaddafi rose to power in Libya in 1969, positioning himself as both a nationalist and a pan-African leader. Over decades, he used Libya's oil wealth to expand public welfare, education, and infrastructure, while advocating for African unity and economic independence. His calls for alternative



financial systems, including proposals for a gold-backed African currency, reflected a broader attempt to reduce reliance on Western-dominated institutions (St. John, 2012). However, his authoritarian governance drew criticism. In 2011, amid the Arab Spring, a NATO-led intervention resulted in his overthrow and death, raising ongoing debates about external intervention and regime change (Kuperman, 2013).

Saddam Hussein's leadership in Iraq, consolidated in 1979, reflected another form of defiance shaped by regional and global tensions. Under his rule, Iraq developed significant infrastructure and military capability, emerging as a major regional power. However, his regime was also marked by repression and prolonged conflict, including the Iran-Iraq War. In the early 2000s, Iraq's move to shift oil transactions away from the US dollar was seen by some analysts as a symbolic challenge within the global financial system (Clark, 2005). The 2003 US-led invasion, justified on the grounds of weapons of mass destruction and security concerns, led to his removal and execution, with long-term consequences for regional stability (Fawn & Hinnebusch, 2006).

Across these decades, despite their differing ideologies and governance styles, a pattern becomes visible. Each leader, in their own way, sought to assert autonomy within a system dominated by powerful states. Their downfalls, shaped by both internal contradictions and external interventions, reflect the complex and often costly consequences of challenging established global power structures.

From a Global Power to a Global Bully

The exercise of the US's hard and soft power can be seen excessively in present times, and no claims are able to justify its grounds of aggression. The recent and highly controversial example of the US overreach can be seen in its actions against Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela in 2026. Not just any leader, but a sitting president, captured by US forces which invaded another country - A blatant violation of the international law of sovereignty, yet the UN along with others hasn't escalated the matter. In an international arena the ideals of sovereignty, equality and mutual respect are promised but when it comes to the US, it's evident that the US is a global bully and pitting against it could attract severe consequences.

The continuation of the US's interventionist policies have met with global criticism along with the unrest by its own people. This growing domestic dissatisfaction within the US already signals early signs of internal strains like witnessed back in 1990 in the USSR. The impending dual change - erosion from



within and resistance from outside - might ultimately lead to a significant transformation of its global position and the structure of international order.

Conclusion

The idea that history has reached its final stage under a single dominant model is increasingly difficult to sustain. Rather than moving toward a fixed endpoint, the global order reveals a pattern of continuous transformation—what this paper has described as the circulation of civilisations. The rise of the United States to unparalleled global dominance after the Cold War once appeared to validate claims of a stable, unipolar world. However, its reliance on military intervention, economic coercion, and institutional influence has exposed the limits of such dominance.

The experiences of leaders who sought alternative paths, alongside the growing resistance from emerging powers, reflect deeper tensions within the international system. The gradual weakening of the US dollar's centrality and the rise of new economic and political alignments further indicate a shift away from concentrated power.

What emerges is not the end of history, but its continuation in new forms. Power is neither permanent nor uncontested; it evolves, encounters resistance, and is eventually reconfigured. In this ongoing process, the global order moves toward greater complexity, where multiple centres of influence coexist, and where the future remains open, uncertain, and shaped by both conflict and adaptation.

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