War, Oil, and Conundrum of Hegemony

We will get on our way to a new record of expansion . . . that will carry us into the next American Century.

—George H. W. Bush
State of the Union Message to the Nation (1991)

A foreign policy that is both immoral and unsuccessful is not simply stupid, it is increasingly dangerous to those who practice or favor it. That is the predicament that the United States now confronts.

—Gabriel Kolko
Another Century of War (2002: 138)

Introduction

The invasion of Iraq—and subsequent occupation of this little country in March 2003—is a déjà vu in the context of the repeated attempts by the United States at turning back the clock of the new epoch to save her hegemonic past. This unreasonable behavior has come to be reasonably predictable, particularly in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union (1917–90) and the lack of inhibition to and penchant for military adventure in the confused and confusing interlude between the collapse of the Pax Americana (1945–79) and the posthegemonic world in the making. Thanks to the loud and boisterous pageantry of the Reagan era, that masked the scale and immensity of Pax Americana’s breakdown, the celebrating of the triumph of America and its acclaimed mastery of the world continued. The post-Reagan 1990s did not produce any appreciable deviation from this euphoric norm until the boomerang of 9/11 hit the homeland, not by vigorous enemies who had come from outer space, but the descendants of the foot soldiers trained and weaponized by America in the Afghan war against the Soviet “infidels”—a barefooted bunch. Even
so, this was not accepted as a sign of diminishing US global power in the post-Pax Americana era. Indeed, we argue the fall of the Soviet bloc should also be considered as a subset of the fall of Pax Americana, if one cares to look at the grand trajectory of the entire forces that were brought to bear by a new epoch better known as globalization (see Bina 1997, 2011; Bina and Davis 2008). This chapter shows that the war-for-oil scenario is a misleading myth that not only negates the decartelization of oil toward competitive globalization but also conceals the fall of Pax Americana and the loss of the American hegemony. The loss of the latter and America’s obsession to get it back is what this havoc is all about. Moreover, the real scenario is the decline and fall of American global hegemony, an 800 pound gorilla that has all the while been sitting in the room without an inkling of acknowledgement from the sizable majority of self-styled experts, from the far right to the far left within the political and ideological spectrum across the world. We contend that the recognition of this very key fact is indispensable for nearly all matters that affect the question of peace and war in today’s global polity.

The Mirror of Iraq and Disjointed Time

While the primordial dust of the Big Bang, so to speak, of globalization (distinct from what is known as neoliberalism), especially globalization of polity has not yet quite settled and the rules of engagement, interaction and coexistence are still in flux, the biggest bully on the block seems to be the decider. In this peculiar half-way scramble of politics the footings have already crumbled although the face and the façade are lingering and replicating the pathological pageantry of better times and the rumbling of reckless military might. The consequence of course is not unpredictable. The blowback arrives not in time, but in an awesome second. And that is an impeccable indication for sizing up the dilemma of a power that has lost its hegemony and now is on the descent, perhaps in free fall. The difference between an ascending power and a descending one is that the former wins its battles on its own terrain in its own epoch; the latter forces its purposeless battles on an epoch that negates its very existence. The first combats with legitimacy, the second confronts and crawls into a mortifying void. Hence, the hastening of the decay by the latter’s own flagellating hand through exceptionalism, unilateralism, preemptive adventurism, and other assorted deceitful and reactionary means. This is the total difference when the specter of change is hovering in every nook and cranny of the world and, in a vivid Shakespearian depiction,