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Institutional Hegemonic Resilience: Understanding the Dynamics of American Exceptionalism in the Institutional World Order*

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Abstract

The post-world war liberal order has been primarily based on the pillars of international institutions inspired from the idea of multilateral agreements and rooted in the ideological components of Western enlightenment and liberal tradition. This order, which has been established and consolidated by a complex set of regulations in form of international institutions, trade agreements, and security alliances, continued to function well after the bipolar system of the Cold War, into the hegemonic US-led era. The principal ideology of this hegemony borrows its spirit from an exceptionality of identity, the much discussed, yet disputable concept of American Exceptionalism. By performing a critical discourse analysis on presidential State of the Union addresses post-World War II regarding nuclear institutional hegemony, this research identifies the way in which political identity and ideational elements, derived from the notion of American Exceptionalism, have played a key role in the strategic culture of America, shaping its grand strategies throughout the past decades to create and maintain an institutional hegemonic dominance in the global arena, and in the nuclear regime as a case study. As a result of the theoretical and critical discourse analysis combined, the concept of *Institutional Hegemonic Resilience* has been offered to explain the dynamics.

Keywords: American Exceptionalism, American Grand Strategy, Institutional Hegemony, Neoclassical Realism, Nuclear Hegemony

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1. Introduction

The election of Donald Trump in 2016, created many surprised faces, a significant amount of satisfaction and delight from parts of the American society known as the “White, male, worker class” grassroots noting this victory as a *wishful*, triumphant return of the “First-ness, Great-ness” and if we may, Exceptionality of the American brand. However, on the other side of the political spectrum and for most of those outside the United States, the result was mainly dismay, confusion and disappointment. Profound questions were raised surrounding the newly occurred situation, domestically, and subsequently all over the world, about the future American role in the global arena. The questions were about the continuity and possible changes in the “traditional” trajectory of the American Grand Strategy dating back to the post- World War II era, coming forward all the way through the Cold War and afterwards to the unipolar American primacy era. Concerns and curiosities rose about the swing between Jeffersonian Isolationism and Wilsonian liberal internationalism and institutionalism in the American definition of its security, as the security of the global hegemon, thus the security of the whole international system, known as the world order, to shape its grand strategy.

The wonderings became more intense when the new administration began to draw back from certain international commitments, treaties and agreements, such as the Human Rights Council, JCPOA, TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership), the Paris Agreement, and the UNESCO Constitution. Its attitude towards a strategy based on reducing costs, institutional burdens, and terminating agreements that were in contradiction to the American interests, were constantly studied and carefully observed by experts. Although this was not an unprecedented presidential

matter, the viability of the American leadership role in the current liberal world order was put under speculation. Predictions were made on how the current hegemon will act, in face of the changing world and rise of other great powers and the domestic developments inside the American society and political elite. In this context, the way in which this hegemon continued to maintain and consolidate its institutional hegemony rooted in its backbone tradition of American Exceptionalism since the end of the Cold War—regardless of the rather contradictory trajectories of administrations—constitutes the main question of this study. To restrict our methodology and make it viable, we have chosen the nuclear realm specifically as a case study.

To answer the research question, a critical discourse analysis is applied to the presidential State of the Unions since the end of the Second World War, with a hint of the nuclear-related historical background of the events occurred in each period. This is done in the paradigm of neo-classical realism with the ideological substance of American Exceptionalism. In this respect and based on the research's basic assumptions of hegemony, different narratives on the concept of institutional hegemony are textually analyzed in accordance with circumstantial and ideational evidence to synthesize and propose a new idea of *resilience* in institutional hegemony. Because of the qualitative essence of this research, empirical data and inherently hypotheses do not become priorities. The data in a qualitative study are words and the researcher's perception of events and narratives, which come mainly in the form of descriptive analysis (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990; Locke et al., 1987; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988 all in Creswell, 2002).

We have tried to elaborate on the continuing institutional

nuclear hegemony of the United States in spite of the quite diverse approaches that presidential discourses and turn of events have taken over time. We hope to shine light on the internal ideational and cultural variables of a grand strategy of nuclear institutional hegemony, designed to operate in response to the impulses of an anarchic international system. With this objective, a new notion of Institutional Hegemonic Resilience has been introduced to explain this continuity. The continuity of US institutional hegemony (in the nuclear global regime) has been taken as the main assumption in this research to enable us to explain the ongoing viability of the institutions established under the power of the United States and by the collaboration of other powers after the second World War, throughout the Cold War era and afterwards in the new order. The assumption is made upon the mentioned fact and in the theoretical paradigm of realism, which considers power to be the main element in international dynamics, and without the power of states and their political and economic support, no institution is able to function by itself.

2. Defining American Exceptionalism

A variety of ideas, doctrines, policies, and actions is raised when the expression “American Exceptionalism” is invoked. Generally speaking, ‘American Exceptionalism’ may attribute to the belief that the United States differs qualitatively from “other developed nations, because of its unique origins, national credo, historical evolution, and distinctive political and religious institutions” (Koh, 2005, p. 225). The expression has been constantly defined and discussed by scholars who have tried to illustrate the “uniqueness” and exceptionality of the country either in an appraising way or as a means to criticize the concept and/or the origins and what derives

from it, while others have tried to prove it as a myth (Hodgson, 2010; Froese, 2007; Weaver, 1995; Varon, 2011; Walt, 2019; Carter, 2015). The term, as Ceaser (2012) puts it, designates a family of concepts, not just one. He emphasizes that none of its proposed meanings is necessarily better or more correct; they are just different. He concludes that in the end, it is a matter of the analyst selecting a variant that is of interest or importance for a given inquiry (Ceaser, 2012, pp. 3-28).

In a specific, detailed classification, American Exceptionalism has been given attributes of *distinctiveness* (merely different), *uniqueness* (anomalous), *exemplarity* (a model for other nations to follow), or *exemption* from the laws of historical progress (it is an *exception* to the laws and rules governing the development of other nations). The two first definitions could be counted in the first category of the nation being somewhat “different” and the other two could be categorized in the being “special” with the sense of superiority as such. The specialness in itself subdivides into two distinct ideas: a) the possession of a certain quality and/or b) the embrace of a task or mission. If the specialness is to be taken into account, apart from taking the burden of a mission to disseminate and spread the American values by different means and sometimes even by practicing rather aggressive and unilateral approaches resulting in many sorts of interference and manipulation to tragic disastrous wars, the implications could consist of being “exceptional,” meaning that Americans demand to be treated in a different manner, compared to other nations.

The first idea refers to certain values and norms residing in the American state and society, which have historically been the foundations of the United States and the main pillars of the “American Identity”. These core values have shaped the American

ideology, and as Seymour Martin Lipset (1996) puts it, consist of: liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, (democracy or) populism and laissez faire (free market economy) (Ceaser, 2012). In addition, having had a different historical background and having not gone through the same historical progress as the other nations, making it exempt from the rules governing the development of other nations, adds to the specialness of the country. In the liberal world view, the United States avoided the class conflicts, revolutionary upheaval, and authoritarian governments of 'Europe' (Ross, 1984, pp. 909-28 in Tyrrell, 1991), and a feudal past, therefore possesses a unique history (Tyrrell, 1991) and the due to the transmission of the European *progressive* virtues arisen from the intellectual turnover in Europe, holds strong values of liberty, equality, individualism, limited government, democracy, freedom, states' rights, and laissez capitalism. The American Revolution—which confronted both a monarchy and a centralized government—the westward expansion, the frontier theory, and the rise of an American brand of evangelical Christianity, all established and consolidated the aforementioned claimed values.

Although the entire idea of American Exceptionalism has often been homogenized intentionally and/or unintentionally, to having an invariant and inflexible set of components shaping and defining it, many critiques such as Richard Hofstadter, Daniel Elazar, Judith Shklar and Wilson Carter have challenged the mainstream idea and extracted certain rather distinct and occasionally contradictory components of the term, which challenge the prevalent, popular view exposed by the proponents.

The mainstream academic and mainly political take of American Exceptionalism has oversimplified the diverse and complex substance of the American political culture, and has often neglected

the fact that it contains both *progressive* and *reactionary* variants. Portraying the concept as homogenous and solely progressive has seriously flawed the very origins of it and denied the negative reactionary traditions embedded in the concept (Wilson, 2015). In fact, as opposed to the European intellectual tradition inherited by America and integrated by progressive mindsets to glorify the American foundation and virtual significance, the other side of the coin of exceptionality lies deeply in the anti-intellectual traditions, sometimes crystalized in political figures and elite such as Donald Trump and his counterparts. Understanding these contradictions helps to see the extent to which racial oppression and other “anti-intellectual” traditions are deeply engraved in the aforementioned American “Exceptional Values”. The oppressive culture of American Exceptionalism is rooted in religious, intellectual and racist traditions. These oppressive racist traditions have taken their toll on the global stage and in the form of international institutions and regulations in the current world order.

On the other hand, possessing the unique values derived from a unique background lead into the second idea of specialness, which is the mission and responsibility of spreading the values such as liberty and democracy throughout the world. The American identity has been considered to have self-designation as a special nation empowered with a distinguished historical task. The mission itself has been viewed as fulfilling a religious purpose and/or a political one by different American presidents, reiterated in distinctive ways. Instances include, Reagan’s recitation of Winthrop’s “City upon a Hill” idea (Reagan, 1983b) and his emphasis on the moral aspect of American virtues against the sin of Communism (Reagan, 1983a); Kennedy’s approach of “liberating people under the communist rule” (Kennedy, 1963) and Johnson’s

messianic account on the American covenant calling “to help show the way for the liberation of man” (Johnson, 1965). This idea arises from the relationship of the members of the American society with ‘the other,’ “the non-members, the nonbelievers, the impure, the immoral, the outcast, the godless, the evil-doers and the disciples of Satan. They become Christian soldiers, willing to go to war against evil doers” (Wilson, 2015, p. 16). There is a certain self-righteousness in defining an ‘otherness’ to be seriously confronted with and to feel morally superior to. They believe they have “God on their side” (Wilson, 2015, p. 17). This orientation has been widely depicted and played out in the US history. Violent repression against an evil enemy or threat dates back to the Puritans, the Massachusetts Bay Colony and their shining notion of “The City on a Hill”.

Referring to the “exceptional” part of the idea of *specialness*, Exceptionalism can be often observed as a pattern of American behavior throughout history, to recent times. The demand to be treated differently from the rest of the world, leads into a behavior very well speculated in the American policies. As Michael Ignatieff describes US policies toward multilateral human rights agreements, three specific types of behavior can be categorized under the concept: excusing itself from provisions of treaties by several means; maintaining a double standard by applying permissive criteria when it comes to allies and friends; and denying jurisdiction to human rights law within its own domestic law, insisting on the self-contained authority of its own domestic rights tradition (Ignatieff, 2005). According to Lavender (2015p. 2), “in the context of US foreign policy, the label “Exceptionalism” has increasingly been used with respect to an American tendency to remain outside of multilateral regimes and to an unwillingness to abide by the norms of international law”.

To sum up the definitions described above, the different and in certain cases contradictory criteria for defining the discourse of American Exceptionalism through a critical discourse analysis, may be described as follows:

1. Being different from other nations in any way; which can be categorized in two other criteria: being distinctive” (meaning merely different) or “unique” (meaning anomalous): the absence of feudal hierarchies, class conflicts in its past and the presence of certain qualities that no other nation possesses.
2. Being special: “exemplary” (meaning a model for other nations to follow) or that it is “exempt” from the laws of historical progress; specialness itself subdivides into two distinct ideas: a) the possession of a certain quality and/or b) the embrace of a task or mission to lead other nations and distribute the certain values and the common “good”.
3. Being exceptional meaning demanding to be treated differently from the rest of the world, in three ways: First exception from the provisions of international treaties by explicit reservation, non-ratification, or noncompliance. Second, maintaining a double standard: judging itself and its friends by more permissive criteria than it does its enemies. Third, denying jurisdiction to human rights law within its own domestic law, insisting on the self-contained authority of its own domestic rights tradition.
4. The distinctions between the “West” and the “East” that gives grounding to the foundational narrative of “America”: Exceptional as opposed to “the others”. An idea that could be rooted either in political thoughts or religious ideas.

5. Being exceptional could contain “progressive” values as well as “reactionary” trends in it, from a critical point of view.

3. Neoclassical Realism: A Format to Take American Exceptionalism to US Foreign Policy

It is believed that no single theory can truly define, or better said, restrict the domain of an idea carried out in research. Therefore, for the sake of better understanding, neoclassical realism is thought to best fit the concepts in this study and deliver the best explanations in order to find suitable answers to the question raised. The theories relying solely on systematic ideas ignore the inside elements of the units and the role and importance of the units as agents in the systematic structure. On the other hand, the unit-based theories neglect the essence of the global system and its reinforcing dynamics. Therefore, neither theory depicts the subtle scene of international politics and the foreign policies shaped in this system, as some scholars have evidently opposed resorting to solely any of these explanations for foreign policy, i.e., American foreign policy. Instead, the conciliation between domestic and systematic variables has been suggested as a mindset of American foreign policy makers, which requires a theoretical framework more responsive to including the national and sub-national components.

In comparison to other schools of realism and in contrast to constructivism, neoclassical realism seems to best embody the foreign policy of the United States and the role of American Exceptionalism in the foreign policy analysis. While sharing a range of fundamentals with the other branches of thought in the paradigm, the neoclassical realist’s attitude can be illustrated by a concept of “domestic transmission belt” between impulses coming

from the international system level and the rationality of states in their complicated process of foreign policy decision-making. Thus, it takes into consideration a “variety of domestic determinants, including the perception of power and quality of political elites” (Więclawski, 2017, p. 193). The school gives a synthesis of classical realism and neorealism in a sense that it combines Morgenthau’s reliance on the state-level importance and considerations of a dynamic nature of politics and complex sources of power and Waltz’s approach to the systematic forces, which form the action of states.

The term *neoclassical realism* was coined by Gideon Rose and first used in his review article “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy” in 1998. He argues, “the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities” (Rose, 1998, p. 146) in an anarchic system. However, how and why individual states pursue particular foreign policies, reacting to the systematic dynamics in their own specific way, is defined by state-level ‘intervening variables’ of domestic factors. The foreign policy decision-making thus becomes an act of domestic perception, identity, state political structure and other sub-state features. The leadership and elite power in a state plays the key role in the process of decision-making and the final determination of the foreign policy acts and grand strategy formations.

To gain a theoretical perspective towards the subject of study, it is inevitable to resort to the main conceptual foundations of this research: American Exceptionalism and Institutional Hegemony. If we accept that grand strategy is derived from a strategic culture of a certain agent of the international system, be it the state, and a

means to achieve, maintain or expand power in the system as the ultimate end, which at the same time is strongly influenced by the system itself and the actions of the other agents, then we can come to ends with the paradigm of neo-classical realism. In other words, grand strategy acts as a means of taking the ideational components of a state's power (here, American Exceptionalism) to the global arena and interpret it into a certain behaviour (Institutional Hegemony).

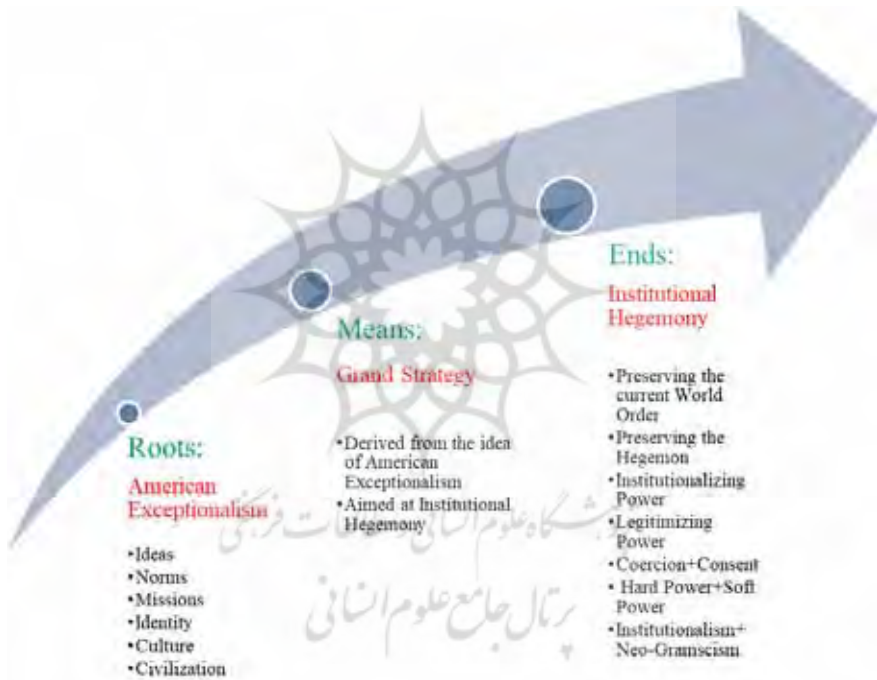


Figure. 1. Neo-Classical Realism: Connecting the Roots, Means and Ends

Source: Authors

Neoclassical Realism explains the way in which the culture, ideas and identity issues of the United States at the domestic level - i.e., American Exceptionalism - have been vital in the US definition of national interest and grand strategy. This in turn, has

resulted in the establishment of an institution-based hegemonic order led by the great powers in the direct aftermath of the World Wars and by the United States in the current hegemonic order, hence its institutional hegemony.

4. US Institutional Hegemony in the Liberal World Order

The theory of Hegemonic Stability has some rationality indeed, and brings insight to what we know as the hegemonic power, its global dynamics, and its institutional indications. In his review of the theory, Duncan Snidal (1985, p. 579) states:

The theory, to state it baldly, claims that the presence of a single, strongly dominant actor in international politics leads to collectively desirable outcomes for all states in the international system. Conversely, the absence of a hegemon is associated with disorder in the world system and undesirable outcomes for individual states.

Nevertheless, Snidal (1985) argues that not only the cooperation and collective action of the other states does not necessarily decline, nor the stability of the system diminish by the decline of the hegemon, but it may actually increase. Furthermore, Allison Bailin (2001) brings together and synthesizes the theory of hegemonic stability with institutionalism, (much in accordance with the subject of this research), and discusses the idea that the world order created by the institutionalized hegemony of the hegemon, because of the involvement and engagement of the other powers of this order, can be saved by those powers. She contends that, the institutional mechanisms enable great powers to collectively manage global economic crises and maintain the liberal economic order (Bailin, 2001). Vice versa, it is the power

possessed by the hegemon and great powers that maintains the credibility of international institutions and arrangements.

On the other hand, Gramscian account of hegemony brings in skillfully the element of values, soft power, and culture in forms of multilateral institutions, which subjugate and dominate the others in ways that they themselves are willing to submit to them. Antonio Gramsci “developed the concept of hegemony to describe a condition in which the supremacy of a social group is achieved not only by physical force but also through consensual submission of the very people who were dominated” (Litowitz, 2000, p. 518). Therefore, in this theoretical view, again, the institutions established and consolidated by sets of rules and procedures help keep the hegemonic world order in place and the hegemon at top. The difference with the previous accounts of institutionalized hegemony is that in this case, the Gramscian perspective takes into account the norms and values (the main value system stemmed from the traditional identity belief in the exceptionality of America), which constitute these institutions deeply, so that there is no need for coercion, per se, but the convincing soft power of the hegemon played out in the international system and institutions are almost blindly submitted to and chosen to adhere to unconsciously (Mcguire & Lindeque, 2007). Thus, they may seem flexible and open to choices, but they are actually very constraining. They may even constrain the choice of the hegemon itself, as far as the United States seems entangled to a degree, that at some point, it decides to leave quite a number of these multilateral, international institutions, the Human Rights Council being a great example of this case.

Furthermore, in another conceptual analysis of the Gramscian concept of hegemony, Franziska Böhm emphasizes the legitimacy caused by the hegemon in combination with the power it possesses. This happy marriage making the basis of the legitimate authority of

the hegemon, which she states can only be established and maintained through a combination of coercion and consent. Gramsci argues that predominance is obtained by consent, and cultural hegemony describes that power is exercised as much through cultural texts as through physical force (Böhm, 2018, p. 36).

Institutions are one of the main elements of the cultural context in which the hegemon exercises its dominance. Institutions—defined as “formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy” (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 938)—can play a crucial role in acquiring hegemony. Memberships of institutions can determine which (military and economic) rules apply to which states, and which taxes and debts they have to pay in which forms. It is often through constructing, destructing, participating and leading institutions that various states pursue their political and strategic ambitions. Cooperation, coalition and collaboration crystalized in and derived from the essence of international institutions could perfectly be adjusted and tailored to the interests of the more powerful players in the international game. Therefore, the hegemon usually has the upper hand in shaping the structures and underlying rules of an institution.

One of the main schools of thought in international relations attributed to the role and rationale of international institutions is Liberal Institutionalism. Its proponents, such as Keohane and Nye have certain arguments on the concept of *institutional hegemony*. They believe that power could be crystalized in institutions, and define the hegemonic state as “powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations, and (...) willing to do so” (Keohane & Nye, 2011, p. 72 in Bongers, 2017, p. 10). Liberal

institutionalists, such as Ikenberry, Qin Yaqing, and Keohane explain the international rules-based order after the Second World War, heavily influenced by international institutions. Countries coordinate their policies through international institutions to maintain the order with or without a hegemon (Keohane, 1984). Institutions are constructs of self-interested states, but they also alter state behavior (Ikenberry, 1998, p. 52). The notion of power here is dismissed and it is important to keep both hegemonic (power-related) and institutional elements in mind to be able to understand the dynamics of the liberal world order.

Therefore, the weight that realists such as Mearsheimer give to the materialistic powers and capabilities, dismisses the importance of 'soft power' and undermines the hegemon's -here, the American ideational hegemony; a concept underlined by Nye himself. Leaning to either side (hard or soft power) extensively, leads inevitably to ignorance towards the role of international institutions rooted in the institutionalized channel of the hegemon's power. The institutions have allowed the United States to extend its limits of military and strategic power through certain rules and regulations and with the help and collaboration of its allies after the second World War. Therefore, it can be presumed that institutionalizing the hegemonic power, persuades the synergy of power by granting a soft power contributing component to the basically material strategic hard power. It is the synthesis of these types of intertwined powers that makes it attractive for a hegemon to move from traditional hegemony to *institutional hegemony* in the current liberal capitalistic order.

Although in the case of America, it seems that it has always been a combination of ideational and material pursuit of dominance, and the institutional one has been the *smart* choice

taken in the aftermath of the World Wars. The interaction and dynamics among these key elements have prominently formed the structure of the post-wars international order. The rules, institutions, pacts and international and regional treaties have legitimized the not so much covert exercise of dominance by the United States and its allies in periods of time. Hence, created a phony depiction of a rules-based international system consistent of a large number of socio-economic, military-strategic and political institutions, which strongly penalizes the outsiders and out-rulers, making them look like rogue states and trouble-makers. Ironically, both powers manifested in the forms of global institutions and binding regulations with punishing mechanisms of US hegemony are deeply rooted in the discourse of American *exceptionality*. Even in seemingly turbulent times of legitimacy issues in measures taken by the US, it has managed to save face in light of some kind of an interpretation of American Exceptionalism and demonstrate its righteousness with the help of its harder means of economic and far less, military power.

The dynamics, in turn have induced the hegemon to flow easily from and to critical junctures of time and events, whilst the institutionalized order is firm in place. Even and significantly in instances where the hegemon outlaws itself because of its “exemptional” position above all regulations and treaties, the institutions continue to pursue their “legitimate” fixed agendas, which strategically promotes the hegemon. Cox (1987, p. 150), in explaining this Gramscian aspect of hegemony, argues that one of the most important sources of ideational domination in the liberal market order that the American hegemony helped create and legitimize, was the “separation of economics and politics; the rule-governed economic international order achieved an apparent independence that effectively insulated and entrenched the U. S’s

overall position as the lynchpin of the system created in the early phase of American hegemony”. Making this distinction between low (economy and trade) and high politics (security) is said to have best matched the national security interests of the United States in the new world order. This especially helps in understanding the dynamics of the post 9/11 American unilateral actions and the way in which the institution-based order survives throughout these seemingly turbulent times.

The first instances of the Gramscian cultural aspect of hegemony playing out globally as an interpretation of American Exceptionalism consisting of its claimed values, date back to the times of the Cold War, when the rhetoric of the US ideology to counter the Soviet ideology with its fast and systematic spreading in the world, came in the form of strategies such as *containment* and *rollback*. The American ideology was seemingly based on decorated ideas of defending democracy and freedom, as the latter was represented as subjugating, enslaving mindsets of *totalitarian* essence, built upon Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” rhetoric (Churchill, 1946) to justify the US intervention in Turkey and Greece and other actions respectively. The contrast deliberately yet delicately drawn between the *totalitarians* and the *free world*, was provided to depict the clash of ideas in order to carry out the “security agenda” on the global scale. The division was the clear manifestation of certain vital aspects of the American Exceptionalism: The *chosen* people with chosen values; i.e., democracy, liberty, equality..., *distinct* and *exceptional* in history, culture and identity, bearing a divine mission to deliver them to the world. Hereby, the simplistic duality with no shades of grey was shaped right away for the American mind to sink into the American identity: “Us” versus “the Others”. The Truman Doctrine made it clear that it had always been about the ideology: even the

involvement in the World Wars, which could be justified as keeping nations from imposing their ideas onto the American domain of national interests, i.e., the world, thus maintaining its security.

Even though the Truman Doctrine was a novelty of strategy, the policy of containment was heavily influenced by the Wilsonian ideology of “freedom” and a its continuation. Following the American role in the First World War, Wilson seized the opportunity to bring out the elements of the U.S. political culture onto the global stage. The “otherization” started there, when the American norms were replicated to become the *universal norms*, defying and demonizing anyone who opposed those norms. The “rights” and the “wrongs” were soon divided and treaties and institutions were built upon the very concepts. This was particularly obvious in condemning the German war, by labelling it a *wrong-doing* against all nations and mankind. At the immediate aftermath, the “friends” were the victors and the “enemies” were all the ones standing on the *wrong* side of history, which had to be annihilated. The norms soon became the cornerstone of international institutions with an exceptional veto power for the great powers. The US has set the stage for a series of international pacts and institutions, led by its will and power to rule the world.

After all, to reach a comprehensive understanding of the institutional hegemony, this paper has brought the teachings of Hegemonic Stability, Institutionalism and its subordinates and the Neo-Gramscian account of hegemony together to explain the way in which the institutional hegemony of the United States has worked post World-War II and continues to stay relevant ever since, while with the grand strategy rooted in the American Exceptionalism, the three main theoretical concepts of power,

institutional mechanisms and culture are going to work alongside throughout the research to bridge the ideas of constructivism, liberal institutionalism and traditional power politics of realism in order to grasp a concise grip of how American Exceptionalism is interpreted in the American strategic culture to help maintain and strengthen its hegemony institution-wise.

To synthesize the teachings of the realist power-based hegemonic stability with the liberal arguments of institutionalism and the Gramscian cultural approach to hegemony, this research proposes the novel notion, which it calls '*Institutional Hegemonic Resilience*'. While all mentioned theories have attempted to explain the dynamics of a hegemon in the international system, there are areas of insufficiency in their deliberations. The order post-WWII has witnessed a stability and continuity of the US hegemony - within all changes occurred. Of course, the hegemon has not been alone in achieving its goals and the contribution of other great powers have been essential in this respect. The institutionalized hegemony derived from the policies of this group has eventually resulted in specific institutional mechanisms and dynamisms, which enables the group to manage and maintain the liberal capitalistic order in place.

5. A Critical Discourse Analysis in a Nuclear Case Study

Regarding the time scope of this study, which starts from the post-world war era, and ends during the Trump presidency, the fluctuations of grand strategy and foreign policy in different American administrations, as well as the intactness of the institutional global order became the general question of this research. As discussed in the conceptual elaboration of hegemony, the American hegemony since the end of World War II has been of

an institutional kind. To support the theoretical analysis offered, and to meet the purposes of this study, the institutional aspects of the nuclear (nonproliferation) regime are examined as a case study. As argued earlier, the hegemon has set up certain global institutions and regulations to form a world order and pursue its material and ideational interests on a global scale. The nuclear nonproliferation regime and its main institutions are of the very instances that have been established post World Wars by a concert of great powers, the United States at the peak. There have been critical junctures and fluctuations in the US nonproliferation policies, yet the overall strategy has remained more or less the same because of the certain regulations and norms in place.

The methodology of this research is based on the analysis of the State of the Union addresses and focuses on analyzing the American presidential rhetoric. To this end, we have applied a critical discourse analysis (CDA), taking the exceptionalist discourse indicators in institutional hegemony and specify it to the nuclear non-proliferation regime and resultingly handpick presidential State of Union addresses as case studies. An exceptionalist approach to all matters, specifically where it applies to nuclear exceptionalism is thoroughly studied and decodified in the related statements. A variant of attitudes can be seen in different situations and circumstances in which the president is located, as well as the political ideational background of the person in power and his team. In this respect, we witness that the ideas of exceptionalism have taken different aspects over time to match the worldview of the administration and the necessities of the world order as well as the global and domestic circumstances of the United States.

Because of the research conducted in a neoclassical realistic approach, the ideational, normative and identity components of the state are considered. To this end, American Exceptionalism as the main ideological tradition, has been scrutinized from different angles and through various, sometimes rather contradictory approaches. The indicators were extracted from the notion, in a way to be approachable in terms of studying the concept in different contexts. The definition of key terms brought to coding the main concepts, which was accordingly necessary in the CDA applied. This selection of method could be best explained in Iver B. Neumann's essay on discourse analysis, stating that "discourse analysis is particularly well suited for studying situations where power is maintained by aid of culture and challenged only to a limited degree, that is, what Gramscians call 'hegemony'" (Klotz & Prakash, 2011, p. 70).

All key concepts of this study attribute to power, dominance and inequality. As a result, to challenge this reality, CDA seems the most appropriate choice of research method. Because of its critical nature, CDA lies within the critical studies approach. It deals with ideologies that play a role in resistance against dominance or inequality. Among its aims, Van Dijk states, is the attempt to reveal and uncover what is thought to be implicit and covert in the dominant's discourse. All said, CDA specifically focuses on strategies of manipulation, legitimation and other ways of mental control and social influence of those in power, aka power elites, in an endeavor to take an oppositional stance against the powerful and the elites, who often abuse their power (Van Dijk, 1995). It also requires action in order to change the status quo dynamics, the existent order and challenge the "manipulative dominance".

6. Findings and Discussion

A CDA of State of the Unions has been applied to bring out the main elements of US exceptionality in the realm of nuclear matters reflected in those articulations as a module of a greater political elite discourse. To achieve a better understanding of the different presidential approaches to the theme of nuclear exceptionality and the related US institutional hegemony in the nuclear regime respectively, and acknowledge an overall underlying trend in all, we have categorized the upcoming themes, as they were used in the presidential rhetoric. Therefore, a table is drawn to depict this picture. To do so, the exceptionalist discourse indicators in institutional hegemony are taken and specified to the nuclear (non-proliferation) regime.

Table 1. American Exceptionalism in the Presidential Discourse: Implications of a CDA in Nuclear Institutional Hegemony

Presidents	Exceptionalist Moral Rhetoric	Grand Strategy	Implication in Nuclear Institutional Hegemony	Nuclear Institutional Hegemony Discourse
Truman	Readout of US atomic power: a powerful and forceful influence towards the maintenance of world peace	Decision to drop the "Bomb"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original idea of establishing an appropriate commission • Control the production and use of atomic power on a global scale 	Assertive Americanism
Kennedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mission of building and securing peace for all time • "World of free choice vs. World of Communism" • Liberating people under the communist rule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Strategy of Peace • Rollback Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuclear test ban treaty: suspending all atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons • Cold War Agreements of nuclear use: introduction to the selective possession of nuclear warfare 	
Nixon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Keeping peace' and defending 'freedom' subject to America's military might. 	US-Soviet Containing Negotiations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first SALT-related conversation • The combined SALT agreements 	

Presidents	Exceptionalist Moral Rhetoric	Grand Strategy	Implication in Nuclear Institutional Hegemony	Nuclear Institutional Hegemony Discourse
Ford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. “once again the master of the international scene.” 	Pragmatic US international leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continues the path previously paved by Nixon on the mutual agreements with the Soviets and international multilateral treaties 	
Reagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winthrop’s “City upon a Hill” idea Concept of Soviet “Evil Empire” Moral aspect of American virtues against the sin of communism Increase in US arms for world peace An <i>exceptional nation</i>, “would never accept second place 	Soviet Containment, Rollback, Détente, Balance of Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiating the INF: Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Arms Reduction instead of Arms Control 	
George H. W. Bush	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Only America” that could “manage” the “danger” of controlling Soviet nuclear weapons. Victory in the Cold War: American <i>exceptional</i> global mission 	Vision of a Post-Cold War new world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> non-proliferation regulatory bodies and treaties already established Unchallenged leadership and mastery of the United States 	
George W. Bush	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Us” against the “Others” ‘Axis of “Evil” or rogue states Nation-building as <i>wills of good</i> to liberate the peoples & Build Democracies 	Post 9/11 Doctrine: Fight with Terrorism & Fight with Weapons of mass destruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the non-proliferation regime institutions to advance strategies in the middle east and against North Korea Unilateral action on Iraq vs. multilateral consensus on Iran Nuclear case Withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty pre-emption/prevention to confront Nuclear Rogues 	
Trump	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inward, anti-intellectual, reactionary attitude towards American Exceptionalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘America First’ Less globally entangled America 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expansion of America’s nuclear arsenal Withdrawal from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Reluctant to approve an extension of the 2010 New START 	

Institutional Hegemonic Resilience: Understanding the Dynamics of
American Exceptionalism in the Institutional World Order

Presidents	Exceptionalist Moral Rhetoric	Grand Strategy	Implication in Nuclear Institutional Hegemony	Nuclear Institutional Hegemony Discourse
Eisenhower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Threat against People and Interests of the United States Selective possession of atomic power in the hands of a few in "good faith" for global peace 	Atoms for Peace Doctrine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laying the ground for IAEA The idea of "Agreements not War" Mutually peaceful Confidence The primary concepts of a nuclear non-proliferation regime 	Cooperative Pragmatism
Johnson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Messianic aspect of American Exceptionalism as the only nation which can bring peace and prosperity to the less-developed and less-privileged world National independence of countries in the 'Stalinist Empire' who deserve to be set free US: keystone in the arch of freedom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Messianic Internationalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signing of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in July 1968 Strengthen the Alliance for Progress, the unity of Europe, the community of the Atlantic, the regional organizations of developing continents, and that supreme association--the United Nations. Security Council to be referred to in case of breach of the treaty 	
Carter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> America's mission to be the world's peacemaker Realist Exemplarism America's military power is a major force for security and stability in the world 	Discourse of 'Human Rights'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Praises the SALT agreement as a means to reduce the danger of a nuclear war Continues strategic arms limitation talks 	
Clinton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American responsibility to 'maintain its defenses as the world's greatest power.' 	Active multilateralism and institutionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> START II approval as an extension of the NPT multilateral approach towards nuclear agreements urge for the signing and approval of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty 	
Obama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American moral leadership integrated with a requirement for American strategic primacy (military power) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change Nuclear grand strategy of nuclear weapons abolition as central goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revival of the NPT regime Promoting of a multilateral negotiation structure on non-proliferation: Iran case Imposing punitive sanctions in the nuclear regime pursuing diplomacy to bring North Korea and Iran back into compliance with their non-proliferation obligations 	

Source: Authors' Findings

To meet the purposes of this study, and review the outline of each presidential discourse through a critical discourse analysis in the period from the end of the second World War to the Trump administration era, in which this research has limited itself, three main conceptual categories are studied:

- The Exceptionalist rhetoric;
- The Grand strategy to meet that rhetoric,
- The strategy and rhetorical implication in the US nuclear institutional hegemony

Furthermore, a discourse classification has been performed to categorize the seemingly diverse attitudes towards the institutional aspects of the US nuclear hegemony. Two main general categories have been identified by scrutinizing the related presidential discourses: Assertive Americanism; and Cooperative Pragmatism. Similar categorizations have been created in the existing literature to demonstrate different approaches to the concept of American Exceptionalism and US hegemony among the American elite, i.e., presidents, although no specific literature has limited the study to the nuclear aspect of the American hegemony. In this respect, although it is deeply believed in this research that the core undercurrent of all presidential discourse relating to the nuclear exceptionality and hegemony of the United States stays intact throughout decades since World War II, the evident approaches that may imply certain strategies in each administration may require certain simplification to be understood.

Accordingly, the discourses of presidents with a more assertive attitude towards the leadership and mastery of the US on the international scene with regards to the international institutions involved, and with a less cooperative approach with other states in the forms of treaties and bodies, are categorized in the *Assertive*

Americanism discourse. Other presidential discourses with a more cooperative spirit towards international institutions and a more pragmatic attitude to multilateral cooperation and consensus-building measures are classified under the label of *Cooperative Pragmatism*. The mentioned analysis has been conducted in respect to the nuclear regime case study. In a neoclassical realistic framework, grand strategy acts as a means of taking the ideational components of a state's power (here, American Exceptionalism) to the global arena and interpret it into a certain behavior (Institutional Hegemony), here nuclear institutional hegemony.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, the new concept of *institutional hegemonic resilience* was proposed to refer to the leadership of the hegemon, which is both crystalized and institutionalized in the form of norms, regulations, institutions and agreements, and at the same time acquired, maintained and promoted by those institutions and rules, at occasional setbacks of the hegemon. Instances such as a *self-exemptionalizing* of the hegemon from those regulations, withdrawal from alliances and institutions or possible decline in certain aspects of its power, while the institutional order renders to be viable, demonstrate the essence of the mentioned *resilience*. The multilateralism that America has sought in the current world order has met a self-binding consent to achieve greater outcomes. Therefore, by legitimizing and institutionalizing its power in multilateral arrangements, the US allows itself to remain a hegemon in a multi-polar world with rising regional and global powers.

The notion of *resilience* has also emerged as an underlying

pattern throughout the time scope of this study, based on the results of the CDA applied on presidential speeches regarding the US institutional hegemony in the nuclear regime. In other words, although American Exceptionalism, as the fundamental ideological tradition of the US hegemony, has been approached from different—sometimes contradictory—aspects by American presidents, who have subsequently adopted rather diverse strategies to meet those ideational accounts, the outcome has been an ongoing consistent creation, maintenance and promotion of nuclear institutional hegemony.

According to neoclassical realism, and assuming that the international system is an anarchy, the state(s) with the most power—ideational and material—is the one holding the order through international multilateral agreements and institutions, not the institutions themselves. The hegemon binding the institutions in place, in collaboration with its allies, creates a *resilient* order in which regardless of what occurs in terms of possible minor or major US leadership declines, the institutionalized hegemony will remain safe in place. This happens by the means of a combination of hard – materialistic- and soft - ideational discourse – power.

In this context, and in the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism, the American political identity and discourse, as well as its strategic culture have shaped and formed the *perception of power* on the sub-unit domestic level of the US decision-making elite. This ideational basis of American Exceptionalism and its perception of the “righteous us” and the “evil others” has primarily been the ideological basis of American identity from the foundation of the country, which is now playing itself into the hegemonic world order in place throughout the decades after victory in the second World War in the form of institutional hegemony.

Neoclassical realism can explain the viability of the perceptions and ideas and the way in which they manifest themselves in the global system: the way in which American Exceptionalism, as the world's hegemon, perfectly fits into the formation of an American-led institutionalized world liberal order, which manages to self-preserve and promote by the means of *institutional hegemonic resilience*.

In this theoretical background, according to the CDA performed on the presidential State of the Unions addresses, an exceptionalist moral rhetoric—as the ideological aspect of the hegemon—has been extracted from the speeches to demonstrate the various aspects that this discourse has taken over time by different presidents. According to the situational circumstances of the United States, (mostly nuclear-related) strategies have been adopted at different times—Cold War and beyond—to match the ideational perceptions. The institutional implications of such strategies in the nuclear regime have also been collected from the textual data. In such a way, two main inclinations of strategy were demonstrated: Assertive Americanism and Cooperative Pragmatism. The qualitative analysis of the data gathered using the respective conceptual frameworks brought us to the realization of a consistent pattern underlying all strategies and attitudes taken.

Through the combinational study of hegemonic and institutional theories and a CDA performance with case study facts, we conclude that the resilience of the US institutional hegemony is rooted in a synthesis of the *power* possessed by the hegemon as the dominant actor and its allies (sometimes in the form of hegemonic unilateralism or pragmatic multilateralism), the *international institutions* and their institutional procedures and mechanisms (as instrumental arrangements and by extracting consensual

submission of states), and the Gramscian account of hegemony which insists on *ideational and cultural* value-based powers of the hegemon—driven from the idea of American Exceptionalism. In fact, it seems that it is the ideological elements that have managed to legitimize the American dominance and authority and helped the materialistic aspects of the hegemon to be applied through a combination of coercion and consent. In other words, the interrelation between the legitimacy brought by institutions and regulations, and the powerful and hegemonic state(s)' power, have led to a certain resiliency in the establishment of the order. In addition, the resilience stems much from the combination of ideology (borrowed from the Gramscian account of hegemony) and material components of hard power. According to this study, the ideational factors of American Exceptionalism have been the cultural pillars of this resilience, which have crystalized in the form of institutions and laid the cornerstone of the current order. This is where the term *resilience* has been attached to the notion of institutional hegemony.

Resilience has saved the hegemony of the United States, in spite of the rising of other great powers and various hybrid challenges, and helped survive different US administrations with quite diverse accounts of the *American Exceptionality*. In this respect, the US has managed to preserve and maintain the profound idea of its *Exceptional* position in the world and its divine mission to bring peace and good to the entire world. It has succeeded in translating its distinctiveness, uniqueness and exemplary position, excusing itself from unwanted entanglements and regulations, and last but not least, establishing a legitimate basis for “otherification” in a global multilateral, institutional context. The exceptionality has taken on several forms in many periods of time, with the turn of

events and administrations, but the main components have remained untouched throughout the last decades.

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