

# The Theory of Hegemonic Stability

The stability of the International System requires a single dominant state to articulate and enforce the rules of interaction among the most important members of the system.

## To be a Hegemon, a state must have three attributes:

1. The Capability to enforce the rules of the system;
2. The Will to do so;
3. A Commitment to a system which is perceived as mutually beneficial to the major states.

## Capability rests upon three attributes:

1. A large, growing economy;
2. Dominance in a leading technological or economic sector;
3. Political power backed up by projective military power.

## The Historical Record

**Portugal 1494 to 1580** (end of Italian Wars to Spanish invasion of Portugal) Based on Portugal's dominance in navigation Hegemonic pretender: Spain

**Holland 1580 to 1688** (1579 Treaty of Utrecht marks the foundation of the Dutch Republic to William of Orange's arrival in England) Based on Dutch control of credit and money Hegemonic pretender: England

**Britain 1688 to 1792** (Glorious Revolution to Napoleonic Wars) Based on British textiles and command of the High Seas Hegemonic pretender: France



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**Britain 1815 to 1914** (Congress of Vienna to World War I) Based on British industrial supremacy and railroads Hegemonic pretender: Germany

**United States 1945 to 1971** Based on Petroleum and the Internal Combustion Engine Hegemonic pretender: the USSR

### **What does the Hegemon Do?**

The system is a collective good which means that it is plagued by a "free rider" syndrome. Thus, the hegemon must induce or coerce other states to support the system. The US system tries to produce democracy and capitalism, thus it champions human rights and free trade. Other nations will try to enjoy the benefits of these institutions, but will try to avoid paying the costs of producing them. Thus, the US must remain committed to free trade even if its major trading partners erect barriers to trade. The US can erect its own barriers, but then the system will collapse.

Over time, there is an uneven growth of power within the system as new technologies and methods are developed. An unstable system will result if economic, technological, and other changes erode the international hierarchy and undermine the position of the dominant state. Pretenders to hegemonic control will emerge if the benefits of the system are viewed as unacceptably unfair.