World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Social and Business Sciences
Vol:16, No:08, 2022

Red Dawn in the Desert: A World-Systems Analysis of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative

Authors : Toufic Sarieddine

Abstract : The current debate on the hegemonic impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is of two opposing strands: Resilient and absolute US hegemony on the one hand and various models of multipolar hegemony such as bifurcation on the other. Bifurcation theories illustrate an unprecedented division of hegemonic functions between China and the US, whereby Beijing becomes the world's economic hegemon, leaving Washington the world's military hegemon and security guarantor. While consensus points to China being the main driver of unipolarity's rupturing, the debate among bifurcationists is on the location of the first rupture. In this regard, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has seen increasing Chinese foreign direct investment in recent years while that to other regions has declined, ranking it second in 2018 as part of the financing for the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). China has also become the top trade partner of 11 states in the MENA region, as well as its top source of machine imports, surpassing the US and achieving an overall trade surplus almost double that of Washington's. These are among other features outlined in world-systems analysis (WSA) literature which correspond with the emergence of a new hegemon. WSA is further utilized to gauge other facets of China's increasing involvement in MENA and assess whether bifurcation is unfolding therein. These features of hegemony include the adoption of China's modi operandi, economic dominance in production, trade, and finance, military capacity, cultural hegemony in ideology, education, and language, and the promotion of a general interest around which to rally potential peripheries (MENA states in this case). China's modi operandi has seen some adoption with regards to support against the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, oil bonds denominated in the yuan, and financial institutions such as the Shanghai Gold Exchange enjoying increasing Arab patronage. However, recent elections in Qatar, as well as liberal reforms in Saudi Arabia, demonstrate Washington's stronger normative influence. Meanwhile, Washington's economic dominance is challenged by China's sizable machine exports, increasing overall imports, and widening trade surplus, but retains some clout via dominant arms and transport exports, as well as free-trade deals across the region. Militarily, Washington bests Beijing's arms exports, has a dominant and well-established presence in the region, and successfully blocked Beijing's attempt to penetrate through the UAE. Culturally, Beijing enjoys higher favorability in Arab public opinion, and its broadcast networks have found some resonance with Arab audiences. In education, the West remains MENA students' preferred destination. Further, while Mandarin has become increasingly available in schools across MENA, its usage and availability still lag far behind English. Finally, Beijing's general interest in infrastructure provision and prioritizing economic development over social justice and democracy provides an avenue for increased incorporation between Beijing and the MENA region. The overall analysis shows solid progress towards bifurcation in MENA.

Keywords : belt and road initiative, hegemony, Middle East and North Africa, world-systems analysis
Conference Title : ICIRGS 2022 : International Conference on International Relations and Global Studies
Conference Location : Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Conference Dates : August 16-17, 2022

Open Science Index, Social and Business Sciences Vol:16, No:08, 2022 publications.waset.org/abstracts/150761/pdf