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Q3(c)

Do you agree with the view that the USA uses NATO as a traditional tool of strategy to perpetuate its hegemony in the world?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Changing International Political Order

Changing International Political Order: Rise of super powers; strategic and ideological Bipolarity, arms race and Cold War; Nuclear threat; Non-aligned movement; Collapse of the Soviet Union; Unipolarity and American hegemony; relevance of non-alignment in the contemporary world.

Core demand of the question

- State NATO's original purpose and U.S. leadership
- **Show post-Cold War uses:** enlargement, out-of-area wars, Ukraine
- **Comment:** agree that it is a traditional U.S. strategic tool of hegemony; note European agency and limits

Revision summary

NATO has been U.S.-led since 1949 in guarantee, command and expeditionary capacity.

Post-Cold War enlargement and out-of-area wars used the Alliance as a strategy tool beyond territorial defence of 1949.

Ukraine policy and Nordic accession again centred Washington in European security.

Gramscian consent and Ikenberry's liberal hegemony explain why many Europeans want this hierarchy.

Agree with the hegemony thesis; qualify it with allied demand and occasional European refusal.

Introduction

NATO was founded in 1949 as a transatlantic **collective defence** pact. From the start the **United States** supplied the nuclear guarantee, the command spine and much of the expeditionary capacity. The view that Washington still uses NATO as a **traditional tool of strategy to perpetuate hegemony** is **largely convincing**. The comment should add that hegemony here is **allied hegemony**, not rule without Europeans.

Body

Traditional tool

John Ikenberry described the U.S. order as a liberal hegemony that binds others through institutions. NATO is the security core of that order in Europe. **Gramscian readings of hegemony, taken up in 4(a), would add that consent matters: European elites have wanted the U.S. presence as much as they have resented it. Morgenthau and Waltz** would strip the moral language: an alliance is an instrument for aggregating power. For the United States, NATO multiplies bases, standardises militaries, and gives legal-political cover

for operations far from the North Atlantic.

How it perpetuates primacy

After 1990 NATO did not dissolve. It **enlarged** into Central and Eastern Europe, which extended a U.S.-centred security system to Russia's doorstep - the grievance Moscow names, and the choice many of those states made. **Out-of-area** war in **Kosovo, Afghanistan**, and the **Libya** campaign showed NATO as a toolbox for U.S. and allied strategy beyond **Article 5** defence of Europe. The 2022-24 response to Russia's war on Ukraine - intelligence, weapons standards, and a larger NATO that Finland and Sweden joined - again placed the United States at the centre of European security. Burden-sharing debates, including under President Trump, confirm the hierarchy: Europeans are asked to pay more **inside** an American-led structure, not to replace it.

Hegemony is visible in command (**SACEUR** as a U.S. officer), in nuclear sharing, and in the fact that a European 'strategic autonomy' remains a speech more than a substitute army.

Limits of the claim

- **The United States does not always get its way:** France's early withdrawal from the integrated command, the Iraq 2003 split, German energy choices, and Turkish veto politics show **allied friction**. NATO is also a **demand from the weak**: Baltic and Central European states want U.S. hegemony as protection, not as a chain they secretly wish to break. Calling NATO only an American imposition misses that consent.

Still, as a **traditional tool of U.S. strategy**, the description holds. It is the durable military arm of Atlantic primacy. It is how Washington remains a European power. A unipolar moment without NATO would have been more expensive and less legitimate. That is hegemony in the ordinary IR sense.

Flow diagram

United States -> NATO command and guarantee command and guarantee
NATO command and guarantee -> Enlargement out-of-area Ukraine
European members -> Consent and friction
NATO command and guarantee -> Allied hegemony

Conclusion

NATO remains the principal institutional tool through which the United States organises European security and projects power with allied cover. That is hegemony by consent of many members, not only by command. The view in the question is right as strategy. It is too simple if it erases European choice and intra-alliance bargaining.

Facts & figures

Article 5

Collective defence clause; invoked after 11 September 2001, showing NATO's use beyond the European central front.

Enlargement

Post-1999 rounds extended the U.S.-led system eastward; Finland and Sweden joined after 2022.

SACEUR

Supreme Allied Commander Europe is a United States officer, a concrete hierarchy inside the Alliance.

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