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Q4(a)

"The Gramscian theory of hegemony provides many valuable insights into the nature of global power." Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 2 · 20 marks · India and the Global Centres of Power

India and the Global Centres of Power: USA, EU, Japan, China and Russia.

Core demand of the question

- **State Gramsci's hegemony:** consent plus coercion, historic bloc, civil society
- Show how Cox and others scale it to world order
- **Comment:** valuable insights into global power; not a complete substitute for Waltz or Wallerstein

Revision summary

Gramsci's hegemony is leadership through consent in civil society, backed by coercion, organised in a historic bloc.

- **Cox applied this to world order:** **Pax Americana** as material power plus institutions and ideas.
- **Insights:** global power includes WTO rules, culture and elite consent, not only armies; resistance includes counter-hegemonic ideas.

NATO and liberal order are hegemonic tools in this sense.

- **Limits:** still need Waltz on anarchy and Wallerstein on the world-economy; the term must not mean every cultural flow.

Introduction

Antonio Gramsci wrote hegemony as a form of class power in which **coercion is wrapped in consent**. The ruling group leads in culture, education, church and everyday common sense, not only in the barracks. The claim that this theory gives **valuable insights into the nature of global power** is **right**. The comment should show how the insight travels from Italy to world order, and where it stops.

Body

Gramsci's core

- **Hegemony is not mere domination. It is a** historic bloc: material force plus ideas that make the existing order look natural. **Organic intellectuals** produce that common sense. Civil society is a trench system where battles of position are fought before a war of manoeuvre. A state that must rule only by force has not achieved hegemony; it is in crisis.

Scaling to global power

Robert Cox took Gramsci into international political economy: world order as a configuration of material capabilities, ideas and institutions. **Pax Britannica** and **Pax Americana** were hegemonic orders when other states and elites consented to rules on trade,

money and security. The **United States** after 1945 did not only occupy. It offered the dollar, reconstruction, **NATO**, and a liberal vocabulary that many allied elites made their own. That is why question 3(c) and this question belong together. **Wallerstein's** hegemonic cycles in the world-economy name a similar peak of organising power, in a more economic idiom.

Insights follow. Global power is **not only tanks**. It is standard-setting in the **WTO**, rating agencies, university rankings, Hollywood and digital platforms. Resistance is not only anti-colonial armies; it is counter-hegemonic common sense - Bandung, NIEO, and today's Global South claims on climate finance. **Passive revolution** and trasformismo help explain how elites absorb dissent without redistributing power.

Limits

Gramsci does not replace **Waltz**. Anarchy and nuclear balances still structure war, as Russia's campaign and U.S. extended deterrence show. He does not replace a map of **unequal exchange**. Insights are richest on **why the strong are obeyed when they are not present**, and why they fail when consent collapses - Vietnam, Iraq, or the present contest over who writes digital and green rules. The theory can become vague if every cultural export is called hegemony. Used tightly, it remains one of the best accounts of **power as leadership plus force**.

Flow diagram

Gramsci hegemony -> Consent plus coercion
Gramsci hegemony -> Historic bloc intellectuals
Cox world order -> Ideas institutions capabilities
Consent plus coercion -> Global power as leadership

Conclusion

Gramscian hegemony shows global power as consent organised through institutions and common sense, backed by force. That insight explains American-led order, NATO, and fights over trade and culture better than a purely military count. It does not abolish structure or capitalist hierarchy. It makes them politically intelligible.

Facts & figures

Prison Notebooks

Gramsci's account of hegemony, civil society and wars of position, written under Italian fascism.

Robert Cox

Social Forces, States and World Orders: Gramscian IPE; theory is always for someone and for some purpose.

Pax Americana

Post-1945 order combining U.S. force with consent around money, trade and alliances.

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