Rehab kills Obama’s political capital. **Trinick 12**[[1]](#footnote-1)

It’s politically toxic. **Any move to alter the current tough stance on criminal justice is inevitably viewed as** being **‘soft on crime’**, regardless of how much sense a new policy might make or how much it might reduce crime in the long-run. **No politician**, especially one running in a race as close as the current match-up, **wants to be seen as ‘soft on crime’.** For Republicans, “the party of law and order”, it would be sacrilege to even suggest a change in policy. For Democrats, especially **Obama**, the **aim[s]** appears to be **to avoid looking “weak and liberal**” and avoid alienating middle-class white voters. In addition, it lacks appeal — few voters (read ‘people likely to vote in swing states’) care about the issue as they perceive that it does not affect them and it requires hard choices to be made.

Obama needs polcap to balance the budget and avoid debt ceiling. That’s key to the US economy and US global leadership. **The Economist 1-19** writes[[2]](#footnote-2)

**NEXT week** Barack **Obama will** take the oath of office as elected president of the United States for the second time—an honour granted only to 16 men before him. When he **returns to** the Oval Office he will rediscover a string of problems, from domestic **struggles over** America’s **debt ceiling** and gun control to bloodier conflicts in Mali and Syria. But now more than ever he would be wise to look at the long term. Mr Obama will not run for office again. How will history see him?

More favourably, we hope, than it would if he were judged just on the past four years. That is not to dismiss the accomplishments of his first term. Few presidents have had to take office against such a dismal backdrop, with the economy contracting at 5% a year, jobs being shed at the rate of 800,000 a month and America mired in two failing wars. Mr Obama has done a creditable job of putting a critically ill patient on the road to recovery. His main legislative achievement—health-care reform—may yet help millions of Americans, though the verdict on that must await its full implementation. All this, together with an unconvincing opponent, persuaded enough Americans (and The Economist) to back him in November. But his first term was nowhere near successful enough to earn Mr Obama the mantle of greatness—or to guard him against the possibility of a disastrous second term wiping away all else.

The Obama legacy will partly be defined by events. When George W. Bush sat reading to schoolchildren in Florida on September 11th 2001, “the war on terror” was not part of his vocabulary. Mr Obama may well be blindsided by something similarly out of the blue. But Mr Bush is also often described as the man who expanded government more than any president since Lyndon Johnson; that was a legacy he could have avoided. More to his credit, Mr Bush will also be remembered for dramatically increasing and improving aid to Africa.

**Political capital**, like a leader’s time and energy, **is a scarce resource, and** the list of **areas where** Mr **Obama could spend his** profitably **is** a **long** one. Immigration reform would be a great gift to leave America (see [Lexington](http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21569715-last-self-interest-pushing-ambitious-politicians-towards-immigration-reform-jumping)); the construction of an EU-US free-trade zone would help the West. But to our mind, three great issues stand out as not just likely to provide vast benefits if resolved, but also as liable to do immense damage to Mr Obama’s legacy if neglected.

First, balance the books

**The most fundamental is that America must put its fiscal house in order. Admiral** Mike **Mullen**, then the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, was not exaggerating when he **said** in 2010 that **America’s debt was the greatest strategic threat the country faces.** Since then, $3 trillion has been added, pushing the dolorous pile above $16 trillion. Much of that has been caused by the recession and the stimulus to fight it; but by the end of this decade, with ever more baby-boomers retiring, the deficit is set to rise relentlessly. If Mr Obama hands over a country heading towards bankruptcy in January 2017, he can forget any idea of being remembered as an economic saviour.

Having ignored the recommendations of the deficit committee he himself established, Mr Obama has never given any sign, other than rhetorically, of being at all serious about cutting “entitlements”: these are the pensions and government health-care schemes for the poor and elderly that will overwhelm the budget as the population ages and medical costs continue their uncontrolled rise. Far from reforming entitlements, Mr Obama added an expensive new one in his first term: subsidised health insurance for lower-paid workers. And **the president** has **just avoided** coming up with any cuts in the deal made on January 1st to stop America heading over **the fiscal cliff**, despite bullying the Republicans in Congress to accept tax rises on the rich.

**An America that cannot deal with** its **financial problems** other than through repeated crises followed by shabby postponements **will eventually go broke. And its capacity to** offer **lead**ership to **the world is gravely diminished. Why should leaders in Beijing, Brasíl**ia, Bogotá **or even Berlin** see anything to **emulate** in **Washington? If** Mr **Obama corrects this, he will be seen as** a **transformative** figure. If not, future generations will look back on “the Bush-Obama years” as a time when two presidents stoked up a very foreseeable disaster.

Empirics prove that a strong economy is key to heg which solves every conflict.

**Hubbard 10** writes[[3]](#footnote-3)

Research into the theoretical underpinnings of this topic revealed that there are two main subfields within the literature on hegemonic stability. One line of study, an avenue pursued by prominent theorists such as Kindleberger, Keohane, and Ikenberry focuses primarily on questions of related to the economic system. The other avenue, pursued by theorists such as Gilpin, looks at the role of hegemonic governance in reducing violent conflict. In my research, I focus on this aspect of hegemonic stability – its implications for military conflict in the international system. To research this question, I undertook a broad quantitative study that examined data from both the American and British hegemonic epochs, focusing on the years of 1815-1939 in the case of British hegemony, and 1945 to 1999 in the case of American hegemony. I hypothesized that hegemonic strength was inversely correlated with levels of armed conflict in the international system. Using the data from the Correlates of War Project, I was able to perform a number of statistical analyses on my hypothesis. To measure hegemonic strength, I used the Composite Index of National Capability, a metric that averages together six different dimensions of relative power as a share of total power in the international system. **I** then **matched this data with data cataloging all conflicts** in the international system **since 1815**. I organized this data into five-year increments, in order to make statistical analysis more feasible. **Regression analysis** of the data **revealed** that **there was a statistically significant negative correlation between** relative **heg**emonic power **and conflict** levels in the international system. However, further statistical tests added complications to the picture of hegemonic governance that was emerging. Regression analysis of military actions engaged in by the hegemon versus total conflict in the system revealed a highly positive correlation for both American and British hegemony. Further **analysis revealed** that in both cases, **military power was a less accurate predictor of** military **conflict than economic power**. There are several possible explanations for these findings. It is likely that economic stability has an effect on international security. In addition, **weaker hegemons are more likely to be challenged militarily** than stronger hegemons. Thus, the hegemon will engage in more conflicts during times of international insecurity, because such times are also when the hegemon is weakest. Perhaps the **most important** implication of this research **is that hegemons may well be more effective in promoting peace through economic power** than through the exercise of military force. II. Research Question In examining hegemonic stability theory, there are several important questions to consider. First of all, an acceptable definition of what constitutes a hegemon must be established. Secondly, a good measure of what constitutes stability in the international system must be determined. Certainly, the frequency and severity of interstate conflict is an important measure of stability in the international system. However, other measures of stability should also be taken into account. Conflict in the international system takes on a wide range of forms. While military conflict is perhaps the most violent and severe dimension, it is only one of many forms that conflict can take. Conflict need not be confined to wars between traditional states. Terrorism, piracy, and guerilla warfare are also types of conflict that are endemic to the international system. Economic conflict, exemplified by trade wars, hostile actions such as sanctions, or outright trade embargos, is also an important form of conflict in the international system. States can also engage in a range of less severe actions that might be deemed political conflict, by recalling an ambassador or withdrawing from international bodies, for example. Clearly, “stability” as it pertains to the international system is a vast and amorphous concept. Because of these complexities, a comprehensive assessment of the theory is beyond the purview of this research. However, completing a more focused analysis is a realistic endeavor. Focusing on international armed conflicts in two select periods will serve to increase the feasibility the research. I will focus on the period of British hegemony lasting from the end of the Napoleonic wars to 1939 and the period of American hegemony beginning after the Second World War and continuing until 1999, the last year for which reliable data is available. The proposed hypothesis is that in these periods, the **heg**emon **acted as a stabilizing force** by reducing the frequency and severity of international armed conflict. The dependent variable in this case is the frequency and severity of conflict. The primary independent variable is the power level of the hegemon. This hypothesis is probabilistic since it posits that the hegemon tended to reduce conflict, not that it did so in every single possible instance. One way to test this hypothesis would be through a case-study method that examined the role of Britain and the United States in several different conflicts. This method would have the advantage of approaching the problem from a very feasible, limited perspective. While it would not reveal much about hegemony on a broader theoretical level, it would help provide practical grounding for what is a highly theoretical area of stuffy in international relations. Another method would be to do a broader quantitative comparison of international conflict by finding and comparing data on conflict and hegemonic strength for the entire time covered by British and American hegemony. The hypothesis is falsifiable, because it could be shown that the hegemon did not act as a stabilizing force during the years of study. **It** also **avoids** some of **the pitfalls** associated **with the case study method, such as selection bias and** the inherently **subjective** nature of **qualitative analysis.**

1. Why Won’t The Candidates Talk About Prisons? By [Richard Trinick](http://www.article-3.com/author/rtrinick) | October 17, 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Economist. 1-19-13. How will history see me? http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21569711-if-barack-obama-wants-be-remembered-great-president-he-should-focus-three-long-term [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jesse Hubbard, Program Assistant at Open Society Foundations Washington, District Of Columbia International Affairs Previous National Democratic Institute (NDI), National Defense University, Office of Congressman Jim Himes Education PPE at University of Oxford, “Hegemonic Stability Theory: An Empirical Analysis” 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)