

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & THE PRACTICE OF HEGEMONY

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I want to offer you some thoughts about how relations across state boundaries tend to function in times of hegemony.

Definitions of Hegemony

Let me specify what I mean by hegemony. In discussions of IR theory it tends to have two meanings. One has to do with the distribution of power in a system. Not merely military force, but also technical and financial strength. The other meaning is the dominance of a particular idea or set of assumptions, such as economic liberalism and globalization.

I certainly use the term hegemony primarily in the first sense. It is the material condition that enables one great power, or a group of powers, or the great powers in a system acting collectively, to bring such great pressures and inducements to bear that most other states lose some of their freedom of action *de facto*, though not *de jure*.

I formerly thought of hegemony as that area of the spectrum between multiple absolute independences and a single world government that allows dominant powers to influence the external policies of other states, but not or only marginally their domestic policies. Now I realise how much the hegemony of the West and especially the U.S. also aims to modify the internal behaviour of other states and communities.

So of course ideas also play their part - especially the ideas of the hegemonic communities. At present these ideas certainly include economic liberalism, the belief in the greater relative effectiveness of private enterprise; and globalization. But that is much too limited a list. Equally prominent today are Western standards of civilization, human rights and the environment. And I think we must include a heightened awareness of the moral responsibilities that go with power, however much these responsibilities are shirked.

This concept of a hegemonic system refers in the first place to dealings between governments. But not merely that. I want also to look at an area that is becoming very crowded with comment, namely the activities of the many different kinds of Non Governmental Organizations, and the pressures which they exert both on governments and directly across state boundaries. This is the grey area between the concept of a state-centred, state-dominated international society and a world of many interests and pressure groups, a so-called world society in which even hegemonial governments may be as much pressurized as pressurizing.

Rosenau summed it up in 1990 with his formula: "The state-centric system now coexists with an equally powerful, tho more decentralized, multi-centric system".

The search of the British Committee for an international theory had to begin at the beginning. It was at first concentrated on the relations between states, and indeed between the executive branches of governments, often even limited to independent governments. The states system was compared to the solar system, where planets and moons are very separate self-contained entities which nonetheless influence each other.

This concentration on relations between independent states is part of what Buzan & Little call the Westphalian straitjacket, and I think also the Westphalian ghetto.

We are now aware that the early concentration of IR theory on systems of independent states prevented us from dealing systematically enough with hegemonic and suzerain systems. If Martin Wight was right in calling the European system "a succession of hegemonies" - as I believe he was - we need to examine the operational practice of each hegemony or bid for hegemony in all its individuality, and then compare them with each other and with the present phase of hegemony. Here we have not done our homework. My book *The Evolution of International Society* is only a start.

Similarly we also need to study more systematically the impact of non-governmental actors on international systems. These are not separate subjects. I hope to indicate the connection between the two.

The World of States.

To take the world of states first.

No system of states can function without some rules and understandings about how its members conduct their dealings.

In the international society defined by Hedley Bull in his classic *Anarchical Society*, member states, especially the big ones, consciously put in place, and continually modify, elaborate rules and institutions to manage their relations.

Diplomacy and war are part of the dialogue between states.

And in all these activities the power of the largest states tells. So that even in Westphalian systems we see a glimmer of that great power governance, and sometimes the pre-eminence of one superpower, that we associate with hegemony.

Superior power is due to technology. In the modern world technology radiates outwards from the areas where it is generated. Perhaps this was always so, as Professor MacNeill and others say. And moral values, standards of civilization, expand on the back of the technology.

I have also become increasingly aware of the underlying continuities along the spectrum. We tend to pay too much attention to differences. We think too much in terms of either/or. And we tend to forget that not every part of a complex international system is at the same point along the spectrum at any one time.

Climate of Ideas

We are now living in a period when the pendulum is visibly moving along the spectrum, away from multiple independences into the area of hegemony. When this happens some tendencies, some ways of thinking and behaving that we associate with Westphalian systems, decline, while others that we associate with hegemony wax stronger.

When we talk of times of hegemony, we refer to what actually occurs in the international field, and also to what people think ought to occur. A useful indication of the shift in the climate of opinion from Westphalian independence to hegemonial constraint is the buzz words which help to formulate in our minds the patterns of international reality.

Ideas like:

- sovereignty
- anti-hegemonial coalitions
- balance of power (especially)
- juridical equality of states
- non-intervention
- splendid isolation
- the Republican party's aim of aloofness in the US today

come from the multiple independences end of the spectrum.

But ideas like:

- management of the international system
- privileges and responsibilities of great powers & rich nations
- concert of Europe
- intervention
- standards of civilization
- human rights and women's rights
- donor and recipient states
- strings to aid
- derogations of sovereignty
- limits to independence

come from the hegemony-suzerainty area of the spectrum.

Intervention designed to change the internal conduct of another, weaker state, is an un-Westphalian concept. It is a hegemonial act. Today we have not merely occasional interventions to correct a specific imbalance or right a specific injustice. We have sustained aid and interventionist pressure, on what is in practice a permanent basis. And where we don't intervene, there is a feeling that we ought to. Think of the President of the United States publicly apologizing to Rwanda after the massacre of 500,000 people there, for not intervening to stop it.

Three tendencies in the policies of great powers, the governments of developed states, help to shape the international system.

1) National interest or Imperialism.

2) Prudence: which means minimizing risks to the state itself and also to the international society

in which it operates. It involves seeking the agreement, or at least the acquiescence, of the other great powers most concerned.

3) And thirdly **Moral responsibility**.

All three of these tendencies are normally present together in the policies of major developed powers. Both in Westphalian and hegemonic times. I would like to offer you an illustration of how these three tendencies can work in practice, from a previous hegemonic period: namely, the collective resolution by the great powers of the Eastern Crisis of 1878. I can do so later if people are interested.

Professor Inis Claude, who has given much thought to the activities of developed states in times of hegemony, wrote to me on 29 November 2001.

"There are ... many inadequately explored issues relating to hegemonial responsibilities for dealing with the inadequacies, injustices and instabilities that are rampant in today's world.

"On thinking about the erosion of sovereignty and the state itself brought about by collective hegemony and its interventionist practice, I raise the issue as to whether such external interference may not have the opposite effect. Indeed, most of our interventions have the ostensible purpose - if not always the actual result - of making the target state more capable and more effective (as well as more acceptable) in meeting the needs of its society. Is collective state-diminution offset by collective state-building, state-improving, state-stabilization etc?"

I agree with Inis Claude that in general the effect of hegemonial aid and intervention is to make weak states more effective: that is, more capable of carrying out the policies agreed with the donors and interveners. These policies are largely determined outside the recipient state. They involve measures specified by the donors and enforcers, but carried out by the government of the recipient state. But not only that. They usually also include the creation of conditions in which non-state actors based outside the recipient state, from banks and businesses to doctors and human rights advocates, can operate more safely and more effectively.

In other words, I think there is a rule of thumb here. At least in the medium term, hegemonial inducements and pressures make recipient states more efficient but less independent.

In the hegemonial range of the spectrum, the purposes of the donor and interventionist states are achieved largely by proxy. Especially when the swing of the pendulum is away from a Westphalian system towards greater hegemony, the recipient states retain the trappings of independent sovereignty: the flags, the embassies, the seats at the UN. Also some interventions, whether unilateral or by multilateral agencies, have the ostensible Westphalian purpose of making the recipient state outgrow its dependence and become as truly independent as a small weak state can aspire to be. This is what Claude calls "post-independence trusteeship". It is particularly true of the rhetoric of U.S. aid and intervention, and I believe its long term intention. The U.S. government and public opinion see their international aims in Westphalian terms.

These trappings of nominal independence and equality help to make hegemonial authority more palatable in recipient states. They lend legitimacy to hegemonial practice. And legitimacy is the lubricating oil of international relations.

When we look at these shifts within the pattern, we can see that one of the forces that has moved the pendulum back in our lifetimes from Westphalian independence towards hegemonial aid and intervention is the fact that, while some of the dependent states have succeeded in managing their newly won independence in the modern world, all too many have not been able to do so on their own. These failures disturb both governments and public opinion in developed states.

In this context there has been some discussion of whether the key factor in the operation of hegemonies is that the strongest powers seek to impose **stability** on the periphery. Some members of the realist school have developed a hegemonic stability theory. This is often too narrow. Today's hegemonic Western great powers conspicuously seek not merely stability, not merely law and order, but also democracy, human rights, and the rest of the western standards.

It is a dilemma of Western powers that in many recipient states these objectives conflict. When they do, Western governments tend to give priority to stability. For stability, in addition to its own merits, is arguably a prerequisite of prosperity, human rights, and other values. But not all morally animated NGO's accept this argument. Some are still committed to anarchophilia.

If we look further along the spectrum, towards more imperial systems, we see increasingly firm and prolonged intervention and diminishing de jure independence. The implementation of the policies of the hegemonial powers by the governments of autonomous states gives way to more efficient and more direct administration of dependent states that implement the policies of a single imperial power. This is what is loosely called colonialism. Or a group of great powers may instal a collective dependent state, as for instance in Bosnia.

When we look in the other direction, back towards the Westphalian area of the spectrum, we see aid and intervention decrease. Weak states become more sovereign, and often less effective. The hypothetical end-system of absolute de facto as well as de jure independences has never existed in practice. At that extreme point no government would feel moral responsibility for what might happen outside its own borders, and be motivated only by *raison d'état*.

This business of looking both ways, like the Russian imperial eagle, is very significant for our understanding of the characteristics of hegemonial systems. It enables us to see [what Claude calls] hegemonial state-building and state-improvement in the periphery of the system as a half-way house between on the one hand the colonial practice of building stable and effective but dependent states, and on the other hand the Westphalian granting of independence to all dependent states. In almost every case, they are the same states, in the same borders. It is the degree of dependence which changes.

What about managing the system itself? As the pendulum swings towards hegemony, we can see how system management expands from the limited Westphalian practice - that is, collective management by states of the impersonal pressures of their mutual involvement - into the present hegemonic practice of worldwide propagation of what Bull and I called "Western values" and what Vincent called the "diplomacy of justice".

These are mutations, but mutations of the same underlying pattern.

NGO's

Now for the non-governmental side of the picture.

NGO's is a vast catch-all term. We are concerned here with **transnational organizations**: that is, those which influence or try to influence the situation in countries other than their own. Generalizations are difficult, as one would expect with such a large and varied group. I think that on balance it is better to treat all non-governmental actors as a single range, and to look at their similarities as well as their differences. But some scholars consider that they get a clearer picture of how the present international system, and especially the concept of a global civil society, function if economic enterprises are treated separately from ethically motivated NGO's. Perhaps we need both approaches.

The most important and powerful category of transnational NGO's is **economic** interests of every kind. It includes not only corporations and banks etc but also trade unions and consumers. Transnational businesses aim to make money by supplying goods or services that their customers in various states want. They become involved in our equation because they have to operate in ways acceptable to the governments of foreign states as well as their own. Transnational businesses bring pressures and inducements to bear on all the governments they have to deal with; and vice versa. The most interesting businesses in this category are those which have become effectively detached from any one state, and make a profit or fee by bringing supply to meet demand worldwide.

Enterprises within a given industry will collaborate to bring pressure on a government, while competing among themselves. So too trade unions compete with business managements on their members' share of the profits, but work with them to bring pressures on governments. And governments always have in mind that economic enterprises, both domestic and foreign, produce tax revenue. I will come back to this web of relationships in a moment.

Economic enterprises usually conduct their relations with governments quietly, avoiding publicity. That is in contrast to another range of NGO's, consisting of organized pressure groups with **moral causes**, that channel selective public indignation onto governments. These special interest groups range from religious and ideological bodies through all sorts of well-intentioned concerns. Many rely on attracting public support through the media by agitation and propaganda.

A third, smaller but interesting category of philanthropic enterprises are organized to operate not for profit but for ethical reasons. They work in areas like agriculture, medicine and education, directly in backward countries and in communities whose values are different from those of the West.

Virtually all members of these categories want to induce Western governments to promote their cause by wielding hegemonial carrots and sticks in underdeveloped states.

There is a rapidly growing academic interest in the international role of NGOs in times of hegemony. This for the pertinent reason that Hegemony seems to be the area of the spectrum that brings NGO's most into play across state borders.

In times of multiple independences even the more powerful governments interfere in the internal affairs of other sovereign states only where it is in their state interest, including of course the state's economic interest. And the citizens of Westphalian states largely hold the same view. They may remonstrate; but they do not expect their state to intervene for moral reasons.

The economic reach of a community - the area of trade - normally stretches far beyond the area of administration. When an area of the trade partnership becomes so chaotic as to make trade difficult, the economic NGO's of a powerful state might induce that state to intervene in the national interest. It is not that trade follows the flag. More usually the flag - the gunboat diplomacy - follows trade.

On the other side of hegemony, in the area of dominion and colonization, (which usually does not cover the whole system), governments come under greater pressure from NGO's, both economic and ethical. On the whole Western imperial governments have wanted above all law and order in their dependent states; and in this they have had the support of economic enterprises in the area. But law and order also requires the acquiescence of the governed. So in their own dependencies Western governments enforced what they considered economically profitable and morally right only so far as that enforcement did not cost them the acquiescence of the governed. Here one must remember that 20th century colonialism was directed, in theory and largely in practice, towards full self-government for colonies, either as separate states or incorporated into the imperial power. Colonial administrations that believed they were making orderly progress towards full self government resented what they considered the excessive greed of some businesses and the ill-informed and disruptive agitation and propaganda by some moral NGO's.

After World War II the main demand of concerned NGO's was to speed up the promised independence or at least full assimilation, and to end colonial rule. In this Westphalian demand they were supported by many non-colonial governments and also, for very different reasons, by the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States.

But in times of hegemony - in conditions such as the present - small and weak states find themselves somewhere on the long road between colonial administration and real as opposed to nominal Westphalian sovereignty. Most of them find that they cannot travel that road alone. Their disappointed well-wishers in the West, including the moral pressure groups, now change their principal demand. They continue to advocate democracy, human rights, the environment and other values - values which I share. But instead of Westphalian non-interference, NGO's of all kinds now urge Western governments and international bodies to lend a helping and sometimes restraining hand. Western governments sense both a national interest and a moral responsibility to act; and they have the material capacity to do so. That is why we find that powerful hegemonial carrots and sticks become common and often continuous.

And what if real and total independence turns out to be a crock of fairy gold at the end of the Westphalian rainbow, and the long road leads in fact to a world society in which states have even less sovereignty than in Europe today?

All in all, therefore, I think that NGO's seem to have the greatest international effect in hegemonial conditions like the present. They achieve this effect by bringing pressure mainly on hegemonial

and potentially hegemonial governments at a time when these governments are more willing to listen and act. And NGO's also, to a lesser extent, bring pressures to bear directly on peripheral societies.

NGO's in Democracies

Economic concerns bring their discreet pressures to bear on less democratic governments as well as more democratic ones. But obviously, the more democratic a state is, the more responsive its govt is to public opinion, and to organizations that reflect and mobilize various segments of public opinion. It is therefore easier for ethical NGO's to mobilize public indignation in democracies.

Members of elected legislatures, especially those that are separate from the executive government, as for instance in the United States, are more sensitive to organized public pressures than professional diplomats and chiefs of staff. So they become focal points for NGO's bringing pressures to bear on government practitioners. As a striking example, the U S Congress insists on every U S embassy reporting every year on the human rights record of the state where the embassy is situated, and then publishing these reports. Such behaviour dismays the permanent professionals inside governments and intergovernmental bodies - the mandarins and sherpas - who try to safeguard what they see as the long term interests of their state or organization, and also to preserve a just balance between several desirable goals for the world.

The pattern of non-govt pressure on governments repeats itself. Just as economic enterprises affect tax revenues, so ethical organizations affect votes. Both are of great concern to democratic governments.

The pattern repeats itself also in that, like transnational economic enterprises, many of the organizations that apply ethical pressure on governments are also not confined within the nutshell of one state, operating on only one government. Obvious examples are religious organizations, the Red Cross, *médecins sans frontières*. They also interact with intergovernmental organizations like the World Bank whose interests are not circumscribed by any one state. In this period of hegemony ethical as well as commercial NGO's are becoming increasingly globalized.

So we see that in times of hegemony a great range of NGO's finds it unusually rewarding to pressurize governments of developed states, in order to change the domestic practices of other states.

What about the position in the **recipient states**? The governments of incompetent and failed states are usually made up of Westernized or Russianized élites. They cherish their recently won nominal independence. But they know that they cannot manage alone. They see their states, with some justification, as poor countries exploited by rich ones. And they are more keenly aware than their Western critics that full Western freedoms would make their states ungovernable - that the alternatives in their states are firm government or chaos.

Therefore these élite governments - where there is effective government as opposed to chaos - have two basic aims in their dealings with the developed world.

1. to obtain the maximum of aid - economic, access to markets, medical, and of course

arms to maintain order. And to ensure that the aid is channelled as far as possible through their government and dispensed to the people by it. This outside aid is a major ingredient of what keeps their government popular, or at least secures the reluctant consent of the governed.

2. to comply with what they call the neo-colonial demands of donor governments and NGO's about Western standards of civilization only so far as necessary to ensure the flow of aid and other advantages.

Some recipient governments are more willing than others to collaborate with governments and NGO's of the developed West, and more skilful at doing so. Such partnerships, though unequal, can be very beneficial to the recipient community. [Example: Costa Rica] Recipient governments can count on the vocal support of moral NGO's in donor states in their quest for material advantages. But they usually find themselves up against the same NGO's over compliance with what we can broadly call Western standards of civilization and human rights.

Of course where a less developed government has a strategic asset like a lot of oil or an indispensable base, it can afford to defy the NGO's of donor states. But otherwise, to defy these NGO's is to renounce Western aid.

Public opinion in recipient countries is hard to measure. In some there hardly is yet such a thing as a majority opinion. In my experience, most of the governed want what they conceive to be Western standards of living and of civilization more than their rulers want these things for them. But they are not effectively organized in moral NGO's.

Reverse pressures

The pressures in the NGO world are not all one way.

You have reverse pressures on NGO's by both donor and recipient governments, and by intergovernmental institutions. These counter-pressures on NGO's are less than the pressures of NGO's on governments; but they are considerable.

On the economic side, you cannot draw a hard line between governments and capitalist private enterprises. There are degrees of partnership. Examples are: the East India Companies; German industry after 1871; and the industrial-military complex in the US.

In quasi-Westphalian times a donor government cannot control what a recipient does with the aid it receives. Even in a hegemonial climate it is not easy. As well as incompetence and embezzlement, many recipient governments use their increased capabilities to pursue policies unpalatable to donor governments. Many NGO's have a patchy but better record of effectiveness than governments in dispensing aid. So we find that today donor governments are increasingly enlisting the active co-operation of nonstate actors. Especially global and transnational businesses, and development agencies.

Public funding for development NGO's now amounts to 30% - including notably financing by the World Bank. Even human rights organizations get some state funding, especially in Europe. Thus there are not just pressures and counter-pressures. In some areas there is a degree of partnership,

though funds are often given to appease public pressure. And this wary but growing co-operation between governments and many NGO interest groups leads both sides to modify their behaviour.

Inevitably the increasing influence of non-state actors changes the ways the actors themselves behave. In addition to the modification of NGO behaviour to accommodate both donor and recipient governments and international institutions, we can see the increasing bureaucratization of pressure groups, especially in their operations in underdeveloped states.

Sum Up

Now let me try to sum up this complicated pattern of international relations - or transnational relations - in its present phase of hegemony.

By Hegemony I mean the material condition of technological, economic and strategic superiority which enables a single great power or group of powers, or the great powers acting collectively, to bring such great inducements and pressures to bear that most other states lose some of their external and internal independence.

Hegemony lies in the spectrum between multiple independences and world government. I want to emphasize the continuities along the spectrum; the gradual nature of changes in transnational relations; and the mutations of the same pattern. We need to avoid sharp distinctions of either/or.

The **rich developed Western democracies** now enjoy a great and growing hegemonic superiority in the international system. In these countries a wide variety of transnational **NGO's** ranges from economic enterprises like banks and oil companies through philanthropic development agencies to vocal champions of moral causes. All three groups want to change the internal affairs of weaker and less democratic states. Transnational NGO's use what direct influence they can on the peripheral states. They also try to get their own elected governments to bring more effective state inducements and pressures to bear, including ultimately armed force. While NGO's urge governments to act in Westphalian times of non-intervention, and in times of direct administration of dependencies, they are most vociferous and most successful in times of hegemony. For hegemony combines a high capacity to subsidize and intervene with a high willingness to do so.

The governments of **hegemonial donor states** respond to their NGO's, and usually share their cultural assumptions about standards of civilization - what is desirable and right. But in times of hegemony hegemonial governments want to act as far as possible by proxy rather than directly. So they bring inducements and pressures to bear mainly on the governments of recipient states. In extreme cases - Bosnia, Afghanistan - they create local governments as proxies through which to deal. And they develop wary partnerships with the more moderate NGO's, using them as proxies too.

Recipient governments want the inducements offered by donor governments and NGO's. Many find that they cannot manage without regular and continuous aid. But weak states are threatened by chaos; and the strings attached by Western donors to their aid are apt to weaken weak states still further. So most recipient governments comply with the moral demands of the developed states -

standards of civilization, treatment of foreign enterprises and so on - only to the extent necessary to ensure the aid. Some see the merits of Western demands and practices more clearly than others.

And finally may I remind you that the pendulum is swinging, and that we do not know how long the present phase of Western hegemony will last.