

## Hasenclever *et al.*, *Theories of International Regimes* (Chaps. 4, 5)

### Chapter four: Power-based theories

In general, realist perspectives on international institutions privilege relative power capabilities and distributional consequences as explanatory factors. Relative gains matter, and institutional forms of cooperation are both more difficult to achieve, and less likely to endure, than neoliberal theories predict.

*Hegemonic stability theory.* Hegemonic stability theory attributes the existence and continuation of international regimes to actors with a disproportionate share of issue-specific power resources. Regimes decline when the power distribution shifts away from the predominant actors(s). The logic is that of public goods and collection action: a great power can act as a stabilizer in the international system, bearing a disproportionate share of the costs of providing public goods and thereby permitting other states to “free ride” and avoid the dilemma of collection action.

Two major variants of hegemonic stability theory exist, depending on how the collective action problem is overcome: In the *benevolent hegemon* version, the hegemon finds it worthwhile to bear the costs of regime provision itself, while other states free ride and collect rents at the expense of the hegemon. In the *coercive hegemon* variant, typified by Gilpin’s *War & Change in World Politics*, the hegemon’s power permits it to coerce other states into contributing to the provision of the collective good. In this version of the theory, the hegemon may in fact be seen as exploiting the other states in the system, although like the benevolent hegemon, the less-powerful states may still reap more in benefits from the public good than they pay out in regime maintenance costs.

Two criticisms of hegemonic stability theory are presented in this chapter. The first concerns the question of whether international regimes are, in fact, public goods. In many issue-areas, exclusion from regime benefits is, in fact, possible. Hegemonic stability theorists respond, however, that exclusion itself may be viewed as presenting a collective action problem, entailing costs and offering benefits to the entire group. A more telling but limited critique, then, is that in some issue-areas, regimes are largely self-enforcing (assurance and coordination games) and in general regimes frequently operate to reduce the costs of providing enforcement.

The second concern involves opportunities for cooperation which are present in the literature on collective action and which are ignored by hegemonic stability theorists. Specifically, there is always a minimum number of states who would benefit by cooperating among themselves, and hence a small number of great powers behaving strategically could theoretically substitute for a single hegemonic power in stimulating the emergence of a regime. This possibility could help to account for periods of post-hegemonic cooperation, as the most powerful states will have ongoing relationships, focal points for agreement, pre-existing sanctioning mechanisms and higher opportunity costs, all of which increase the likelihood that a small enough group of powerful states can overcome the dilemma of collection action.

*Krasner’s power-oriented research program.* Krasner argues that the primary obstacle to regime formation, and international cooperation in general, isn’t overcoming market failure and collective action problems at all. His model is the Pareto frontier (the curve representing all possible Pareto-efficient solutions). In most cases (modeled by Battle of the Sexes, but not Prisoners’ Dilemma), states have different preferences among the various possible choices for cooperation, and struggle not over reaching the Pareto frontier, but over the distributional question of which point along the frontier is chosen.

In this view, cheating and such institutional features as information provision and compliance mechanisms are irrelevant, as no state has an incentive to deviate from any point along the Pareto frontier.

Power is essential, however, as it may be used to determine the actors involved in a solution, dictate the rules of the bargaining game and alter payoff structures.

Regimes, under this approach, act as stabilizers in their respective issue-areas. But that stability is highly contingent upon the underlying distribution of power. While regimes are therefore quite weak in this model, they can to a limited degree represent sources of power, particularly for weaker actors in the system. Nevertheless, powerful actors can still alter the rules of the game whenever the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs, which limits the significance of both international regimes and game-theoretic models purporting to show fixed attributes of a given issue-area.

*Grieco's modern realist critique.* Grieco argues that *anarchy*, in the realist tradition, refers not simply to the absence of a central authority to enforce bargains, but to the absence of any outside assurance of basic survival. Accordingly, international cooperation is difficult not primarily because of fears of cheating, but because states must constantly worry about relative gains.

Grieco characterizes interest-based regime theories (neoliberal institutionalism) as founded on the assumption that states are *rational egoists*, *i.e.*, that they seek to maximize utility functions that are independent of those of other states. On the contrary, Grieco argues, realists hold that the utility functions of states under anarchy are very much concerned with the payoffs accruing to others. This concern with relative gains does not mean, however, that states seek to achieve relative gains, but only that they are *defensive positionalists* and seek to avoid relative losses.

Grieco stresses that states will always be concerned about relative gains: the uncertainty inherent in anarchy, combined with the stakes at issue in security calculations, ensures that the gains of any partner are viewed with suspicion. Moreover, beyond the goal of survival, states avoid relative losses in order to prevent any increase in the bargaining power of their partners. One limitation of the concern with relative gains, however, is that states also value absolute gains, and will accept minor relative losses in order to achieve sufficient absolute gains. Grieco explicitly argues, in fact, that states will vary in their relative weighting of absolute and relative gains.

These realist foundations lead Grieco to conclude that international cooperation, when it occurs, will tend to take forms that roughly balance the distribution of benefits. This will involve side-payments or other concessions, especially if cooperation is to persist. International institutions can assist in reducing any gaps in the distribution of benefits, as well as reducing the sensitivity of states to relative gains.

An influential critique of Grieco's position holds that the logic of relative *vs.* absolute gains fails to hold when there are multiple actors. Another criticism imposes stringent conditions on the ability of relative gains concerns to impede cooperation. Specifically, the gains from cooperation must be indivisible, side-payments unavailable, and issue-linkage impossible.

## **Chapter five: Knowledge-based theories**

Cognitive approaches to international regimes decline to treat state identity and interests as exogenous. Instead, these theories hold that international cooperation is influenced by the beliefs held by decision makers.

*Weak cognitivism.* Weak cognitivists view rationalist theories of regimes (including interest- and power-based theories) as essentially incomplete. They seek to supplement rationalist explanations by providing an account of the origins and dynamics of the preferences underlying rational state behavior.

Weak cognitivists hold that the interests of state actors are not fixed, but instead are dependent upon the knowledge and understandings possessed by the actors. Moreover, in an era of increasing interdependence, knowledge in technical areas has become more difficult to obtain and experts are increasingly influential in determining state behavior. Finally, weak cognitivists stress the role of intersubjective meanings that can create convergent expectations and make possible cooperative solutions to common problems.

Causal and normative ideas are at the heart of one cognitivist research program. Changes in causal beliefs (scientific knowledge) and normative beliefs (moral concerns) can help to explain variation in international behavior. Beliefs can influence the choice of both means and ends, create focal points for enabling common solutions, and grant institutions power to prolong ideas. Learning can occur, leading to the development of new state strategies or, in the case of complex learning, new state interests. Finally, knowledge may be transmitted to decision makers and between countries through the mediation of *epistemic communities*, networks of professionals with expert knowledge relevant to policy choices.

*Strong cognitivism.* Strong cognitivists view rationalist theories as fundamentally flawed, preferring to analyze cooperation as essentially a social phenomenon. These theorists stress the importance of roles (identities) and their corresponding rules, rather than rational calculation, in determining state behavior. State identities and cognitions, in turn, are dependent upon international institutions and international society as a whole. International cooperation, therefore, should be more robust than simple utility calculations based on self-interest would suggest.

“Institution-centric” scholars argue that international institutions such as sovereignty, diplomacy and international law embody norms and rules that are constitutive of state actors. Rationalists, by contrast, distinguish deep, underlying social structures from international regimes that, they argue, may be explained merely by reference to individual rationality. Strong cognitivists also argue for supplementing the positivist epistemology with an interpretive approach that questions the existence of strict cause-and-effect relationships, and for engaging in critical analysis that recognizes the impact of social science on its subject matter.

While strong cognitive writing tends to emphasize critical analysis, constructive approaches to strong cognitive theory can be identified. The *power of legitimacy* approach emphasizes the observation of Louis Henkin that international society is characterized by compliance with legal rules, and links the degree of state compliance with international norms to the underlying normative structures of international society. The *power of arguments* perspective, represented by John Ruggie and Fred Kratochwil, holds that international regimes require a convergence of expectations among states, and that this convergence depends upon a practical discourse arising out of the ongoing interpretation and application of regime norms. The *power of identity* approach is offered by Wendt, who stresses that the identities and interests of states are constantly in the process of construction in the social context, and that these endogenous variables in turn shape rational choices. Finally, Cox’s *power of history* perspective emphasizes the arbitrary nature of the distribution of power at any moment in history, and the forces that tend to sustain and to unravel any particular world order.