

SOME STRUCTURAL PECULIARITIES OF THE HIERARCHICAL INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS

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The thesis of anarchy remains demanded both in terms of the leading postulates in international relations (IR) theories and as a “guiding” approach in foreign policy implementation process. Its main principle for the real politics is that anarchy reigns in the international system. This does not necessarily imply an absolute or relative chaos in the system of international affairs, but rather, is based on a postulate of absence of any structured institution that would ensure international order. The discourse on establishment of global governance mechanisms and instruments, despite its “sustained urgency”, has not produced any even conceptually practical means to face the challenges or solve the problems stemming from the nature of international anarchy. The classical international political discourse continues to be dominated by the traditional argument that “none is entitled to command; none is required to obey” [1]. Within the same tradition, R. Art and R. Jervis assert that “anarchy is the fundamental fact of international relations.” [2]

Nevertheless, retrospection of even the not so far past shows that in practice, interstate/international models and modes for hierarchic regulation not only did exist, but also endure currently and are extremely important in understanding the international and regional dynamics. In the post-Cold War context,

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where previously dominant disciplined order has steadily being been replaced by the regional systems, the examination of macro-regional hierarchic choices and analysis of their underlying operational properties is acquiring a particular importance.

*Some Peculiar Manifestations of International Hierarchy
during the Cold War Era*

After the World War II, during the Cold War era, maintaining order at the systemic level of international relations was principally based on the so-called bipolar stringency, whereby the two dominating powers in the system, the USA and the USSR, assumed the role of ensuring worldwide stability or at least controllability of developments unfolding across the various parts of the world. One of the characteristic aspects of international relations during those time was the rejection of the legitimacy of the bipolar paradigm created by under direct supervision of the two superpowers: both Moscow and Washington did not officially recognize each other's extensive claims¹. Unlike the preceding colonial period, when the rules of the game were based on an "established consensus" between the main actors and that was considered ideologically acceptable for the key actors, the Cold War inertial thinking did not really inspire much hope about the prospects of "peaceful coexistence". The US-Soviet global rivalry, though did not cross the boundaries of rationality, yet was based on the notion of dismantlement of each other's domestic political and regional clout just to spread its own influence and control instead.

At the same time, with all inherent controversies and threats, the bipolar world order unleashed some essential transformations in the concept of interna-

¹ R. Cooper, *The Post Modern State and the World Order*, Demos 2000, pp. 12-13.
<http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/thepostmodernstate.pdf>

tional relations, and influenced the positions and relationship of the forces of international system, their hierarchic structure, as well as the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the system [3, с. 185-186]. It has to be noted that the classical realist approaches that dominated international relations for decades and were tied to the ideas of priority of national interests and security dilemma, were perceived as components of a “problem-solving” thesis.

Nevertheless, in the Cold War era both the US and Soviet foreign policies were characterized by a tenor of principal opposition to the colonial approach. The former geopolitical perceptions of the British Empire were deemed unacceptable in normative and political, as well as operational terms [4]. The direct action format as a method of implementing foreign policy¹ was removed from the agenda, given the dynamics of global transformations and the peculiarities of the standoff between the two superpowers. Unlike the immediate and direct action strategy of the colonial times typical for, say, British and French policies in Africa and Asia², the rules external engagement and interference in the modern times underwent significant transformations. Recognition of sovereignty and universal equality as a formalized norm of modern interstate relations significantly changed the rules of control and perceptions on (macro)regional developments and processes [5].

Another key characteristic of the modern times has been that the discipline among the groupings of countries formed around the power centers was ensued by these centers, through applying both institutionalized and ad hoc control mechanisms. Unlike the classical era of imperialism, when the main

¹ А. Журавлев, Параметры эффективности внешней политики в зарубежной литературе, *Международные процессы: журнал теории международных отношений и мировой политики*, <http://www.intertrends.ru/twelfth/006.htm>

² Ibid.

driver for territorial expansion and political consolidation was the inflow of resources from colonies to metropolises or as D. Lake has defined it, competition between the great powers [6], in the modern times the two great powers were the ones to spend enormous resources to maintain their “own” zones of influence. Worded differently, significant funding was directed to ensure social and political stability in the zones of influence and satellite territories, as well as allied nations. Evidently, the funds and resources spent on ensuring internal stability, sustainability (political, social and economic) and external security of the countries in the zones of influence, were an indicator of a wider, geopolitical function. This was about manageability and controllability of regional developments and dynamics, which understandably, required substantial costs.

For instance, after the World War II, the USSR had to incur huge costs to keep the Eastern and Central Europe under its integrated and manageable control. By one estimate, while initially the USSR withdrew nearly \$1 billion in resources and capital per year from Central and Eastern Europe, by 1980s the Soviet Union was subsidizing economies of Eastern Europe to a total of about \$17 billion per year. Annual subsidies were offered to the Comecon countries to maintain the unity and interrelation among the Soviet bloc [7].

In essence, since the Cold War period some modern concepts were formed for international relations that in some sense contradicted the classical, anarchic notions. These new concepts, perhaps, were hard to unequivocally qualify simply as imperialistic or hegemonic. This is the phenomenon of hierarchic international relations, which despite having historical precedence (such as the macro-regional paradigm established by ancient China [8]), in modern times acquired a new conception in terms of its status and operation.

Hierarchy and the System of International Relations: Modern Perceptions

The analytic and applied significance of international hierarchy is based on several aspects.

At the *theoretical level* the phenomenon of hierarchy in the international relations may open important prospects for analysis and conceptualization from several viewpoints. First, in both academic and political discourse, which apparently is under the influence of (neo)realistic “problem-solving” dialectic [9], the processes occurring in international relations are mostly viewed as a result of interactions between systemic factors. There are numerous and diverse theoretical and conceptual approaches that accept the thesis of anarchy as a guiding principle in international relations, and consider among the drivers of international relations mostly such “faceless” structural phenomena as configuration of forces, general systemic features of their arrangement, the security dilemma, etc. In this context, reviewing the dynamics of international relations from the perspective of the hierarchical thesis may bring to the forefront not only and not so much an alternative point of view, but rather would considerably widen the research base. In addition to material resource and materialistic perceptions on international relations (which by themselves are the basic preconditions of international hierarchy), it can introduce the variables of authority, legitimacy and identity into the theoretical domain. The concept of international hierarchy is close to the constructivist paradigm [10] and may also create an important bridge to the theory of foreign policy.

At the *policy analysis level*, review and examination of international processes and phenomena in the hierarchic context can be important in several aspects. First of all, the underlying logic of hierarchic modus tends to use and rely

more on quantitative methods, which advantageously differs from the traditional qualitative method of foreign policy analysis. The phenomena under examination in the hierarchical system are relatively more objective. At the same time, the analysis of international developments in the context of hierarchy draws relatively clear boundaries between the relevant time phases.

In international (inter-state) relations, hierarchy is defined as a system of social stratification [11]. On one hand, it can be viewed as a static means to describe a *certain status* and a “format” in the international relations, given the differences in the status of the main actors/countries of the international system in relation to each other (legally, all nations are equal, but “some are more equal than others” [12]). On the other hand, it may also be operational in nature, thus reflecting and involving the dynamics, variables and area indicators of hierarchic relations (transformations).

R. Aron argues that three structural measures are typical for international systems: power configuration, existence of hierarchy between the main actors, and the homogeneous or heterogeneous nature of the international system participants [3, c. 185]. The author contends that hierarchy reflects the actual inequality of the actors in terms military, technological, economic, political, resource, ideological and other means of affecting the international system [3, c. 185].

As it has been already mentioned above, almost all the international relations theories and schools are based on the unbothered hypothesis of anarchy dominating the international arena, with exception, probably, of the constructivist stream believing that neither anarchy, nor hierarchy are *a priori* predetermined phenomena, but rather just potentially possible outcomes of practical interactions between the actors themselves. As for the proponents of the concept

of hierarchy in the international arena, they adhere to various theoretical and doctrinal schools, such as the power transition theory or the English school of “international society/community” paradigm. Generally, two types of international hierarchy are distinguished: systems based on the principle of “coercion” and that of “voluntarism”.¹ The first one is characterized by use of a coercing force (including direct force) to ensure preservation of the pyramid-type regimes, whereas the second one, by voluntary acceptance of the rule of a dominant power. Usually, in discursive and semantic terms the modern perception of hierarchic systems does not imply direct imperial control or direct (external) governance. Rather, a proxy or “contracted” ruling power is implied, that is accepted as such both by the dominant and subordinate states [13].

As for the realm of international relations, regardless of the practical experience with hierarchic methods, the sociopolitical ranking systems have a number of common advantages and shortcomings. First of all, one of the main advantages typical to hierarchic systems is the labor division (specialization), which enables implementing large-scale projects and works. Combination of resources and legitimacy, as evidenced by the historical experience, had allowed handling projects of considerable size. The second advantage is the high degree of integration among the system participants and low transaction costs (which are due to the system participants’ belief and aspiration in focusing on absolute, rather than relative interests and goals) that not only contribute to cooperation among the participants, but also facilitate implementation of future-oriented strategic investments. In such systems, given the high degree of polarity, there is a low likelihood that the conflict will cross the threshold of an open and direct

¹ It has to be noted that hierarchic international relations cannot be directly compared or equalized to the imperial governance methods.

violence [14]. Of course, along with the advantages, the hierarchic systems also have vulnerabilities or disadvantages. Although it is true that high degree of integration decreases the likelihood that a conflict will get out of hand, but if does, then given the large volume of resources invested “together”, its effects would be graver than under different circumstances [14].

Theoretically, in developed countries the commercial contracts reflect the perfectly functional thesis typical to hierarchic systems: monitoring, dispute resolution and enforcement [15]. The emergence of a hierarchic structure in the private sector is due to the participants’ desire to decrease the transaction costs under incomplete awareness (even under a hierarchy the monitoring and regulation functions are limited), which according to some British scientists may lead to an incompetent intervention [16]. On the other hand, it is invoked by the necessity of establishing a stable institutional environment, so as to focus on the long-term, predictable and absolute common interests. Explanation to the drivers and peculiarities of the mentioned phenomenon in the private sector offered by O. Williamson, a Nobel Prize winner [17], prompted some scholars to suggest that models of hierarchic interrelationship also exist in the international relations. Unlike the private sector though, the primary “goods” in international relations are the national *security*, as well as the social and economic well-being and domestic order, which are subject to the logic of hierarchic distribution: “international relations resembles the world of firms in that the provision of security can require replacing anarchy (market) with hierarchical governance structures (firms)” [18].

In addition, it is obvious that hierarchic structures, whether solid organizations or formats based on bilateral agreements, the management and coordina-

tion costs are significant and long-lasting. For countries in subordinate relationship accepting the legitimacy and power of the central force comes at a price, which could have both economic and political dimensions. For example, a K. Hancock [19] suggests that costs and benefits of a hierarchic system can be as follows:

	Benefits	Costs
<i>Subordinate state</i>	a. Financial assistance b. Military assistance	a. Incompatible policy choices b. Domestic policy losses
<i>Dominant state</i>	a. Greater policy control b. Domestic political benefits	a. Financial costs b. Commitments c. International political risks

Peculiarities of the Hierarchic Systems at the Regional Level

The phenomenon of hierarchy in international relations is conceptually based on existence of two parametric key measures: *material* disparity (for example in military and economic areas) and sustained inequality factors in *political* (power) relations. Empirically, even though there are (have been) significant differences in forming and maintaining hierarchy, still a common “hierarchical regional system can be defined as a regional international system composed of a single Great Power and a number of relatively small states” [20, p. 18]. Zimmerman contends that another important reality of a regional system is that the relevant decision makers think it exists and behave accordingly, as it was the case with the Organization of American States or Eastern European countries of the Warsaw Treaty Organization [20, pp. 19-20].

In this context it is important to differentiate unipolar system, hegemony and hierarchy. A unipolar system implies concentration of material means and resources, whereas hegemony involves an entirety of both material and non-

material (ideological dimension, values and norms) factors. In this light, hierarchy as phenomenon in international relations is focused not only on formal, but also on relative (variable) power relations between a state with dominant aspirations and those dependent on the latter.

In reviewing the relation between hierarchy and regional systems, it has to be noted above all that hierarchical relations are dyadic in nature: in this type of relations one state accepts the dominant role and status of the other within the framework of an existing system. However, these types of relationships between the dominant state and geographically contiguous states within a common (macro)region may break grounds for establishment of a regional hierarchical system. Apart of political dimension, which clearly is interrelated with the international legitimacy of the dominant state, in D. Lake's opinion the hierarchic relations between the two actors additionally could spur forward the *economies of scale*, which significantly reduce the costs of further expansion and at the same time create incentives for expansion. Worded differently, if a hegemonic state initially bears large costs for a subordinated state (e.g. USA – Panama: building a military base, related infrastructure, other economic and financial costs), then establishing subordination relations with the neighboring states may, understandably, decrease the costs of further expansion (e.g. thanks to using material or human assets stationed in Panama to expand to the neighboring states) [21].

Along with the features of the hierarchical governance schemes put in practice by a hegemon state, the regional systems are also based on certain principles. The regions where *balance of power* and conflicting relations are present, in definition by B. Buzan and O. Wæver are characterized by “a pattern of secu-

rity interdependence shaped by fear of war and expectations of the use of violence in political relations” [22]. However, security systems can be built also based on other values, such as the *security community (pluralistic)* in North America and Western Europe, or the *security regimes* and regional *power “concert”* (South America).

The post-Soviet region, viewed as a separate security system, is described as a unipolar structure: “security regime, Russian hegemony/regional power concert” [23].

In our opinion, given the dynamics and structural attributes of the developments in Eurasia since the collapse of the Soviet Union [24], it is possible to “derive” a few dimensions of the regional hierarchy. *First*, it is the presence of a regional system (especially a security system) and disparity in material resources possessed by Russia on one hand, and the combined potentials of all other post-Soviet countries on the other. According to A. Hurrell, one of the important systemic characteristics of the international arena is the existence of an alternative between power balancing or unequal (hierarchical) relations, which, inter alia, are caused by impossibility of balancing policies against the hegemon state [25, p. 120]. A number of American experts and scholars since mid-2000s have argued that a hypothetical attempt of direct balancing by all post-Soviet countries as a unified force against Russia is simply hopeless due to resource disparity. “In terms of aggregate indicators of military might, the region is just as primed for hegemony as it was in 1995: none of Russia’s neighbors has managed to enhance its relative share of military power to any significant degree” [26].

Second, the key indicators of regional hierarchical relations are the degree and parameters of policy convergence (foreign policy, security and defense poli-

cies, socioeconomic development, etc.) around the axis of the dominant state's strategic interests. Despite of the complex and composite nature of this indicator, the policy convergence turns critical if the dominant state uses either coercive means/force, or puts in practice certain rules and institutes at the regional level. These are based on the dominant interest of the hierarchical state while the subordinate states follow the path not so much because of the coercive force application, but rather, due to the political image and states that the dominant actors wields (power). In the post-Soviet space, if taken from the perspective of defining the priorities and main directions of foreign policies, the factor of a structural preponderance is of critical importance as it is a powerful macro-leverage to influence the course of action and behavior paths by the smaller states. The concept of structural power is generally understood as a combination of the following factors (as a foreign policy resource of a state aimed at controlling its environment): security; production; credit and finance; knowledge, beliefs and ideas [27].

Although different power centers utilize their structural power in a varying degree and with the different success in order to determine the political preferences and foreign policy behaviors of the post-Soviet countries, much depends on the institutionalization extent of the structural influence. M. Mastanduno suggests that hegemon states not only endeavor to dominate over the other states, but also to achieve acceptance of the other great powers as to their "right" to set the rules of the game within the given international subsystem [25, p. 123]. In this sense, establishment and institutional strengthening of the Eurasian Union were aimed at consolidation of the Russian Federation's influence, which in turn is directed to achieving the ultimate goal of policy convergence. Empiri-

cal experience shows that many powerful states in practice are not too much prone to foster regional institutionalization, because the relevant primary foreign policy goals are easier to achieve through unilateral or bilateral strategies [28]. However, at the same time it has to be taken into consideration that the regional hierarchy maintenance costs also include those for ensuring inregional and extra-regional (international) legitimacy.

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