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# World Hegemony and the United Nations

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When the well meaning “man from Mars” arrived at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York City and asked to be taken to that organization’s leader, personnel at the security desk assumed that the Secretary-General was being sought. They, thus, proceeded to direct the visitor to the 38th floor. But diplomats encountered in the corridors promptly suggested to the misdirected Martian that he was in the wrong building. “Cross First Avenue,” they instructed. “The leader of the United Nations is in the US mission.” The United States, however, denied this statement and assured the by now very confused Martian that, far from leading the United Nations, they were not even very interested in the organization. “Go and talk to the Cubans, the Algerians, the Indians, or others from the Group of 77. They are leading the United Nations, and that is precisely why we Americans are not very interested.” But the leaders of the Group of 77 explained to the alien visitor that their hold even on their own Third World group was at best tenuous. “The United Nations,” they rather ruefully acknowledged, “is economically dominated by the North and politically controlled by the West,” who, the bewildered Martian discovered, are essentially the same people, although they have no address.

Among the pieces of advice given in this parable to the peripatetic Martian, the guidance offered by the Third World leadership was probably the most reliable. The United Nations Organization—in New York and Geneva—as well as most, and certainly the most important, of the UN specialized agencies are Northern or Western creations, as are the world’s institutions of economic management: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. These institutions establish, monitor, maintain, and enforce global regimes that further Northern and Western goals. Moreover, they institutionalize and regulate a liberal internationalist world order that has remained remarkably stable for well over a half century. Global institutions are elements and instruments of a prevailing liberal internationalist hegemony.

## Hegemony

In much of the literature on world order, discovering hegemony means registering disapproval. Hegemony connotes the domination of the weak by the strong, the many by the few. It implies the institutionalization of privilege, consequent inequality in the distributions of various values, and the injustices inherent in inequality. Hegemony, many analysts of international relations conclude, is therefore a condition in human relations to be resented, rejected, and removed. Some say it should rightly trigger antihegemonic, revolutionary action. In these interpretations, “hegemony” and “hegemon” gather notoriety along with “empire” and “imperialist.” Both sets of terms might best be either avoided in enlightened intellectual company or employed only as poison-tip barbs directed at targets of disapproval. Still, hegemony, like empire, identifies a real and important phenomenon in international relations. Indeed, the concept’s analytical usefulness cannot be set aside simply because the state of affairs it defines might be normatively

unpleasant. Like empires, hegemonies recur with considerable frequency in international history; just this fact alone ought to render them objects of study rather than subjects of immediate dismissal. To postulate that the United Nations and most of the rest of today's global institutions are elements of a prevailing hegemony is to call for deeper understanding of this state of affairs, which is the object of this essay.

Conventional discourse in international relations interprets hegemony as the predominant influence of one state over others, wherein "predominance" is commonly understood in its lexicographic sense to mean "greatest ascendancy, importance, authority, or force." Hegemony, then, is a state of international affairs, a condition or situation in international relations. It arises when a single state attains preponderant power and elects to use its power to manage the international system. In the vocabulary of the theory of hegemonic stability, for example, the preponderant power or hegemon manages the international economy by making rules that lend order and predictability to transactions in trade and finance (Kindleberger 1973; Keohane 1980). The hegemon enforces established rules by meting out rewards and punishments. It induces compliant behavior by promising cooperation, coopting partners, and providing collective goods up to the limits of its self-interest. But it also holds in reserve both the ability and willingness to use force to respond to noncompliance. Others' voluntary compliance, or their acquiescence regarding the projects of the hegemon, are offered either in exchange for rewards, from dread of penalty, or out of ideological affinity. The voluntary compliance of subjects distinguishes between hegemony and empire. Subordinate elites under conditions of hegemony are better conceived as partners rather than subjects. In the reasoning of those who find analytical usefulness in the theory of hegemonic stability, Great Britain is widely identified as the world's hegemon during the last third of the nineteenth century and the United States is seen as assuming the hegemon's role during the two decades following the Second World War.

### **The World's Only Remaining Superpower**

By virtue of its current status as the "only remaining superpower" and in recognition of the military, economic, and political power that defines this status, the United States is taken by many to be today's hegemon. But the scope of predominance attributed to the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century is substantively broader than that recognized in the theory of hegemonic stability, which speaks only about economic ascendancy. US hegemony today is seen to extend well beyond the management of the international economy to include rule making and management in areas of international development, international security, peacekeeping, state-building, nation-building, democratic transition, and human rights. American hegemony is seen to be embodied in the contents of countless regimes that regulate international relations within the many issues-areas composing today's world politics and political economy. American preferences define the "principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures" that constitute these regimes (Krasner 1983:2). They are also said to delimit the contents of prevailing regimes because principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures that are unacceptable to Washington rarely see the light of diplomatic day. Moreover, many of those who see the world being managed today by the hegemony of the "world's only remaining superpower" see global organizations functioning mainly as creators, monitors, and enforcers of international regimes. United States hegemony, then, both logically and practically implies American domination of global organizations, including, most notably, the international economic and financial institutions and the United Nations.

Many of those who have studied the United Nations, as well as many associated with the organization, view it as the servant of a long-standing US hegemony that not only predates the end of the Cold War but actually goes back to the end of

World War II. This interpretation begins with the by-and-large accurate observation that the United Nations was largely an American creation. It was Cordell Hull's inspiration brought to realization at San Francisco in the spring of 1945. So dedicated were US diplomats to making San Francisco a success and so apprehensive were they that it would not succeed, no effort was spared to heighten the impact of the founding conference. Stephen Schlesinger's (2003:118–119) account of the opening ceremony in San Francisco colorfully captures the American emotional investment in getting the United Nations successfully off the launching pad:

Oliver Lundquist and Jo Mielziner—the latter famous as a Broadway designer of musicals—had transformed the \$5 million San Francisco Opera House into a glittering hall. . . . Lundquist and Mielziner adorned the stage with four golden pillars tied together with olive branch wreaths symbolizing the four freedoms that President Roosevelt had proclaimed. . . . Forming a semicircular row among the columns was an array of flags affixed to pikes from all the nations attending the conference, floodlit against a backdrop of gray-blue drapes. The two men garlanded the stairs to the stage with flowers, lit the stage like a sunburst, and tinted twenty-four big spotlights with blue filters for cosmetic impact. . . . [Edward] Stettinius, silver-haired and distinguished, convened the meeting at the podium and called for a minute of silent meditation; he then introduced President Truman, who delivered his ten-minute radio address.

Later in this same passage, Schlesinger (2003:125–126) also underlines the commitment of the United States to making the new world organization normatively “American”:

Given the enormous stress of hosting the worldwide meeting, with the League of Nations fiasco haunting the background, Stettinius and his aides relied heavily on their ability to overcome various obstacles by imbuing the conference with US values and goals. The sheer scope of this operation helped to limit areas of maneuver for other nations, stave off deadlock and collapse, and enhance the likelihood that the Roosevelt and Truman administrations would achieve the aims they sought. Nonetheless, the United States insistently communicated a public impression that it was just one among many participants engaged in an arduous intellectual process that it did not intend to dominate.

It is also largely accurate to point out, as those who see the United States as hegemon frequently do, that during the early years of the Cold War the United Nations remained a frequently used instrument of US foreign policy, as for example in episodes having to do with Atoms for Peace, Korea, Suez, UNEF, the Congo, decolonization, the condemnation of Iran in 1979, and censuring the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Puchala 1982–1983). US goals were pursued in the United Nations via threatened vetoes in the Security Council, preponderant influence over the selection of successive Secretaries General, key positions and general overrepresentation in the Secretariat, and a deferential majority, consisting mostly of West Europeans and Latin Americans, in the General Assembly. Even after the dawning of the era of North–South relations, when the views of the majority of the membership shifted, the hegemony of the United States was to be observed in the many things that did not happen at the United Nations. Communist China was denied membership until Washington decided otherwise. Moreover, in the mid-1970s, the New International Economic Order (NIEO) failed to emerge mainly because the United States opposed it. In Joan Spero's (1990:170–171) words, “the Declaration and Action Programme on a New International Economic Order (NIEO) . . . called for a link between SDR allocation and development finance, the implementation of the 0.7-percent-of-GNP goal for industrial country foreign aid established by the United Nations, and greater participation by less-developed countries in IBRD, IDA, and IMF decision making.” But, as Spero then goes on to say, even though

“the South was able to force the North to discuss the concept of reform at the United Nations and other multilateral forums, . . . it was not able to make the North actually negotiate for systemic change.” At this point, the United States led the Northern coalition; just as later in the 1970s and into the 1980s, it similarly led the group through the trying negotiations surrounding the issue of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Because, as Ulla Carlsson (1983:31) observes, this latter initiative, launched by the Third World, offended Washington’s understanding of, and traditional commitment to, “the free flow of information,” “a new international information order, in the sense that its authors intended, was not to be. After some brief years of debate, the issue disappeared from international agendas.” In the early 1990s, the United States could be observed stopping the Vienna Conference on Human Rights from turning into an Asian and Islamic celebration of cultural relativism, and, in turn, stopping a timely and effective UN response to the genocide in Rwanda because Washington was still smarting from its failure in Somalia. The United States also stopped the Kyoto process from moving the industrialized world via international legal fiat toward an era of posthydrocarbon energy that Washington concluded would be too expensive for the country.

The widely held impression among UN insiders today is that the United Nations remains largely a US-controlled organization just as it has been for the last half-century. The difference now is that its control is seen as more compelling than ever before. So frequently is the designation “only remaining superpower” used by insiders to identify the United States that one almost expects US diplomats at the United Nations to be wearing baseball caps with this slogan printed across their visors. Or, as some sarcastically have suggested, US representatives on the Security Council ought to perhaps don tee shirts with “Permanent One” air-brushed front and back. The predominant impression within the Secretariat and among many member state delegations is that almost everything the United Nations does or does not do is conditioned by the will, whims, and resources of the United States. Deference to American power exhibited, grudgingly or otherwise, throughout the Secretariat and among the missions is rather remarkable. For example, one European diplomat interviewed in 2002 explained that few peacekeeping operations move ahead without financial contributions from Washington; even after the US administration approves a mandate, “we must simply sit and wait until Congress decides on the money.” A similar remark could have been made in reference to most UN programs. Politically, moreover, the United States looms large on the Security Council; little that is actionable can emerge from the General Assembly or any other organ of the United Nations unless it garners Washington’s approval. “Nothing can be done without the concurrence of the United States,” a French diplomat acknowledged in 2002. “It reflects the reality of the world.”

The prevalent view of US behavior in the United Nations held by the New York diplomatic community is uncomplimentary. Criticisms of the United States voiced during interviews conducted at the United Nations between 2001 and 2004 came from several different directions, but the harshest were voiced by those who perceived the United States to be leading the United Nations—but leading in the wrong directions. The United States was seen as using its power to control the United Nations in its own self-interest. Much of this criticism, though by no means all, came from diplomats associated with member states of the Group of 77 or the Nonaligned Movement, who perceived the United States to be foisting institutions and values on the rest of the world, particularly those concerning economic liberalism and a narrowly conceived notion of democratization, and using the United Nations to enforce this agenda. “The US is using the organization for its own purposes and interests which are not necessarily those of the international community,” one Latin American diplomat reported, and “it frequently leads in directions that others don’t want to go.” Or, as one secretariat official commented, “there

is the prevailing fear that the economic and social functioning of the UN is going to be packed up and shipped to Washington.” In the opinion of another secretariat official, “the main problem is that the UN has to get out of the US embrace. The US is largely running the organization. It has to become the organization of its members, not the tool of one of its members.”

### Hegemony and the Historical Bloc

There is nothing altogether wrong with assuming United States hegemony, either in the immediate sense of “the only remaining superpower” or in the longer-term meaning of American ascendance after World War II. The United States wields a great deal of influence at the United Nations, as it does in world affairs more generally. The assumption of single-power hegemony with the United States as hegemon models a world prone to deferring to American preferences and a United States prone to promoting its preferences by exercising influence commensurate with its power. The carryover from the explanation of economic ordering contained in the theory of hegemonic stability to a more comprehensive world ordering under a more generalized hegemony is consistent with many empirical observations. For many years, American preferences on many issues, embodied in US policies and backed by US power, have explained a great many outcomes in world affairs. This, notably, has been very much the case with regard to international public policies emanating from the United Nations, its associated specialized agencies, and the managing institutions of the global economy. In analyzing patterns of output and outcome from global organizations during the past several decades, if one assumed American preferences in time period one, then one could with reasonable reliability predict international organizational behavior in time period two. Even more so is this the case if one observes US opposition in time period one and then predicts international organizational inaction in time period two.

There is, however, another model. Although there is nothing altogether wrong with assuming US hegemony and explaining episodes in international relations accordingly, such assumptions probably misinterpret the nature of present-day hegemony because there is more to the story of hegemony than US dominance. Hegemony has prevailed in world affairs for quite some time; it was remarkably compelling through the 1990s and up through the turn of the century. The United States participates importantly in the state of affairs that the current hegemony establishes; indeed, this country certainly benefits from its participation. *But the United States is not the sole hegemon*, although this fact only becomes analytically apparent if we abandon the notion that hegemony has to be “the predominant influence of one state over others.”

Even though it is true that Antonio Gramsci’s “fragmentary and often contradictory thoughts concerning social theory” are open to broad interpretation (Gill 1993:2), the Italian theorist’s conceptualization of hegemony is fairly straightforward. This, at least, is the view of Robert Cox (1971, 1981) who can be credited with introducing Gramsci’s thinking into the contemporary study of international relations. Interpreting Gramsci, Cox first observes that hegemony follows from power, but hegemonic power invites consent more often than it coerces compliance. “Gramsci,” Cox (1993a:52) says, “took over from Machiavelli the image of power as a centaur: half man and half beast, a necessary combination of consent and coercion. To the extent that the consensual aspect of power is in the forefront hegemony prevails.” Cox then reasons that Gramsci’s commentaries on hegemony in national contexts can be transposed to the international level, such that “world hegemony is describable as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure” (Cox 1993a:62). But, according to Cox (1993a:62), still interpreting Gramsci, world hegemony is also a normative, ideological, or ethical structure. It “is expressed in universal norms, institutions, and mechanisms which lay down

general rules of behavior for states and for forces of civil society that act across national boundaries.” Continuing, Cox links this interpretation of world hegemony to Gramsci’s notion of the “historical bloc.” This whole configuration of social forces, Cox (1993b:259) observes, “its economic basis, its ideological expression, and its form of political authority as an interaction whole, Antonio Gramsci called . . . the *blocco storico*.” World hegemony amounts, therefore, to the ascendance of a historical bloc or transnational coalition of classes and forces that command and wield disproportionate power; favor and promote particular forms of social, economic, and political institutions; and share ideological convictions assumed to be universal. Finally, Cox (1993a:62) links the notions of hegemony and historical bloc to the establishment and functioning of international organizations, which, in his interpretation, are mechanisms “through which the universal norms of a world hegemony are expressed.”

The Gramscian vision imagines world order imposed and maintained by a coalition of elites that collectively command sufficient power to direct world affairs in their interest. In this vision, the hegemon is not a “predominantly influential single state,” but, instead, a transnational alliance of elites. They share social, economic, and political values that define their mutual interests, signal their aspirations, and found their common ideology. That they constitute a hegemony rather than an empire is reflected in the fact that they rule more by consent, either active or passive, than by coercion. International organizations are elements in the structure of hegemony as well as the instruments of its imposition. Summarizing, Cox (1993a:62) says, “international organisation functions as the process through which the institutions of hegemony and its ideology are developed. Among the features of an international organisation which express its hegemonic role are the following: (1) they embody the rules which facilitate the expansion of hegemonic world orders; (2) they are themselves the product of the hegemonic world order; (3) they ideologically legitimate the norms of the world order; (4) they co-opt elites from peripheral countries; and (5) they absorb counter-hegemonic ideas.”

Although enlightening, Gramscian analysis is limited by its historical materialist pedigree; to be most useful it needs to be separated from its Marxist premises. Marxist thinking confounds the Gramscians in at least three ways. First, there is in Gramsci and his interpreters a rather dogged unwillingness to move beyond class analysis. Even Cox (1993a:56) contends that “an historic bloc cannot exist without a hegemonic social class,” and Craig Murphy (1994:27), who applies Gramsci most imaginatively in his *International Organization and Industrial Change*, nevertheless sees the history of international organization driven by the “cosmopolitan bourgeoisie” and its class allies. Needless to say, regardless of how it identifies itself, any coalition of elites can be called a “class” or a “bourgeoisie” if the analyst chooses to label it as such. But, why, except on the basis of Marxist assumptions, does an historical bloc have to be a transnational class alliance? Why, except again on the basis of Marxist assumptions, does the hegemonic class have to be a bourgeoisie? Is it not possible that some other identity or interest besides class might link the transnational coalition of elites that constitute a historical bloc? In point of fact, if the world hegemony of today approximates a historical bloc in the Gramscian sense, is it built upon transnational class identity and interest, or are elites coalescing around other myths?

A second factor limiting Gramscian analysis is its central focus on capitalism. The purpose of hegemony, the Gramscians insist, is to preserve and promote capitalism and the pattern of inequality that results from it. Given the Marxist underpinnings of Gramsci’s thought, making the world safe for capitalism has to be the purpose of hegemony. This, after all, has to be the interest of the transnational bourgeoisie that forms the core of the historical bloc. Yet, is it not possible that the purpose of the hegemony is to preserve and promote values, interests, and institutions other than capitalism? Or, is it perhaps possible that the hegemony preserves and promotes

other values, interests, and institutions in addition to capitalism, and that in the table of priorities, advancing capitalism turns out to be about as important as advancing any number of other conditions or outcomes? In point of fact, if the world hegemony of today approximates a historical bloc in the Gramscian sense, is advancing capitalism its primary purpose? Or, are its purposes more numerous and varied?

Third, in the classic philosophic contest between materialism and idealism, the Gramscians are most conclusively in the materialist camp. This locates them respectably in the historical materialist tradition, but taking such a position also limits them analytically because it renders them unwilling to acknowledge that the main purpose of a hegemony might be to advance an ideology. For the historical materialist, hegemony advances material conditions, that is, capitalist modes of production; ideology interprets and legitimates the material modes thus advanced. Ideas are results, never causes. For the idealist, by contrast, ideas anticipate material developments; one must imagine before one can construct. In this sense, is it not possible that the most consequential aspect of any hegemony is its ideological or mythological content? And could the primary aim of hegemony be to impose visions that might be later built into realities? In point of fact, if the world hegemony of today approximates a historical bloc in the Gramscian sense, is promoting an ideology not its primary purpose?

### **The West as Collective Hegemon**

In point of fact, world hegemony today does approximate a historical bloc in the Gramscian sense, but it is not a Gramscian hegemony based on historical materialist assumptions. For most of the post-World War II era, two historical blocs have competed for ascendance and universalization, each having established a hegemony in the full Gramscian sense (that is, economic philosophy and institutions, political forms and structures of authority, ideological legitimation and vision) over areas and peoples of the world susceptible to its respective power. This was the Cold War. But even during the Cold War, the Western bloc projected substantially greater influence, most notably over the functioning of the world economy, but also in political affairs, and certainly over the activities and policies of international organizations. The Bretton Woods institutions are structurally controlled by the West; there is no mystery therefore about the Western bias conditioning their policies and programs. The United Nations similarly has always been and continues to be a Western organization in the sense that the policies of the organization most often coincide with Western preferences. Those that do not coincide with Western preferences tend not to be financed and consequently do not get executed.

The "West," moreover, never was, nor is it now, solely the United States. It is a multinational entity. Geographically, the West is a cluster of countries and peoples, mostly, but not exclusively, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean. Westernized by virtue of US occupation after World War II, Japan also is politically, economically, and institutionally, if not entirely culturally, a part of the West. Economically, the West is a cluster of capitalist countries, more or less committed to private enterprise and open markets; politically, it is a club of democracies; ideologically, it is the source and center of liberal internationalism; hegemonically, it is a transnational coalition of elites sharing interests, aims, and aspirations stemming from similar institutions and a common ideology. In the post-Cold War era, the hegemony of the West is unchallenged and, for the moment at least, it is probably unchallengeable.

In Alison Bailin's (1993:2) words, "the US . . . has not acted as the sole hegemon since the 1970s . . . a group of great powers replaced the US as the hegemon." Hegemony today is collectively imposed by the club of the powerful, that rather small collection of countries controlling most of the wealth, most of the commerce, and most of the military capability in the world. In an insightful study titled, "From



Traditional to Institutionalized Hegemony,” Bailin (1993:8) introduces the notion of “institutionalized hegemony,” which, she says, “describes the continuity of the liberal economic order in terms of great power cooperation.” In all of its complexities and implications, the Bailin model of institutionalized hegemony amounts to a non-Marxist rendition of Gramscian hegemony; it at least pictures the political superstructure of the historical bloc. The group of powerful countries, Bailin (1993:8) observes, “uses its overwhelming resources to support institutions, such as the IMF, World Bank, and WTO. These multilateral arrangements oversee the everyday management of the world-economy.” Conditions for the existence of institutionalized hegemony include, according to Bailin (1993:26), a concentration of global power in a small group of countries, group identity, restricted membership (capitalist democracies only), a system of regularized interaction including ongoing preparatory processes in advance of periodic meetings, and documentation amounting to a public record of agreements and commitments. Because Bailin’s essay is essentially a critique of the theory of hegemonic stability, her focus is upon institutionalized hegemony amounting to collective management of the global economy. Generalizing the model to explain the collective management of political and security as well as economic affairs does no harm to Bailin’s assumptions, and it explains the institutional hegemonic management of the United Nations in addition to the major global economic institutions.

The West is politically structured as a complex and continuously pulsating network of diplomatic consultation and negotiation. At the core is the Group of Seven: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Summits of the Group of Seven have connected Western governing elites at the highest political levels for three decades and have contributed importantly to what Bailin means by institutionalized hegemony or what Robert Putnam and Nicholas Bayne (1984) term “collective management.” Ever since the Venice meeting of Western heads of government in June 1980, the agendas of the annual major power summits and the contents of agreements and commitments have begun to move beyond economic issues, so that the summits, and preparations for them, have evolved into processes of wide ranging, continuous Western consultation and policy coordination concerning economic, political, and security affairs. Of these meetings, Theo Sommer (see Sklar 1980:134) has observed in *Die Zeit* that “above national and international bureaucracies and beyond the brief tenures of most elected governments, a useful level of meetings and exchanges of views has come into being—a sort of European–Japanese–American Establishment.” The summits, however, are less significant in and of themselves than are the continuous processes of consultation and coordination that they set into motion at interbureaucratic levels. The formal comings together of heads of government, moreover, are but the tip of the huge consultative and coordinating iceberg that characterizes intra-Western, inter-elite interaction at official levels. There are, for example, the regular ministerial meetings of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the regular ministerial meetings and periodic summits of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the annual board meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the EU–US Dialogue, various interparliamentary gatherings, and numerous multilateral committees and commissions spun off from the major institutions. “[T]he summits themselves,” Putnam and Bayne (1984:8) note, “are merely one moment in a continuous flow of domestic and international discussion and bargaining.” “You cannot understand the summits,” one German summiteer concluded, “without taking account of all other ongoing international meetings. When we set out to influence another government—and I presume the same is true of anyone trying to influence us—we say, ‘We’ll start off at the OECD Ministerials in May, follow up at the summit, and then hit them again at the IMF in September’” (Putnam and Bayne 1984:8–9).

Dense and continuous inter-elite interaction at nongovernmental levels complements the official structure and functioning of the West as a political-economic entity. The Trilateral Commission, for example, was established in 1972, in Stephen Gill's (1993:185) interpretation, to "cope with the divisions and tensions between major capitalist powers in the era which followed the so-called *Pax Americana*, as well as provide a forum for analysis and for bringing together different but commensurable academic traditions in the study of International Relations." Still alive and well in 2004, the Commission—through meetings, research projects, study groups, and widely circulated publications—nurtures an elite network of academics, businessmen, other professionals, and former and future government officials from the United States, Canada, Japan and a number of European countries. Starting from the assumption that the West is obliged to be the contemporary custodian of world order, the group's activities aim at determining appropriate Western perspectives and approaches to economic, political, and security issues to place on the international agenda. The Commission projects its recommendations into public discourse and debate and seeks influence in foreign policymaking in the states of the trilateral world. The Commission is but one of numerous multilateral elite networks that politically and intellectually interconnect the societies of the West. Others include the Atlantic Council, the Bilderberg group, the Davos group, the Anglo-American Ditchley Foundation, the Council on Foreign Relations and its European counterparts, and, as Gill (1993:185) reports, "a vast series of international governmental, political, cultural, and economic interactions and exchanges which form the substance of the relations between the trilateral countries." These relations, he observes, "are still 'thickest' across the Atlantic, are 'thickening' between the USA and Japan, and are still 'thin' between Europe and Japan." What these relations establish over all is a real and practical civil societal meaning to the idea of the West as an entity and a collective actor in global affairs.

### Universalizing Liberalism as the Goal of Western Hegemony

Murphy (1994:13–26) opens his study of the history of international organization with a chapter titled "The Promise of Liberal Internationalism." Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant figure centrally in Murphy's elaboration of liberal thought, but strangely, and perhaps regrettably, part way into Murphy's discussion Smith becomes one-dimensional and Kant becomes Smith. Both of these seminal thinkers of the eighteenth century Enlightenment become, in Murphy's chapter, spokesmen for the bourgeoisie and proponents of capitalism. Smith, of course, was a proponent of capitalism, but missing from Murphy's presentation is any examination of exactly why Smith favored free economic intercourse in open markets. With regard to Kant, Murphy's rendition leads readers to believe that the two or three paragraphs on the virtues of commerce contained in the German philosopher's essay on *Perpetual Peace* represented the central theme of the piece. Smith's political economy was essentially a brief on behalf of individualism and self-realization in an environment of limited government and political freedom, and Kant's *Perpetual Peace* was a logical working out of the relationship between democracy within nations and peace between them. Both were important contributions to what blossomed during the nineteenth century into classical liberalism.

Free enterprise capitalism was logically consistent with classical liberalism and, therefore, was endorsed by liberals; it was not (and is not), however, the beginning and end or even the central thrust of liberal thought. In North America during the last decades of the eighteenth century and in Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century, liberalism meant political freedom, constitutional government, republican government, expanding enfranchisement, and civil liberties. What, after all, were the revolutions of 1848 all about? All these conditions of liberal society were accepted as natural, indeed self-evident, in liberal thought because they were

consistent with the universal moral order “discovered” by the philosophes of the Enlightenment. They were also embedded in the assumptions of Smith and Kant (see Becker 1932; Garrty and Gay 1972).

Murphy, however, is surely correct in emphasizing that the history of international organization, particularly during the 20th century, is bound up with the advocacy and spread of liberal internationalism. For much of the 20th century, liberal internationalists, including Woodrow Wilson most prominently, were seeking a world of liberal states—constitutional, democratic, free, open, laissez faire, and prosperous—thriving in an international environment of stability and peace. Carr (1964:22–62) described the liberal internationalists as “utopians” and thought them to be well meaning but naive. The majority of US scholars contributing to the infant discipline of international relations in the 1930s were themselves liberal internationalists, although they, too, were dismissed as “idealists” by academic successors (see Schmidt 1998:77–122). Nevertheless, 20th century liberal internationalists have believed, as Immanuel Kant did, that liberal states and international peace are interrelated, each contributing to the realization of the other (see, for example, Oneal and Russett 1999). Indeed, liberal internationalists still believe this (for example, Doyle 1995). They have also believed, and still do, that free trade promotes international prosperity, just as free enterprise promotes national prosperity. Moreover, they believe, as Woodrow Wilson did, that international institutions, including international law, are necessary for constraining aberrant behavior in relations among states, just as governments constrain such behavior in national societies. Contemporary liberal internationalists, like Robert Keohane (1984) for example, also believe, quite rightly, that international institutions facilitate collective action—that is, international cooperation—that otherwise would not occur.

Liberalism and liberal internationalism are both Western ideologies. Their assumptions and aspirations follow from a long and distinctly Western tradition in thinking and historical experience that amalgamates Greek rationalism, Roman Stoicism, Christianity, Newtonian physics, and the critique of the European *ancien regime* elaborated in the writings of the philosophers of the Enlightenment (Gress 1998). Shared liberal ideas and ideals have been, and continue to be, the mortar that binds the elites of Western societies into a Gramscian historical bloc. *The celebration of liberalism defines the West; the universalization of liberalism is the West's project; employing Western power to construct a liberal world is the overriding purpose of Western hegemony today.*

“We came together,” the political leaders of the major Western powers declared at their first G-7 meeting at Rambouillet in November 1975, “because of shared beliefs and shared responsibilities. We are each responsible for the government of an open, democratic society, dedicated to individual liberty and social advancement. Our success will strengthen, indeed is essential to, democratic societies everywhere” (G-7 Summit 1975:1). At Williamsburg in 1983, the governments of the West reaffirmed that “our nations are united in their dedication to democracy, individual freedom, creativity, moral purpose, human dignity, and personal and cultural development. It is to preserve, sustain, and extend these shared values that our prosperity is important” (G-7 Summit 1983:1). And, then, in May 1985, the G-7 Summit (1985:1–2) issued the Political Declaration on the 40th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War, which affirmed again that:

we have learned the lessons of history. The end of the war marked a new beginning. As the sounds of battle ceased, we tackled the tasks of moral and spiritual renewal and physical reconstruction. Transcending the hostilities which had once divided us we initiated on the basis of common values a process for reconciliation and cooperation amongst us. Today, linked in a peaceful, secure and lasting friendship, we share in all our countries a commitment to freedom, democratic principles, and human rights. We are proud that the governments of our countries owe their legitimacy to the will of our people, expressed in free elections.

We are proud that our people are free to say and write what they will, to practice the religion they profess, and to travel where they will. We are committed to assuring the maintenance of societies in which individual initiative and enterprise may flourish and the ideals of social justice, obligations and rights may be pursued.

The noted historian Hans Kohn interpreted the 20th century Western commitment to liberalism as an epic struggle, a confrontation with contrary systems of belief that, after trial and ordeal, resulted time and again in triumph. Writing about the appeal of liberalism in the second half of the 19th century, Kohn (1957:59–60) observed that, “based upon faith in common reason and the dignity of every individual, it appealed to every man and to every people and tried to draw the masses and the most distant countries into its train. The dynamics of its ideas could not be stopped.” Then, writing about the mid-20th century, the historian (Kohn 1957:60) concluded that “against all the expectations of the totalitarians, by the middle of the 20th century, Western civilization has proven its power of resistance against fanatic ideologies. Through this resistance there is a possibility that in the second half of the 20th century the Western spirit of tolerance and compromise, of self-criticism and fair-minded objectivity, of reasonableness and individualism, may spread again as it did in the 19th century. Then, in a new age of reason, an international society will be able to grow with emphasis on common human values and individual personal independence.” Francis Fukuyama’s (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man* is the sequel to Hans Kohn’s (1949) *The Twentieth Century: A Mid-Way Account of the Western World*. The second half of the twentieth century did, in fact, witness another triumph of liberalism, this time consolidated in the hegemony of the West.

The hegemony that prevails today over the workings of major international organizations, including the United Nations, is not the imposed will of “the only remaining superpower” but more precisely the imposed will of the historical bloc herein identified as the West. It is a hegemony of ideas—liberal ideas—that decisively affects and patterns outcomes in global political, economic, military, social, and cultural affairs. Western liberalism in its classical variant endorses democratic governance, the rule of law, private property, private enterprise, capitalism, individual liberty, and freedom of opportunity and expression. In its liberal internationalist form, it endorses international law, free and open international communication, diplomacy as a means of conflict resolution, free trade, open markets, and international organizations as custodians of international order and facilitators of collective action. International liberalism condemns war and accepts peace as the catalyst for realizing all other values. Although this hegemony of liberal ideas prevails today largely as a result of active and passive consent accomplished through the cooptation of non-Western elites, it is nevertheless backed by the preponderant economic and military power of the major states of the West. The primary and continuing role of the United States as constituent in this hegemony of the West has been, and continues to be, that of an enforcer, energized when behavior inconsistent with liberal principles and norms needs to be constrained or contained, and particularly in instances when military action needs to be taken. The primary role of the United Nations under the hegemony of the West is to validate the liberal world order. Its secondary role is to serve as a political-ideological sink for counter-hegemonic ideas and projects by ushering them into history’s dustbin.

### **The Durability of Western Hegemony**

Even though the ideals of liberalism are appealing (to many Westerners at least), the purpose of this essay has been to identify the hegemony of the West, not to endorse or otherwise applaud it. Liberalism has its downsides, among which are its indifference to cultural differentiation, its unsubstantiated claims to universality, and its total rejection of all forms of collectivism as well as all the pains, penalties,

and inequalities that critics of capitalism correctly attribute to this particular form of economic life (see Gray 1995). The West as the ideological wellspring and present-day cathedral of liberalism is also problematic given that Western history is not exactly an unblemished record of liberal deeds performed by liberal states. In a criticism of the West, Ali Mazrui (1993:23), for example, has pointed out that “much of the discussion of the ‘end of history’ focuses on the strengths of the West and therefore assumes the weaknesses of the rest of the world. But if Islam in the 20th century has not always been the most fertile ground for democracy, it has also been less fertile for some of the greatest evils of this century: Nazism, fascism, Communism and genocide.” Liberalism has not been the West’s only project; as skeptical outsiders readily recall, there have been other eras of Western hegemony. Many have yet to be persuaded that the present-day liberal era of Western hegemony will be more benign than eras past or that what is good for the West is really all that good for the world.

Western hegemony also may be collapsing, because the West itself may be disintegrating. Reflecting on the end of hegemonies, Bailin (1993:25) observes that in situations in which a single state acts as hegemon, the ends of hegemonic eras are signaled by the erosion of the hegemon’s power and by the all-powerful state’s decreasing ability to manage the international system by making and enforcing rules. But, in the case of institutionalized hegemony, in which the hegemon is a coalition of powers, “the demise of . . . hegemony is most likely to emerge from within the group.” For a number of reasons—including the end of the Cold War, differences between American and European experiences during that so-called war, the consolidation of the European Union, the unilateralist inclinations of the United States, the turning over of elite generations, and the evolution of public opinion on the two sides of the Atlantic—the United States and Europe may be drifting apart. The dispute over the war in Iraq in 2003 divided European governments, although it did not divide Europeans given that public opinion across Europe overwhelmingly disapproved of moving against Saddam Hussein without a UN mandate. What was much more dramatic was the way in which the dispute separated Europe from the United States and Europeans from Americans. This prompted scholars and pundits on both sides of the Atlantic to wonder whether the European–American falling out over Iraq may have deeper roots. And, indeed, many contend that it has (see Kupchan 2002; Kagan 2003a, 2003b). What may be occurring, or what may have been occurring for some time, is a transatlantic rift over values that is threatening the group identity of the West, an essential element of Western hegemony. Cox (1993b:285) recognized this estrangement in the West more than a decade ago:

Europe’s relation with the United States will in the long run be redefined as Europeans recreate their own identity. The Gulf War and President Bush’s “new world order” placed Europe in an ambiguous position. Britain and France followed the US lead, intent on regaining a position near the centre of global politics as these were envisaged in the 1940s. Neither country appears to have gained status or other rewards as a consequence. Germany held back, conscious of a divided domestic opinion and of the overwhelming need to give priority to absorbing the impact of the collapse of real socialism in the east. Italy, in a certain manner, followed both courses. . . . Will Europe continue to accept the role of the United States as enforcer of global-economy liberalism? The role of enforcer is not sustainable by the United States alone; and there is a real question whether Europeans and Japanese would want to perpetuate and to subsidise this role for long.

To explore these themes of Western fragmentation at greater length would require another essay. Let us, therefore, conclude this one by pondering the fate of the United Nations in the event that the current hegemony of the West disappears. Although invariably producing winners and losers, hegemony also produces world

order. Historically, periods of hegemony have been interspersed with lapses into anarchy: times during which open international economies have collapsed into competing autarchies, times during which rivalries have displaced diplomacy, and times during which great wars occurred. Eras without hegemons have not been hospitable to international institutions. The United Nations under the hegemony of the West may not be the world organization that many of its non-Western members would prefer. But should the hegemony of the West disappear and should no new hegemony quickly consolidate to replace it, the future of the United Nations could readily recall the history of the League of Nations.

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