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Beyond regime theory

Gerd Junne

I. Introduction

International cooperation has always received less attention from scholars analysing international relations than international conflict. With the end of the Cold War, which has, for a long time, overshadowed international relations as well as the academic discipline devoted to their study, this may change. The dynamics of international cooperation will probably get more attention. The dominant framework for the discourse on international cooperation is presently provided by regime theory, perhaps not so much for its success in explaining cooperation, but for the lack of competition from alternative approaches.

Realist approaches interpreted international cooperation to be possible only under very restrictive conditions (temporary alliances against third parties, dominance by a hegemonic state). Regime theory helps to understand the existence of international cooperation in situations that do not fulfil these conditions. Regime theory explains why states may cooperate even if there is no hegemonic power that induces them to do so. It tries to show that knowledge about the distribution of power alone is insufficient to explain political developments. The extent to which states can bring their power to bear on a specific situation, may be influenced by the intervening variable of 'international regimes'. Such regimes may in the long run even cause a change in the distribution of power in the issue area they cover. Regime theory thus obviously leaves the standard assumptions of realism (see, for instance, Pijpers 1990, 27-30) behind and tries to explore new ground.

Regimes are defined as stable sets of principles, norms, rules and procedures that guide international cooperation (see 2.3). They are analysed as dependent, independent and intervening variables. In the studies on creation, change and decline of regimes, regimes are the dependent variable. In the literature on the consequences of regimes ('do regimes matter?'),

they are the independent or intermediate variable.

Regime theory has drawn on many theoretical ideas from earlier approaches. It offers a body of well-structured hypotheses (Kohler 1989), and has stimulated several projects of comparative research into different regimes. (For instance, Rittberger 1990; Müller 1991; Young, forthcoming) It has given rise to different schools. (Cf. the excellent survey of Haggard and Simmons, 1987)

When regime theory started to dominate the discussion on international cooperation in the United States in the early 1980s, Dutch scholars regarded it to be just another fashion in the American academic discussion, and little attention was devoted to it (with the exception of Rood (1987) who discarded it somewhat too quickly). Ten years after the 'mid-term' review of regime theory in the special volume of *International Organization* (Krasner 1982), it has to be asked whether regime theory has wrongly been disregarded in the Netherlands.

This article will shortly summarize some of the main contributions of regime theory. It will reflect the differences in emphasis in the regime discussion in the United States and Europe, respectively. It then moves on to a critical review of regime theory, and finally offers some elements of an alternative research agenda.

2. The state of regime theory

2.1. *Reasons for the increasing interest in 'regimes'* – There has been a tremendous increase in the number of multilateral international organizations during the last three decades. Whereas there were fewer than 100 in 1945, and about 200 by 1960, their number had increased to over 600 by 1980. (Keohane 1991, 11) The creation of these organizations typically goes hand in hand with the development of a set of rules, principles, norms, and procedures, that is, of a 'regime', which regulates international interaction in a specific field. This tremendous increase is one of several factors that explain the rise of regime theory:

- (a) an increase in the number of international organizations and corresponding regimes;
- (b) a decline of U.S. hegemony;
- (c) an increase of transnational relations, still canalized by interacting national states; and
- (d) a decline of integration theory.

The decline of U.S. hegemony (or at least the wide-spread perception of a decline) has triggered the interest in the repercussions of this systemic

change for existing international regimes, which, according to one school of thought, had come about only as a result of this hegemonial position (see 2.4.2).

Changes in the character of nation-states have also stimulated the interest in the study of regimes. Many states have become much opener (compared to the period of 1914-1945). Transnational relations have proliferated. But this growth of private international interactions has not led to a world society ('Weltgesellschaft') in which the national states would wither away. States still organize the framework in which transnational relations take place, and much of it is in the form of regimes. The 'neutral' theory of regimes is regarded as lending itself very well to the analysis of these phenomena. (Czempiel 1986, 254)

Finally, the decline of neo-functional integration theory was a factor that contributed to the increasing interest in international regimes. In the monograph *The obsolescence of regional integration theory* (Haas 1975), E. Haas, the 'father' of neo-functional integration theory (Haas 1958), scrapped the assumption that 'spillover' effects of advances in one issue-area would stimulate further integration in other areas. According to Haggard, "this proved a beginning as much as an end [...]. Haas opened the door to the study of looser forms of issue-specific international organization that extended beyond any particular region or organization. The literature on regimes was born." (Haggard 1991, 429)

2.2. *Differences between American and European applications of regime theory* – Regime theory is largely the product of academic discussion in the United States and reflects dominant streams of thought, actual political concerns and explanatory needs of that specific environment. Nevertheless, it has increasingly been applied also in Europe, especially in Germany (see references below).

However, there are some general differences between American and European contributions regarding: (a) political motives, (b) issue areas chosen, (c) analytical perspective, (d) academic context, and (e) incorporation of the subnational dimension.

(a) *Different political motives.* The regime discussion in the United States had its origin in the second half of the 1970s, when many political scientists saw a decline of the hegemonic power of the United States. Research on international regimes was stimulated by the search for conditions of *stability*, which seemed to be threatened by changes in the distribution of power. Proponents of regime theory did not only have an analytical, but also a political objective. The purpose of neoliberal authors was to assure colleagues and politicians alike that international stability in many fields

did not depend on a continuing hegemony of the United States, and that, as a consequence, unilateral measures to restore that hegemony would not be needed. These measures might even be counterproductive for the further development of multilateralism.

In Europe, there was also a clearcut political motive behind the interest in regime theory. This interest was particularly strong among peace researchers looking for mechanisms to canalize and soften the East-West conflict, especially in Europe, and to prevent the outbreak of violent conflicts in general. They were therefore less interested in the stability or change of existing regimes than in the *conditions for creating new regimes* that could bring some order in fields of international relations hitherto dominated by power politics. (Kohler-Koch 1989, 18)

Whereas American authors have looked at regime theory for advice on how the position of the U.S. could be maintained in the absence of clear hegemonic relations, authors from less powerful European states rather turned to regime theory to obtain insight into political structures that would reduce the impact of power on international relations.

(b) *Different issue areas.* Since American hegemony has first been challenged by other Western countries in the field of economics, American applications of regime theory have concentrated on international trade and monetary issues. The focus has been on the relations among capitalist industrial countries. (Kohler-Koch 1989, 17)

European, especially German scholars, have focused more on East-West relations and security issues. This priority reflects the special concern for stable cooperative East-West relations, independent of the ups and downs of the relations between the superpowers. It was also an expression of the special vulnerability of Germany, due to its geographical position and the isolation of West-Berlin up to the end of the eighties, as well as of the forerunner role which Germany took in the intensification of East-West cooperation since the seventies.

(c) *Different analytical perspectives.* Even where American and European scholars deal with the same issue areas, they ask different questions. Stability and change of regimes are of primordial importance to American scholars, while the *distributional effects* of specific regimes are hardly discussed at all. (Wolf and Zürn 1986, 203) European peace researchers have been more interested in the contribution of international regimes to social justice and environmentally sustainable development. (Cf. Efinger et al. 1990, 277-279)

(d) *Diverging academic contexts.* Keohane admits that: "the American literature on international regimes has been shaped – one might say distorted – by its advocates' intellectual battles with neorealists, as repre-

sented by Kenneth Waltz". (Keohane 1991, 4) Since neorealism has been less strongly anchored in Europe, it did not determine the academic discourse to the extent it did in the United States. Many of the ideas that regime research corroborated, sound rather self-evident to European scholars; examples are: the insight that international relations are not dominated by conflicts only, but that international cooperation is pervasive, that international organizations contribute to shaping international relations without merely restricting themselves to executing the policies of member states, and that progress in international relations is possible, implying that there is no iron law or an endless cycle of the use of force, exhaustion, recovery and competition for power. (Müller 1991, chap. 2)

One consequence of this has been that European authors are more prepared to incorporate the domestic dimension into their analysis. (For instance, List 1991; Müller 1991; Müller, forthcoming; Zürn 1991)

2.3. *Definition of regimes* – Stephen Krasner has provided a standard definition of regimes, which one will inevitably find in practically every work on regime theory. He defines a regime as: "implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations." (Krasner 1983) While this definition has become widely shared, the meaning of the terms used is far from clear. Keohane admits that the definition is vague, and that it is "difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish an 'implicit rule' from a 'norm', 'procedure', or 'principle'." (Keohane 1984, 59; 1991, 2)

The *principles* may be general goals shared by the actors involved. But they can also embrace accepted knowledge about basic facts or causal relationships in the field of the regime. Without some common insight in the issue to be regulated, agreement on specific rules and norms would be very difficult and unsustainable in the long run. It would have been better to include these two different elements – common goals and common knowledge – explicitly into the definition.

Norms provide general guidelines in the sense of rights and obligations of the participants. They constitute the link between the principles and the more detailed and normally more formalized, often legally binding *rules*. The acceptance of precise rules is the cornerstone of the creation of any regime. But regime rules can never cover all possible situations.

Procedures, therefore, contain an agreement on steps to be taken under different contingencies. Procedures have to be elaborated in order to deal with new developments, new information, changes in participation, unforeseen questions, further details. They have to provide a framework for a revision of rules under changing circumstances, sometimes also for

sanctions against participants violating the rules, the management of common funds, administrative routines et cetera.

The Tübingen Peace Research Group has added two other criteria to decide whether a regime has been established: *durability* and *effectiveness*. (Rittberger 1990, 3) While the criterion of durability does not create problems, the demand for a certain degree of effectiveness may lead to a myriad of theoretical difficulties. According to Keohane, this demand makes causal statements about regimes difficult, because: "the concept refers both to international agreements and rules, and to the behavior that such rules were designed to regulate". (Keohane 1991, 2) Statements about regimes as 'intervening variables' (between interest and power structures on the one hand and political outcomes on the other) would then be difficult to test. The conviction that 'regimes do matter' would become a tautology. Keohane himself prefers to define international regimes as: "institutions with explicit rules, agreed upon by governments, that pertain to particular sets of issues in international relations". Only such a definition would allow one to examine the impact, if any, of agreed-upon international rules on the behaviour of states and non-state actors. (Keohane 1991, 3)

This point makes clear that, in spite of the standard reference to Krasner's definition, the issue of the most suitable definition of regimes has not been settled yet.

2.4. *Different 'schools' in regime theory* – But it is not so much the lack of a common definition that has caused regime researchers to split up into different 'schools' of thought. It is rather their different perception of international relations in general. Regime theory is not *one* approach, it is only a common concern that is shared by representatives of quite different approaches. Haggard and Simmons have distinguished four different "families: structural, game-theoretic, functional, and cognitive", and they underline that: "these categories are not mutually exclusive, and [that] the most persuasive interpretations are likely to draw from more than one theoretical tradition." (Haggard and Simmons 1987, 498)

2.4.1. *Functional theories* – A good example is Keohane's book *After Hegemony* (1984), which combines structural, game-theoretic and functional arguments. Haggard and Simmons (1987, 499) cite it as a leading example of the functional approach. The demand for regimes is explained with reference to some general functions that regimes fulfill (for instance, reduction of information and transactions costs). However, they can say little about the concrete conditions under which regimes come about or do not come about.

2.4.2. *Structural theories* – The main hypothesis of structural regime theories is that the existence of a hegemonial power leads to the establishment of regimes that weaken as hegemony withers away. Though it cannot be denied that some important regimes in the field of international trade and monetary affairs were launched under strong American leadership in the postwar period, the approach cannot explain the many regimes that have come about without the support of a hegemonial power. The existence of a hegemonial power, therefore, certainly can be a *facilitating factor*, but it is *not a necessary condition* of regime formation.

2.4.3. *Game-theoretical approaches* – Game theory has made an important contribution to the theory of cooperation by helping to distinguish between different types of situations in which cooperation is fraught with more or fewer dilemmas, such as the 'Prisoner's Dilemma' or 'Rambo' (that is, a situation in which one actor can realize his most preferred outcome irrespective of what other actors do). (See Rittberger and Zürn 1990, 41) There, however, the positive contribution stops. The use of game-theoretical models in regime analysis has probably done more harm than good to the analysis: it locks authors in a perspective of unitary actors (states), with a fixed number of policy options and explicitly specified and inflexible preference structures. It thus often resulted in a static analysis that misses crucial aspects of regime formation (which often results from changes in preference structures). Even outspoken advocates of game-theoretical analysis have had to admit that there is some "tension between formal elegance and substantive relevance". (Snidal 1991, 7) Game-theoretically inspired thinking has had considerable influence on the framework of regime theory even if no game-theoretical models were used. The resulting deficiencies will be dealt with below. (See section 3.2)

2.4.4. *Cognitive theories* – Cognitive theories start from the premise that *problem setting* is often as important as *problem solving*. They spend more attention to the analysis of perceptions of specific problems and interests by crucial decision makers. They see a convergence of interests (as a result of common knowledge, ideology, or increasing transnational contacts) as the major source of regime formation. They argue that structures and functions have in any case to be *perceived* by decision makers before they can be acted upon; otherwise they are not directly relevant for policy making. Cognitive theories thus "explore what structural, game-theoretic, and functional approaches bracket." (Haggard and Simmons 1987, 509) The Tübingen Peace Research Group has probably discarded this approach too quickly for not having produced testable hypotheses. (Ritt-

berger and Zürn 1990, 43) We come back to it below (4.2.) to explore some of its potential.

2.4.5. *Normative-institutional explanations* – Recent surveys of regime theory by German authors (Kohler-Koch 1989; Efinger et al. 1990) have added two other streams of thought – normative-institutional and problem-structural explanations – to the ‘families’ distinguished by Haggard and Simmons. Rittberger and Zürn summarize the normative-institutional approach in the following way:

In a nutshell, the normative-institutional analysis of regime formation holds that the existence and operation of a policy-making system with a clearly delineated jurisdiction in one or more issue area(s) [like the CSCE, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe] creates extra opportunities and incentives to agree on cooperative arrangements for issues or conflicts which have been tackled primarily by unilateral strategies. (Rittberger and Zürn 1990, 42)

This stream of thought thus can make a contribution to the analysis of the ‘procreativity’ of regimes. The approach can explain how existing regimes can facilitate the formation of additional regimes, because some basic principles and norms have already been accepted by the potential participants. The approach has little to offer, of course, with respect to the explanation of why the original regimes were established in the first place.

2.4.6. *Problem-structural typologies* – Just as game-theoretical analysis helps to describe situational characteristics of specific issues, a typology of different problems according to their structure can also improve our understanding of different conflict situations. Rittberger et al. differentiate between *consensual* conflicts and *dissensual* conflicts:

In dissensual conflicts, the actors agree about what is desirable, not just for each of them individually but for all of them collectively. In consensual conflicts the actors are confronted with a situation of scarcity in which every actor desires the same valued object but cannot fully be satisfied because there is not enough for everybody. (Rittberger and Zürn 1990, 31)

Dissensual conflicts are further divided into conflicts about *values* and conflicts about *means*, while consensual conflicts are either conflicts about *absolutely* assessed goods or about *relatively* assessed goods (where the objective is not so much to get a specific amount or share, but to get, for instance, *more* weapons in comparison to other actors).

The authors assume that these different conflicts provide different chances for regime formation and conflict resolution:

Type of conflict	Chances for conflict resolution
Value conflict	very low
Conflict about relatively assessed goods	low
Conflict about means	medium
Conflict about absolutely assessed good	high

Preliminary empirical tests were highly supportive of these hypotheses. (Rittberger and Zürn 1990, 32)

The circumstance that a large number of approaches have contributed to regime theory, underlines that the theory, in any case, has had one beneficial impact. It has created a common set of hypotheses and a framework for discussion between authors from very different backgrounds and thus gave some common focus to the discipline. It is probably this aspect more than anything else which made regime theory the dominant focus of discussion in theories of international cooperation during the past decade.

3. Critique of regime theory

The existence of a large number of different approaches makes it risky, at the same time, to formulate critique. There will always be an author to whom the critique will not apply. There are, however, some aspects which are common to a number of approaches. For instance: “Most structural, game-theoretic, and functional theories of regimes are state-centered, presuming unified rational actors”. (Haggard and Simmons 1987, 499) As a consequence, their analysis does hardly pay attention to the domestic (‘subnational’) dimension of regimes. Secondly, many contributions to regime theory suffer from what is called here ‘the legacy of game theory’. And thirdly, regime theory has turned one of its basic insights into a troublesome burden. Regime theory starts from the premise that different ‘issue areas’ have their own power structure, and develop quite independently from each other. The correct idea that there is not just one unified power structure, and that the distribution of power

is different from issue to issue, has, however, given rise to a situation in which the different issues are analysed almost totally independent from each other, thus taking them out of their historical context.

3.1. *The underdeveloped domestic dimension* – One of the main critical points is the *state-centric approach* of regime theory. The main question that regime theory does address, is: “How is cooperation possible between states claiming sovereignty but competing for power and influence in a situation of anarchy?” (Hurrell, 1991) It is only from a state-centred perspective that this question becomes a puzzle at all.

As soon as states are no longer perceived as solid units, but as societies that consist of different groups with divergent interests and power positions, which can be more interested in other values than the maximization of the power and influence of ‘their’ state, the puzzle is no longer a puzzle. Influential societal groups may have a strong interest in international cooperation because this creates a favourable environment for the achievement of their primary goals (such as wealth). This makes them exert pressure on ‘their’ government to cooperate with other governments.

Nevertheless, most contributions to regime theory try to explain regime formation and change at the level of relations *among* states: out of constellations of power, interests, situational characteristics, the structure of the problem at hand, or the existence of already established regimes. However, most aspects of regime development – regime formation, change, and decay –, can only be understood fully if the domestic situation in the major participating countries is taken into account. The same holds true for the effects of regimes.

To establish a regime, somebody has to take an initiative. This can be a government, but it can also be a non-governmental organization. Even if it is a government, it typically reacts to some form of pressure from its constituency. The type of government is relevant for its openness to this kind of pressure from society. An initiative can depend on the specific coalition in power (for instance, of a more unilateralist or a multilateralist orientation) and on the distribution of power among domestic institutions in favour or against it. It also depends on how burdened the agenda of a specific government or ministry already is. More pressing issues may not leave time to elaborate proposals, although the government in question may in principle be highly interested in it. The fate of an initiative may further depend on the stability of a specific government. A lack of stability may cause negotiation partners to wait until the situation has stabilized, before entering into meaningful negotiations.

To establish the preferences of the different actors, the domestic situa-

tion obviously has to be taken into account. To get an idea of the durability or flexibility of these preferences, the position and strength of oppositional forces have to be analysed alongside with government positions, because a strong opposition will make a government ‘learn’ more quickly, even if that opposition will never be in the position to replace the government.

Changing preferences often lead to regime change or even decay: “regime change [...] has been most likely to occur when new coalitions successfully challenge domestic regulatory bargains in countries with significant [international] impact.” (Cowhey 1990, 171)

Many contributors to regime theory acknowledge that more systematic attention should be devoted to domestic aspects of regime formation and change. (Efinger et al. 1990, 280; Rittberger and Zürn 1990, 43) There is an increasing number of authors that try to take the domestic dimension into account. (Cf. Cowhey 1990; Zürn 1991; List 1991; Müller forthcoming) However, this is often done in a piecemeal and *ad hoc* fashion.

3.2. *The legacy of game theory* – The neglect of the domestic dimension is stimulated by the game-theoretic perspective and its apparent success to ‘explain’ regime formation. (See Rittberger and Zürn 1990, 38–42) Apart from its contribution to the state-centred perspective on regimes, the game-theoretic perspective entails that preferences of the different actors are regarded as given, that important features of negotiation processes are abstracted from, and that the context of the ‘game’ is left out of the analysis. I do not want to imply that game theory is necessarily beset with these flaws. The simple game-theoretic models that have influenced regime theory have, however, invariably displayed these characteristics.

Game theory, as used by regime theorists, entails too static a perspective. It often takes years of negotiations to establish a specific regime. During this period, preferences of the negotiating partners often change. Their change is often even a precondition for regime creation. Many of the actions (or public statements) of negotiators are not only directed at their counterparts at the negotiation table, but also at either their own constituencies or those of the other negotiators in order to provoke or facilitate changes in preferences which stand in the way of an agreement.

A good deal of the negotiation process consists of a continuous ‘redefinition of the situation’ in order to find some common ground. A good negotiator will come up with new options when the old options fail, or with face-saving devices for the opponent in order to facilitate a change in his preference structure. (See for a discussion of different forms of leadership – structural leadership, entrepreneurial leadership, and intellectual

leadership—in negotiation processes: Young 1991)

Even the type of conflict under discussion may change. A conflict about relatively assessed goods may turn into a conflict about absolutely assessed goods, if trust between the negotiation partners can develop to such an extent that the competitive element withers away. A standard game-theoretic or situation-structural analysis would probably have difficulties to cope with such changes.

3.3. *The missing global context*—Regime theorists have taken great care to separate different issues from each other. In this process, however, they ‘threw out the baby with the bath water’. They lost the global perspective out of sight. Politicians’ behaviour with regard to one issue is strongly influenced by developments in other issue areas. To cope with a very complex world, political actors have to formulate some basic rules or philosophies for themselves, which they will apply across various sectors.

Besides, their willingness to cooperate may be influenced profoundly by the expectation that their partners otherwise might ‘retaliate’ in other issue-areas. Such linkages are often made explicitly in international negotiations. A ‘package deal’ across a number of issues is often the only way to come to an agreement. The situational characteristics of a specific issue then play only a secondary role.

Not only the acceptance, but also the implementation of certain rules is influenced by expectations regarding other issues. Actors that are tempted to defect and ‘cheat’ with regard to one issue, may not do so because they fear a loss of credibility that would reduce their chances to achieve desired objectives with respect to other policy fields.

The analysis of (and comparison between) individual issues and regimes does not pay attention to the general conditions that facilitate regime formation in specific periods and geographical areas. The structural approach could be expected to take at least one important aspect into account: the existence of a hegemonic power. Hegemony in this context, however, is defined as being *issue-specific* and thus does not link the issue to other issues.

Although regime theory has been grafted on interdependence theory to some extent, regime analysis has never really elaborated this link in detail. There are few analyses from this perspective that show how dependent countries have become on each other in certain areas, how this dependence has facilitated the creation of regimes, and how various areas are linked to each other. It may be that disillusion about the fact that the *spill-over* of integration from one issue area to others did not take place in the way the neofunctionalists had expected, made the next generation of

theorists neglect this interdependence altogether.

According to structuralists, the correlation between regimes and certain outcomes may misleadingly show a causal relationship, since both would probably be determined by the structure of the global system. Keohane (1991, 18) reminds us of some global trends which can affect regimes, such as ideological hegemony (see Donnelly 1986, 637) or transnational networks which have an impact on states’ conceptions of their preferences. (Cf. Haas and Hall 1991)

Kohler-Koch (1989) has argued that regime theory has become mature, and that further progress can be achieved by systematic comparisons between individual regimes. A number of efforts, based on comparisons between a small number of regimes, have been done. (See, for instance, Efinger et al. 1991) These comparisons do certainly have a heuristic value. However, they are not unproblematic because every statistical comparison becomes biased by the selection of the regimes included into the analysis. Given the fact that there is no generally acknowledged definition of regimes and that the number of regimes (and potential regimes) is infinite, it is extremely difficult to select a ‘representative sample’. Second, and probably more important, such an analysis would be as problematic as many studies in comparative politics that compare developments in different countries as if these had been independent from each other. This assumption neglects the basic insight of structuralism (cf. Haggard 1991) that the developments in different countries or, in the present context, of different regimes, have common determinants. If this overall context is not taken into account, the analysis may lead to serious misconceptions.

4. Overcoming the weaknesses of regime theory

Though regime theory has grown out of interdependence theory (see Van Ham’s contribution to this issue for a different interpretation), its proponents have rarely fully analysed the recent development of interdependence. Far-reaching changes have taken place in the world economy. Especially during the second half of the 1980s, the interpenetration of the developed capitalist economies has increased tremendously as a result of the wave of international mergers and acquisitions, and the proliferation of strategic international alliances among firms (see 4.1). These changes have gone largely unnoticed by regime theorists, who by and large cling to the analysis of state policy and state interaction.

The fast economic ‘interpenetration’ of the highly developed capitalist countries has been accompanied by a new surge of a myriad of *transna-*

tional relations, not only between companies and company associations, but also between non-profit organizations of all kinds. These relations contribute to the rapid spread of *information, knowledge, and ideology* across borders. This creates a situation in which decision makers would more easily pick up the same problems, share some principles with regard to the problems at hand, and evaluate the different options in a similar way. In this process, the problems that are most difficult to solve – value conflicts and conflicts about relatively assessed goods – may be turned into conflicts about means and about absolutely assessed goods which lend themselves much better to international regulation (see 2.4.6).

The rapid spread of information, knowledge, and ideology is facilitated by changes in the *world communication system*. International satellite broadcasting, and the spread of telephone and fax equipment, have dramatically changed the level of information about developments elsewhere on the globe.

The branch of regime theory which has the largest potential to shed some light on these processes is the one that is based on *cognitive theories*. However, their contribution to theory formation could be considerably boosted if they could be related to theories of economic development. Gramsci's work links ideology production to developments in the productive system and class formation. It may offer some guidance.

4.1. *The growing 'interpenetration' of highly developed countries* – The 'demand' for international regimes and the willingness of governments to engage in international political cooperation cannot be seen independently from developments in the world economy. Rapidly increasing economic links do not automatically lead to political cooperation, however. They lead to increasing international conflict as well, since the advantages of the international division of labour are seldom evenly distributed among the countries (and societal groups) involved. Any analysis that intends to explore the dynamics of international cooperation would have to study the *specific forms* of economic interpenetration of countries, the resultant constellation of interests, as well as the mechanisms through which these are translated into patterns of political cooperation and conflict.

The second half of the 1980s has seen a hitherto unexperienced growth of the 'interdependence' of highly developed capitalist countries. This has taken two main forms: on the one hand, it has led to a wave of international *mergers and acquisitions*, and, on the other hand, it has caused the relatively new phenomenon of *international strategic alliances*.

Between 1983 and 1988, foreign direct investment (FDI) worldwide

rose by more than 20 per cent annually, four times faster than world trade. According to DeAnne Julius, chief economist of Shell, "increases in FDI flows have reached the threshold where they create a qualitatively different set of linkages between advanced economies." (Julius 1991) The main reason behind the recent wave in foreign direct investment is the increasing deregulation and liberalisation of Western economies, which enlarge the scope of activities foreign companies are allowed to engage in. This has resulted in an unknown scale of international mergers and acquisitions during the last decade.

Figures on foreign direct investment flows underestimate the intensity of economic links, because they are based on national balance of payments statistics, which do not sufficiently reflect assets which were financed locally. Besides, the engagement of companies in foreign countries more and more often takes the form of 'non-equity engagements' (such as management contracts, licences, long-term sub-contracting, cooperation in research, production and distribution) rather than of foreign direct investment. A very important form are so-called 'strategic alliances' among firms, which increasingly link firms in Europe, North America and Japan. (Ohmae 1985) A detailed analysis of the *political* impact of these strategic alliances on the relations among the states involved is still missing.

4.2. *The role of hegemonic ideologies* – Since stronger economic links between countries are not automatically translated into foreign policy changes of the countries involved, an analysis of domestic policy formation is necessary to understand the impact of these links. Sometimes the attitude of politicians will directly reflect intensified economic relations. (The changing attitude of the British government regarding the treatment of producers from third countries in the European Community as a result of the large inflow of Japanese investment into the United Kingdom² is a case in point.) But normally, the impact is far more indirect.

Foreign direct investment and other economic links contribute to the increasingly dense networks of transnational relations that serve as channels for the international transfer of ideas, perceptions, interpretations, political programmes and ideologies. They do also have a direct impact on the material interests of specific groups, whose employment, income level, and career prospects will depend on the further expansion of these links. They thereby become more receptive for ideas and visions that take these interests better into account.

The main impact of stronger transnational ties between societies may therefore be found in changes in the attitudes of the constituency of politi-

cians rather than in immediately changing attitudes of politicians themselves. The impact on selected constituencies may be large enough to tip the balance in cases where about equally strongly backed political programmes compete with each other (for instance, protectionism versus free trade). In order to evaluate the likely consequences of the intensification of transnational relations, it is necessary to have a clear picture of the cleavages in the dominant domestic political discourse.

To understand how specific interpretations of reality (ideologies) are developed and spread internationally, it is important to have a close look at the institutions ('think tanks') where these ideologies are elaborated, refined and adapted, and the media through which the ideologies are diffused. A more complex theory of international cooperation would have to entail hypotheses on the conditions under which specific views and ideologies are likely to spread.³ Cognitive theories and theories of socialization (cf. Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990) can be helpful in this respect.

Antonio Gramsci has elaborated ideas about the conditions under which a specific ideology can become the hegemonic ideology. (See Cox 1983; Cox 1987; Gill 1986; Gill and Law 1989) In a period of relatively declining economic power of the United States, but of *increasing* international influence of the ideologies that are dominant in the United States, it seems especially worthwhile to apply these thoughts to the international scene. Young and Osherenko (1991, 45), for instance, point out that it may "make sense to consider the role of hegemony in the cognitive or Gramscian sense in the formulation of the problem during the early stages of regime formation". It is interesting in this context that in spite of all signs of a relative economic decline of the United States, the ideological preponderance of 'American values' has increased. In an analysis of trends in the strategic environment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States have underlined that no factor has recently developed more positively than the ideological environment. (Joint Chiefs of Staff 1991) This dimension, however, has been rather neglected in the analysis of international relations.

4.3 *Differentiation between states* – If transnational relations can play a decisive role in the formation and change of international regimes, then it becomes crucially important to make a distinction between states that allow transnational relations to develop and prosper and those states that try to channel all international relations through their own control systems. This distinction differentiates between states where civil society enjoys considerable freedom to entertain relations with other countries

and where individual actors are allowed to freely associate themselves in interest groups, and states in which the state or state-organized institutions have a monopoly in domestic political decision-making and international relations. Different theories would have to be applied for the explanation of their activities in international politics.

The differentiation that Rosecrance (1986) has made between 'trading' and 'warrior states' corresponds to some degree with this difference. Van der Pijl (1989a, 1989b) makes a basically similar distinction between states which belong to the 'Lockean heartland' of countries in which civil society has emancipated from the pervading control of the state, and 'Hobbesian states' which continue to exercise central control of society and international relations.

The problem of international relations as an academic discipline has been that the dominant theories are still based on a perception of states as being 'Hobbesian' entities under central control interacting like 'billiard balls' in the international system. But during the past decades, the area which forms part of the 'Lockean heartland' has continued to expand; in the future it may encompass the majority of countries in the world. For the interpretation of their international relations, reductionist theories of the past are of little help. In as much as regime theories cling to the state level, they are of limited use. But where they open up and take domestic factors better into account, they could be of considerable value for further theory building. In future theories developed along these lines, however, the analysis of international regimes would no longer occupy the centre stage position that it currently enjoys. In these future theories, the transnational interaction between domestic forces and international developments would have to play a central role, as well as the interaction between different issue areas. These theories thus will go far beyond regime theory.

Notes

1. The following definitions are mainly based on Müller (forthcoming, chapter III).
2. See the supplement 'Japan in the United Kingdom' in the *Financial Times* of 20 September 1991.
3. One of the basic propositions of theories on 'comprehensive concepts of control' (see Van der Pijl 1984 and 1989; Overbeek 1990) is that 'projects' which provide a better solution to the concrete control problems that dominant groups in a society face at a given historical juncture, will spread more rapidly than others.

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The lack of a Big Bully: Hegemonic stability theory and regimes in the study of international relations

Peter van Ham

I. Introduction

One of the major questions in the study of international relations is 'why do (military) conflicts break out?' Or, conversely: 'which are the political, economic and military conditions that bolster peace and stability?' For a long time, on the basis of the assumption of *homo homini lupus*, people have maintained that in world affairs conflict was the rule, rather than the exception. Thomas Hobbes has stated that:

[p]ersons of sovereign authority, because of their independency, are in continual jealousies and in the state and posture of gladiators, having their weapons pointing and their eyes fixed on one another – that is, their forts, garrisons, and guns upon the frontiers of their kingdoms, and continual spies upon their neighbors – which is the posture of war. (Hobbes 1958, 108)

In a similar vein, the French philosopher Joseph de Maistre, has argued that:

[h]istory proves unfortunately that war is in a sense the habitual condition of mankind, that is to say that human blood must constantly flow somewhere or other on earth; and that for every nation peace is no more than a respite. (De Maistre 1971, 61)

This, however, leaves unexplained the occasional instances of collaboration between states and even more so the institutionalized forms of cooperation among them. When both people and states are bellicose, why have the European states not bombed each other out of existence after World War II?; how is it that the European Community has achieved such a surprising record of economic cooperation in the last decades?

The most influential theories explaining peace and stability in world affairs generally boil down to two major, contradictory categories of propositions. First, that war can be avoided by careful balancing between