

Hegemony Studies 3.0: The Dynamics of Hegemonic Orders¹

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During his successful presidential campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly argued that the existing international order weakens the United States. Previous American presidents and diplomats, he claimed, struck terrible international bargains on trade, arms control, and alliances. He “made clear that he sees allies as business partners, and relationships with them in transactional terms: Pay up or we won’t protect you.”² The irony of Trump’s position was not lost on many analysts. As Thomas Wright notes, “Trump believes that America gets a raw deal from the liberal international order it helped to create and has led since World War II.”³ Since assuming office, Trump’s foreign-policy preferences have been, at best, partially translated into concrete policy outcomes. But his routine disparagement of the basic orientations and commitments of American hegemony and liberal order has produced significant doubts about American leadership.

These doubts coincide with significant developments outside of the United States. The People’s Republic of China is now, by some measures, the world’s largest economy. Under President Xi Jinping, China has grown more assertive in its efforts to shape regional and global international relations. Many observers consider the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, (AIIB) as parts of a broader attempt to reorder international relations along Beijing’s preferred lines.⁴ Russia, meanwhile, has emerged as a more direct challenger to the current texture of international order; Moscow uses a variety of instruments to disrupt and undermine American

¹ Draft. Please contact us before citing.

² Michael McFaul, “Mr. Trump, NATO is an alliance, not a protection racket.” *The Washington Post*, July 25, 2016. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/mr-trump-nato-is-an-alliance-not-a-protection-racket/2016/07/25/03ca2712-527d-11e6-88eb-7dda4e2f2aec_story.html?utm_term=.f941c7d2524c

³ Thomas Wright, “Trump’s 19th Century Foreign Policy,” *Politico* January 20, 2016. Available at: <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-foreign-policy-213546>

⁴ Astrid H. M. Nordin and Mikael Weissmann, “Will Trump Make China Great Again? The Belt and Road Initiative and International Order,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 2 (March 1, 2018): 231–49.

hegemony and liberal order.⁵ Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) still suffers the aftershocks of the 2008 Great Recession, now further complicated by the United Kingdom's "Brexit" referendum and its subsequent triggering of the Article 50 withdrawal process. Some see events in the EU as part of a wider populist backlash against liberal international order.⁶

Hegemonic-stability and power-transition theories provide two venerable frameworks for understanding these developments. The two approaches comprise part of a broader family of theories of interstate hegemony.⁷ Such theories focus on a particular kind of international hierarchy: those in which a leading political community uses its outsized military and economic capabilities to organize, at least in part, relations among weaker polities. In many respects, Russian and Chinese behavior tracks well with the notion that periods of power transitions generate increasingly assertive, and potentially revisionist, behavior by other great powers; trends within the "western democracies" might similarly reflect contemporary shifts in military and economic power.

Until relatively recently, these approaches have done more to establish the parameters for such processes than to provide direct insights into them. For example, they do not tell us very much about the causes and consequences of specific counter-hegemonic strategies.⁸ This is because much of the explanatory and theoretical focus of traditional theories of interstate hegemony rest on a relatively narrow subset of issues. These include the connection between the existence of a preeminent power and the provision of international public goods, whether open trade or generalized security; the relationship between power transitions and international conflict; and understanding alliance behavior within unipolar systems.

⁵ Roy Allison, "Russia and the Post-2014 International Legal Order: Revisionism and Realpolitik," *International Affairs* 93, no. 3 (May 1, 2017): 519–43.

⁶ Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash" (Rochester, NY, July 29, 2016), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2818659>.

⁷ For overviews, see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Jacek Kugler and A. F. K. Organski, "The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation," in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky, Power Transition (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929-1939* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973); John Gerard Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order," *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 379–415.

⁸ see Karen J. Alter and Sophie Meunier, "The Politics of International Regime Complexity," *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 1 (March 2009): 13–24; Benjamin Daßler, Andreas Kruck, and Bernhard Zangl, "Interactions between Hard and Soft Power: The Institutional Adaptation of International Intellectual Property Protection to Global Power Shifts," *European Journal of International Relations* forthcoming (2018); Brock Tessman and Wojtek Wolfe, "Great Powers and Strategic Hedging: The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy," *International Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2011): 214–40.

These debates, in turn, often pivot on the general factors that might contribute to the stability of hegemonic systems—such as power asymmetries, legitimacy, threat, and the relative attractiveness of hegemonic order.⁹ This tends to sideline not only analysis of the full range of strategies that actors use to contest or uphold international order, but also how variation within and between hegemonic orders might shape power politics—at least beyond the durability and stability of hegemonic systems.¹⁰ For similar reasons, they confront problems when contemplating the possibility, highlighted by Trump’s foreign-policy dispositions, that a hegemonic power may actively aim to undermine the very order that it constructed.

A more recent wave of work focuses on these, and related, concerns. It also reconfigures more traditional approaches to interstate hegemony. An increasing number of scholars break from the impulse to treat hegemony as an independent variable and system-wide war as the major outcome of interest. Instead, they show increasing interest in how hegemonic orders operate in practice; how they produce opportunities and constraints for actors in world politics; the dynamics of power-political competition within and over order; and the mutually interdependent relationship between preeminent powers and the orders they create, sustain, and seek to alter.¹¹ Some incorporate new ways of understanding international structures, and hence theorizing international order, such as in terms of

⁹ See, for example, Jonathan M. DiCicco and Jack S. Levy, “Power Shift and Problem Shifts: The Evolution of the Power Transition Research Program,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43, no. 6 (December 1999): 675–704; Gilpin, *War and Change*; Robert Gilpin, “The Theory of Hegemonic War,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 591–613; G John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Kugler and Organski, “The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation”; David A. Lake, “Leadership, Hegemony, and the International Economy: Naked Emperor or Tattered Monarch?,” *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (December 1993): 459–89; Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner, “Power Parity, Commitment to Change, and War,” *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (June 1996): 235–60; Barak Mendelsohn, *Combating Jihadism: American Hegemony and International Cooperation in the War on Terrorism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009); A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1968); Susan Strange, “The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony,” *International Organization* 41, no. 4 (ed 1987): 551–74; Stephen M. Walt, “Alliances in a Unipolar World,” *World Politics* 61, no. 01 (2009): 86–120; William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 5–41.

¹⁰ We risk overdrawing this claim for heuristic purposes. Gilpin, of course, points to a variety of factors that explain the replacement of imperial cycles with hegemonic ones. And he provides analysis of the political economy of specific systems, such as the Roman imperial order. See Gilpin, *War and Change*. Indeed, some more explicitly Marxist approaches to hegemony also challenge, to some degree, this narrative. See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (Verso, 1994).

¹¹ Ian Clark, “Towards an English School Theory of Hegemony,” *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 203–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066109103136>; Evelyn Goh, *The Struggle for Order: Hegemony, Hierarchy, and Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Stacie E. Goddard, “When Right Makes Might: How Prussia Overtaken the European Balance of Power,” *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2009 Winter 2008): 110–42; Seva Gunitsky, *Aftershocks: Great Powers and Domestic Reforms in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2017); Ikenberry, *After Victory*; G John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011); Mendelsohn, *Combating Jihadism*.

networks, relations, and social fields.¹² Moreover, this “third wave” of scholarship includes work that engages—whether implicitly or explicitly—with scholarship on interstate hegemony but does not necessarily characterize itself as part of the research program. Examples appear in the growing wave of work on international hierarchy¹³ and the politics of unipolarity.¹⁴

This project aims to consolidate and push forward this third wave of scholarship on interstate hegemony.¹⁵ What are its overarching characteristics?

- The treatment of the *politics of hegemonic orders* as important in their own right. This involves a greater focus on *processes* at work in hegemonic politics and hegemonic ordering—such as the bargaining, contestation, and cooperation that operates within hegemonic systems.
- The related emphasis on the analytical and causal significance of *order* in the study of interstate hegemony. That is, we see recent scholarship as correctly emphasizing hegemonic orders as *means, medium, and object* of power politics.
- An attempt to more firmly incorporate the insight that hegemons do not simply supply international order for other actors. Rather, hegemons find their foreign and domestic

¹² Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Marina E. Henke, “The Politics of Diplomacy: How the United States Builds Multilateral Military Coalitions,” *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 1, 2017): 410–24; Paul MacDonald, *Networks of Domination: The Social Foundations of Peripheral Conquest in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Jeppe Mulich, “Transformation at the Margins: Imperial Expansion and Systemic Change in World Politics,” *Review of International Studies*, March 2018, 1–23; Daniel H. Nexon and Iver B. Neumann, “Hegemonic-Order Theory: A Field-Theoretic Account,” *European Journal of International Relations*, July 4, 2017, 1354066117716524, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066117716524>; Thomas Oatley et al., “The Political Economy of Global Finance: A Network Model,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 01 (2013): 133–53.

¹³ See, for example, Alexander D. Barder, “International Hierarchy,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, December 2015), <http://internationalstudies.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-95>; David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009); Janice Bially Mattern and Ayse Zarakol, “Hierarchies in World Politics,” *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (2016): 623–54.

¹⁴ Stephen M. Walt, “Alliances in a Unipolar World,” *World Politics* 61, no. 01 (2009).

¹⁵ Jesse et al. also describe three phases of hegemony. For them, the first wave “focused mainly on international political economy (IPE)” and the problem of open “international economic systems,” the second wave “emerged... after the end of the Cold War” and focused on the lack of balancing against the United States, while the third wave concerns “the nature of the lead state’s interaction with others in the system.” As the next section illustrates, we deviate somewhat from this rather neat division. For example, its periodization cannot accommodate power-transition theory. But we should stress the broad similarities in our account, especially with respect to the issues that they see as important in third-wave hegemony studies. See Neal Jesse et al., “The Leader Can’t Lead When the Followers Won’t Follow: The Limitations of Hegemony,” in *Beyond Great Powers and Hegemons: Why Secondary States Support, Follow, or Challenge*, ed. Kristen Williams, Steven Lobell, and Neal Jesse (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 1–32; Judith Kelley, “Strategic Non-Cooperation as Soft Balancing: Why Iraq Was Not Just about Iraq,” *International Politics* 42, no. 2 (2005): 153–73

relations structure by the very order that they help create and uphold. Hegemons are not just order makers, but also order takers.¹⁶

Pursuing these wagers, we contend, works best when we embrace theoretical diversity, especially in terms of different ways of understanding international order. This better enables scholars of interstate hegemony to unpack hegemonic orders into their constituent relations and practices; study more granular processes of hegemonic ordering and counter-ordering; take much more seriously the role of non-state, transnational, and sub-state actors in these processes; and incorporate a broader understanding of the tactics, logics, and instruments through which states and other actors contest and uphold hegemonic orders.¹⁷

We use the phrase “hegemonic-order theory” to describe this third wave of international-relations hegemony studies. Doing so signals its distinctiveness from hegemonic-stability theory, power-transition theory, and other *particular* schools of hegemony studies. We find the term useful, in part, because of its inclusive scope. It reflects not a repudiation, per se, of earlier frameworks but their incorporation into a broader research agenda. It differs from some first- and second-wave approaches in that it builds in no specific assumptions about the consequences that follow from a system having a preeminent power. Finally, as the preceding discussion makes clear, it takes very seriously the analytical and explanatory importance of “order”—thus rendering “hegemonic order,” rather than simply “hegemony,” as its central concern.

¹⁶ As noted earlier, this insight is most advanced in Marxist-inflected understandings of hegemony. See Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*; Peter Burnham, “Neo-Gramscian Hegemony and the International Order,” *Capital & Class* 15, no. 3 (1991): 73–92; Robert W Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*, vol. 1 (Columbia University Press, 1987). It also appears in some practice-theoretic accounts. See Go, *Patterns*; Nexon and Neumann, “Hegemonic-Order Theory.” But, in many interstate hegemony theories, the interdependent character of hegemons and order largely restricts itself to economic dynamics, such as in debates about overextension and the way in which hegemonic orders may facilitate uneven growth that favors other polities. See [XX] in this collection.

¹⁷ Not all of these concerns receive attention in this collection, especially the role of non-state actors. For cognate arguments and examples, see Daniel Flemer and Leslie Wehner, “Drivers of Strategic Contestation: The Case of South America,” *International Politics* 52, no. 2 (February 1, 2015): 163–77; Stacie E. Goddard and Daniel H. Nexon, “The Dynamics of Global Power Politics: A Framework for Analysis,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 2016): 4–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogv007>; Evelyn Goh, “Understanding ‘Hedging’ in Asia-Pacific Security,” *PacNet* 43 (2006): 31; Kai He, “Institutional Balancing and International Relations Theory: Economic Interdependence and Balance of Power Strategies in Southeast Asia,” *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 489–518; T.V. Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy,” *International Security* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 46–71; T. J. Pempel, “Soft Balancing, Hedging, and Institutional Darwinism: The Economic-Security Nexus and East Asian Regionalism,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (July 1, 2010): 209–38; Tessman and Wolfe, “Great Powers and Strategic Hedging: The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy.”

In this introduction, we begin by looking back at prior waves, or phases, of hegemony scholarship, with an emphasis on the study of interstate hegemony in the United States. After this, we identify the theoretical and empirical impulses that have begun to produce a third wave of scholarship on hegemony. We then situate the articles within this wave.

The Study of International Hegemony: A Stylized History

As Perry Anderson notes, “the origins of the term hegemony are Greek” and, as “an abstract noun, *hēgemonia* first appears in Herodotus, to designate leadership of an alliance of city-states for a common military end, a position of honour accorded to Sparta in resistance to the Persian invasion of Greece.”¹⁸

A broadly similar concept appears in Ancient China to describe military leadership of city-state leagues: the “ruler of the dominant state was given the title of ‘senior’ or ‘hegemon’ (*ba*) by the Zhou king, who charged him to defend what was left of the Zhou realm. Formally these leagues were hierarchical groupings of independent states, bound together through treaties” that were, in turn, affirmed by historically specific practices.¹⁹

Whatever the specific terminology, these two examples suggest that the basic idea of a hegemonic power likely appears in a variety of historical settings; hegemony probably constitutes a ubiquitous feature of international relations, broadly understood.²⁰ It therefore might prove difficult to disentangle the study of hegemony from the study of world politics writ large. At the extreme, some might argue that hegemonic powers—whether in their past or the present—shape all international

¹⁸ Perry Anderson, *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (Verso Books, 2017), 1.

¹⁹ Mark Edward Lewis, “The City-State in Spring-and-Autumn China,” in *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures*, ed. Mogens Herman Hansen (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 2000), 365; See also Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77n49.

²⁰ For example, pro-Habsburg propaganda asserted that Latin Christendom needed *monarchia* to guarantee peace, as well as guard against heretics and infidels. Their opponents charged that unchecked Habsburg leadership would, in practice, represent a “mere tyranny,” an “unchristian slavery.” A similar rhetorical battle developed as Bourbon power waxed nearly a century later. Thus, David Armitage notes that “apprehensions that one European power was aiming at universal monarchy could be used to inspire others to ally against the potential aggressor, so that what began as an analytical theory of empire ultimately became a justification for defensive aggression within Europe.” This duel between notions of hegemonic stability and of the balances of power, albeit stripped of much of its explicit normative content, remains a key division in contemporary realist theory. Franz Bosbach, “The European Debate on Universal Monarchy,” in *Theories of Empire, 1450-1800*, ed. David Armitage (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), 89–90; David Armitage, “Introduction,” in *Theories of Empire, 1450-1800*, ed. David Armitage (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), xx.

orders. At least that the *potential* for hegemonic dominance always looms over relations among autonomous political communities. This demarcation of a distinct thing called “hegemony studies” becomes even more difficult if, as Robert Gilpin argues, hegemonic and imperial orders are two different manifestations of the same basic processes.²¹

Regardless, it seems clear enough that we find a number of different strands of research devoted explicitly to the study of hegemony in post-war anglophone international-relations theory. These include not only hegemonic-stability and power-transition theory, which constitute our immediate focus, but also, for example, English School and neo-Gramscian variants.²² Of these, neo-Gramscian approaches prove the most distinctive; we return to them in the penultimate section. Most international-relations frameworks for studying hegemony focus on relations among states and other political communities. Many see international politics as marked by the rise and decline of dominant powers. Some emphasize process of economic change, some political dynamics, and some both.²³

We focus on the study of interstate hegemony as it developed in the United States. While the English School clearly theorized hegemony and cognate concepts, it is only in the most recent wave of hegemony studies that scholars in that tradition have really excavated those concepts and brought them into dialogue with hegemonic-stability and power-transition traditions.²⁴ In the United States, the study of interstate hegemony was initially driven by theoretical questions about the functioning of the world economy and the logic and character of American global leadership. This literature— theoretical and empirical studies—has gone through several phases.²⁵

²¹ Gilpin, *War and Change*. On the distinction, or the lack thereof, between empires and hegemons, see Terry Boswell, “American World Empire or Declining Hegemony,” *Journal of World-Systems Research* 10, no. 2 (2004): 516–24; Daniel H. Nexon and Thomas Wright, “What’s at Stake in the American Empire Debate,” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (May 2007): 253–71; Miriam Prys and Stefan Robel, “Hegemony, Not Empire,” *J Int Relat Dev* 14, no. 2 (print 2011): 247–79. These considerations, in our view, require much broader empirical and conceptual adjudication than we can offer here.

²² Anderson provides a reflective genealogy that takes up many of these strands. See Anderson, *The H-Word*.

²³ Compare Watson’s “pendulum” model or long-cycle theory. See Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis Reissue with a New Introduction by Barry Buzan and Richard Little* (New York: Routledge, 2009); George Modelski, “The Long Cycle of Global Politics and the Nation-State,” April 1978.

²⁴ See Clark, “Towards an English School Theory of Hegemony”; Goh, *The Struggle for Order*. [XX] discusses English School approaches in this collection.

²⁵ This focus comes with costs, which we readily acknowledge. In particular, it is obviously parochial. As the preceding discussion implies, we see ample room for more global genealogies of the study of interstate hegemony. Unfortunately, we are not qualified to tell such stories. See, for example, Amitav Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 647–59; Peter Fibiger Bang, “Lord of All the World—The State, Heterogeneous Power and Hegemony in the Roman and Mughal Empires,” in *Tributary Empires in Global History* (Springer, 2011), 171–92; David Chan-oong Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*,

The first phase of work offered structural arguments about material capabilities and system outcomes. In its hegemonic-stability variant, it argued that the provision of international public goods required the existence of a leading state—one both willing and able to act as an international quasi-government and deploy its superior economic and military resources to create those goods. The most basic form of the theory argued that, first, open-trade regimes were an international public goods and, second, that they depended on a hegemonic power. In early formulations, the United Kingdom adopted this role with the repeal of its corn laws and its use of carrots and sticks of open formerly closed economic systems. During the interwar period, London attempted to play a similar role but lacked the capacity to do so. After 1945, the United States replaced the United Kingdom as an international hegemon. It played the critical role in establishing—and maintaining—the Bretton Woods system, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the collection of international banks that became the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).²⁶

The research program also incorporated more expansive understandings of public goods. These included the absence of great-power war and the provision of security. In Gilpin’s critical formulation, dominant powers set the rules of the game for their systems: they allocate status and prestige, regulate the terms of foreign policy, and underwrite the economic order. Hegemonic powers pursue these policies not out of altruism, but rather a desire to mold and maintain an international system that serves their interests and values.²⁷

The Cold War period also saw the parallel development of power-transition theory. It held that the typical, and most stable, distribution of power involved a dominant actor standing atop of “pyramid of power.” The preeminent power’s clear priority deterred lower-tier states from initiating major-

Book, *Whole* (Columbia University Press, 2010); Emilian Kavalski, “Relationality and Its Chinese Characteristics,” *The China Quarterly* 226 (2016): 551–59; Manjeet S. Pardi, “Mughal Hegemony and the Emergence of South Asia as a ‘Region’ for Regional Order-Building,” *European Journal of International Relations*, March 20, 2018; Nicola Spakowski, “China in the World: Constructions of a Chinese Identity in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,” in *Trans-Pacific Interactions* (Springer, 2009), 59–81; Yuan-kang Wang, “Managing Regional Hegemony in Historical Asia: The Case of Early Ming China,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5, no. 2 (2012): 129–53; Yaqing Qin, “A Relational Theory of World Politics,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016).

²⁶ Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929-1939* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973); Michael C. Webb and Stephen D. Krasner, “Hegemonic Stability Theory: An Empirical Assessment,” *Review of International Studies* 15, no. 2 (1989).

²⁷ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For an earlier discussion linking dominant powers to ideological order, see E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1946).

power wars. It also rendered the preeminent power secure enough to avoid initiating such conflicts. Major-power, system-wide wars occur during power transitions: when a rising power with revisionist orientations attained enough power to threaten the dominant power. In power-transition theory, system-wide wars begin either when the declining power launches a preventive war against the rising one, or when the challenger feels confident enough to initiate such a war itself. The result is major-power conflict that either ends with a new leading power or the re-establishment of the incumbent as a dominant power.²⁸

The major differences between hegemonic-stability and power-transition theory ultimately proved methodological in character. Hegemonic-stability theory was rooted in qualitative approaches, while power-transition theory was rooted in statistical analysis. Over time, the two approaches basically converged on the same principles, problems, and understandings of international politics. And this convergence occurred despite the fact that the former was embedded in realist theory, while the latter sometimes characterized itself in opposition to realism.²⁹

By the late 1980s and 1990s, however, hegemonic-stability theory looked like it was running out of steam. Concerns about Japan, in particular, overtaking the United States prompted work that echoed aspects of hegemonic-stability and power-transition theory,³⁰ but the winding down of the Cold War shifted attention to other issues, such as role of ideas in world politics. Many realists had, by this time, already adopted Waltz's structural-realist theory as their baseline for understanding world politics.³¹ Structural realism sees balances of power, rather than hegemonic preponderance, as the 'natural' equilibrium of international politics. It predicts that attempts to establish or maintain hegemony will

²⁸ Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*; "Great Powers in the Post-Cold War World: A Power Transition Perspective," in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, ed. T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner, "Power Parity, Commitment to Change, and War," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1996); A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958); *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). A comprehensive treatment of this wave would require attention to theories of international leadership and long-cycle theory: George and William Thompson Modelski, "Long Cycles and Global War," in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus I. Midlarskny (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); *Leading Sectors and World Powers: The Coevolution of Global Economics and Politics* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

²⁹ Compare DiCicco and Levy, "Power Shift"; for formal elaborations, see Alexandre Debs and Nuno P. Monteiro, "Known Unknowns: Power Shifts, Uncertainty, and War," *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (2014): 1–31; Robert Powell, "Uncertainty, Shifting Power, and Appeasement," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (1996): 749–64; Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

³⁰ See, especially, Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

³¹ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

falter in the face of counterbalancing pressures. Whatever the reason—structural realism’s comparative theoretical elegance, disciplinary sociology, or its usefulness as a foil for liberal and constructivist theorists—it colonized much of realist theorizing at the expense of hegemonic-stability theory.³²

At the same time, liberals argued that hegemons were unnecessary for the creation of robust international regimes and international order. Some scholars found it increasingly difficult to identify the existence of public goods putatively supplied by hegemons. Other empirical anomalies accumulated. Constructivists questioned the link between dominant powers and particular outcomes, such as open-trade regimes. And a variety of theorists challenged the internal logic of a theory that predicted *both* that hegemonic powers would supply international order *and also* that supplying that international order would ultimately undermine their preeminent position.³³

The Revival of Hegemony Studies and the Emergence of New Frameworks

Although work on hegemonic-stability and power-transition theories continued throughout the 1990s, the apparent durability of American-led unipolarity helped reinvigorate hegemony studies in the wider field. In an influential article on unipolarity, Wohlforth argued that unipolar systems are, in fact, more stable than bipolar or multipolar ones.³⁴ Both separately, and together, Deudney and Ikenberry

³² William C. Wohlforth, "Gilpinian Realism and International Relations," *International Relations* 25, no. 4 (2011). Scholars sometimes characterized Gilpin and Waltz as "neorealists." Gilpin spends significant time grappling with Waltz's framework, which he characterizes as an oligopolistic model of international order. Gilpin's richer understanding of international politics was also pushed toward the margin by a shift away from realist and Marxist approaches to international political economy (IPE) in the United States after the Cold War. It also likely suffered from its very richness in an era marked by increasing emphasis on theoretical simplicity and falsifiability. Still, some realists argued that the end of the Cold War vindicated power-transition accounts. See Randall L. Schweller and William C. Wohlforth, "Power Test: Evaluating Realism in Response to the End of the Cold War," *Security Studies* 9, no. 3 (2000): 60–107.

³³ See Joanne Gowa, "Rational Hegemons, Excludable Goods, and Small Groups: An Epitaph for Hegemonic Stability Theory?," *World Politics* 41, no. 3 (1989): 307–24; Isabelle Grunberg, "Exploring the 'Myth' of Hegemonic Stability," *International Organization* 44, no. 4 (Autumn 1990): 431–77; Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Lake, "Leadership"; Ruggie, "Embedded Liberalism"; Duncan Snidal, "The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory," *International Organization* 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1985): 579–614; Michael C. Webb and Stephen D. Krasner, "Hegemonic Stability Theory: An Empirical Assessment," *Review of International Studies* 15, no. 2 (1989): 183–98. For more recent criticisms, see Margit Bussmann and John R. Oneal, "Do Hegemons Distribute Private Goods?: A Test of Power-Transition Theory," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 1 (February 1, 2007): 88–111, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002706296178>; Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino, "Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory," *International Relations* 23, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 389–410.

³⁴ Wohlforth, "Stability."

developed arguments about American leadership and liberal order.³⁵ Ikenberry's *After Victory* put forth a modified version of hegemonic-stability theory that captured widespread attention.³⁶ The dispute over "soft balancing" reflected a developing focus on how power-political dynamics might operate in systems with a preeminent power.³⁷ English-School theorists explored how to integrate hegemony as a primary, or perhaps secondary, institution of international society.³⁸ And a variety of work questioned the strength of the balance-of-power mechanism altogether.³⁹

Such work responded to concrete developments beyond the apparent durability of American unipolarity. The September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, the American-led intervention in Iraq, and the Bush Administration's justification for the war through a doctrine of "preemption" all played a role. These events turned a spotlight on questions of hegemony and international order. Was the Bush Administration turning revisionist against the existing order? The lack of traditional balancing by second-tier powers in Europe and Asia sparked the debate over soft balancing—that is, non-military or partial efforts that states might use in the face of a potentially threatening and possibly revisionist hegemonic power. At the same time, related talk of an "American Empire" drove renewed interest in the nature and dynamics of imperial orders—and not just among international-relations scholars. In particular, scholars expended significant effort on how to differentiate between empires and hegemons, which led to new attention to the concept of hegemony.⁴⁰

³⁵ Daniel Deudney and G John Ikenberry, "The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order," *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 1999): 179–96.

³⁶ Ikenberry, *After Victory*; Randall L. Schweller, "The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 161–86.

³⁷ See Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," *International Security* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 72–108; Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and US Policy toward China," *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 363–95; Neal Jesse et al., "The Leader Can't Lead"; Judith Kelley, "Strategic Non-Cooperation as Soft Balancing: Why Iraq Was Not Just about Iraq," *International Politics* 42, no. 2 (2005): 153–73; Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing Against the United States," *International Security* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 7–45; Paul, "Soft Balancing"; T.V. Paul, "Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance," in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, ed. T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1–25.

³⁸ Clark, "Towards an English School Theory of Hegemony"; Mendelsohn, *Combating Jihadism*.

³⁹ Stuart Kaufman, Richard Little, and William Wohlforth, eds., *The Balance of Power in World History* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); Jack S. Levy, "Why Do Great Powers Balance Against and When," in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, ed. T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 29–51. For an overview, see Daniel H. Nexon, "The Balance of Power in the Balance," *World Politics* 61, no. 2 (April 2009): 330–59.

⁴⁰ See Anna M Agathangelou and Lily HM Ling, *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds* (Routledge, 2009); Alexander D. Barder, *Empire Within: International Hierarchy and Its Imperial Laboratories of Governance* (Routledge, 2015); Boswell, "American"; Yale H. Ferguson, "Approaches to Defining 'Empire' and Characterizing United States Influence in the Contemporary World," *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2008): 272–80; G John Ikenberry, "Liberalism and Empire: Logics of Order in the American Unipolar Age," *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 4 (October 2004): 609–30; Nexon and Wright, "American Empire Debate"; Marc J. O'Reilly and Wesley B. Renfro, "Evolving Empire: America's 'Emirates' Strategy in the Persian Gulf," *International Studies Perspectives* 8, no. 2 (May 2007): 137–51;

We see this second phase of interstate hegemony studies as transitional. Its central concern remained the stability of hegemonic orders: under what conditions states turn revisionist against the order, balance against the hegemonic power, or both. Thus, attempts to elaborate the nature of American-led liberal international order focused on debates about whether characteristics of that order make it particularly attractive to potential challengers.⁴¹ However, efforts to distinguish among kinds of hegemonic orders, as well as the renewed attention to empires and imperial relations, brought variation in their texture and dynamics into the analytical spotlight. Similarly, arguments about soft balancing turned attention to, first, a broader range of strategies by which states might influence hegemonies and hegemonic orders, and, second, how they might use non-military instruments to pursue those strategies. Thus, the second wave pushed the study of interstate hegemony in directions beyond its initial concerns.

The emergence of hierarchy-centric scholarship also plays an important role in our story. The 2000s saw increasing momentum around the “new hierarchy studies”: efforts to place patterns of super- and subordination at the center of the study of world politics. A number of scholars argue that the focus on anarchy distracted international-relations theorists from the critical importance of various forms of stratification in world politics. Such hierarchies extend beyond asymmetries of military capabilities and the size of national markets or national economies. They include a variety of forms of social stratification along, analogous to, or informed by, for example, racial, class, and gender hierarchies. Moreover, realists usually discount global governance as simply serving the interests of powerful states. But many in the new hierarchy studies see international regimes, normative arrangements, and regulatory activities as not only relatively autonomous from the interests and purposes of great powers, but also as generating, enacting, or manifesting international hierarchical relations⁴²

Prys and Robel, “Hegemony, Not Empire”; Jennifer Sterling-Folker, “The Emperor Wore Cowboy Boots,” *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2008): 319–30.

⁴¹ Interestingly, participants in these debates sometimes sought, in essence, to synthesize hegemonic-stability and structural-realist strands of realism. That is, to bring together “hegemony” and “balance-of-power” realism. Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, *Causes of War* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), chap. 2; see also Liu Feng and Zhang Ruizhuang, “The Typologies of Realism,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 1, no. 1 (July 1, 2006): 129–30.

⁴² For key statements, see John M. Hobson and J.C. Sharman, “The Enduring Place of Hierarchy in World Politics: Tracing the Social Logics of Hierarchy and Political Change,” *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 1 (March 2005): 63–98; Mattern and Zarakol, “Hierarchies”; See also Jack Donnelly, “Sovereign Inequalities and Hierarchy in Anarchy: American Power and International Security,” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 2 (June 2006): 139–70; David A. Lake, “The New Sovereignty in International Relations,” *International Studies Review* 5, no. 3 (September 2003): 303–24; Meghan McConaughy, Paul Musgrave, and Daniel H. Nexon, “Beyond Anarchy: Logics of Political Organization, Hierarchy, and International Structure,” *International Theory* Forthcoming (2018); Ole Jacob Sending and

We suspect that, as in the case of revival of more general interest in hegemony, hierarchy-centric scholarship emerged from a combination of disciplinary forces and external events. The growing crystallization of a variety of theoretical frameworks—post-structural, practice-theoretic, feminist, and so forth—played an important role. After all, these approaches are, in many respects, theories of power relations and social stratification that go beyond looking at the capabilities enjoyed by particular actors.⁴³ Once scholars see the world from these perspectives, it becomes difficult to ignore myriad informal and formal hierarchical relations in world politics. At the same time, the increasing presence of perspectives from the global south, as well as post-colonial theory, brought in scholars and theories for whom anarchy often seems relevant, at best, only to relations among great powers.⁴⁴

But we should not discount the importance of the same developments that drove greater interest in hegemony, empires, and other verities of interstate political domination. If scholars sought to build a research program around hierarchy—when no such program, as such, existed—than power-transition theory, hegemonic-stability theory, neo-Gramscian accounts of hegemony, and other flavors of hegemony studies number among the traditions available to yoke together. Indeed, theories of

Iver Neumann, “Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing NGOs, States, and Power,” *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 2006): 651–72; Ann Towns, “The Status of Women as a Standard of ‘Civilization,’” *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 681–706; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Cornell University Press, 2015); Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ayşe Zarakol, ed., *Hierarchies in World Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁴³ See, in particular, Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, “Power in International Politics,” *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (February 2005): 39–75; For examples, see Rebecca Adler-Nissen, “The Diplomacy of Opting Out: A Bourdieudian Approach to National Integration Strategies*,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 46, no. 3 (2008): 663–84; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Routledge, 2013); Didier Bigo, “Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of Practices, Practices of Power,” *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2012): 225–58; Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Univ of California Press, 2014); Charlotte Epstein, “Who Speaks? Discourse, the Subject and the Study of Identity in International Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 2 (2011): 327–50; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon, 1977); Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. I (New York: Vintage, 1978); Wendy Larner and William Walters, *Global Governmentality: Governing International Spaces* (Routledge, 2004); Anna Leander, “The Power to Construct International Security: On the Significance of Private Military Companies,” *Millennium-Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005): 803–25; Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Sending and Neumann, “Governance”; Laura Sjoberg, *Gender and International Security: Feminist Perspectives* (Routledge, 2009); Cynthia Weber, “Queer Intellectual Curiosity as International Relations Method: Developing Queer International Relations Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2016): 11–23.

⁴⁴ For overviews, see Agathangelou and Ling, *Transforming World Politics: From Empire to Multiple Worlds*; Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds”; Sanjay Seth, *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge, 2013); Rosa Vasilaki, “Provincialising IR? Deadlocks and Prospects in Post-Western IR Theory,” *Millennium* 41, no. 1 (2012): 3–22.

interstate hegemony have a continuous tradition of taking status hierarchies—patterns of super- and subordination that involve social dominance—seriously.⁴⁵ Gilpin not only highlighted the allocation of prestige in his work, but also argued that hegemonic systems display some characteristics of domestic hierarchy.⁴⁶ Power-transition theorists tend to dismiss the importance of anarchy outright; they favor a hierarchical view of world politics.⁴⁷

This synergistic relationship finds reflection in one of the most influential works of hierarchy-centric scholarship. Lake's *Hierarchy in International Relations* breaks from hegemonic-stability theory in that it emphasizes the provision of private goods rather than public ones. But it otherwise theorizes something very much like an American-led hegemonic order.⁴⁸ A number of other works involve efforts to broaden and refine insights from the study of hegemony via notions of international hierarchy.⁴⁹ But the new hierarchy studies also involve, as noted above, cognate work on empire and imperial formations, as well as other forms of international hierarchy often incorporated into—but arguably under-theorized in—hegemony studies.⁵⁰

What all of this work has in common, in the broad sense, is an attempt to break out of the deterministic and simplified aspects of hegemonic-stability and power-transition theory in favor of a richer analysis of order and hegemony. Thus, earlier phases of scholarship shared at least a vague sense that the structural-realist vision of a world of anarchy and balance did not capture, at the very least, the political formation constituted by American leadership. They agreed that it was both more hierarchical than anarchy would predict, and that it was built around, at least in part, more consensual, cooperative, and institutionalized relations than approaches rooted in anarchy expect. In the first wave of this scholarship, “hegemony” provided a good term to use for this type of political formation. It was hierarchical but did not generally take the form of traditional empire. Thus, in the decades following

⁴⁵ See Tudor A. Onea, “Between Dominance and Decline: Status Anxiety and Great Power Rivalry,” *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 1 (2014): 125–52; Thomas J. Volgy and Stacey Mayhall, “Status Inconsistency and International War: Exploring the Effects of Systemic Change,” *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1995): 67–84; Steven Ward, “Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s,” *Security Studies* 22, no. 4 (2013): 607–39; William C. Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War,” *World Politics* 61, no. 01 (2009): 28–57.

⁴⁶ Gilpin, *War and Change*, 30, 228–30.

⁴⁷ Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22.

⁴⁸ Lake, *Hierarchy*.

⁴⁹ See Ahsan I. Butt, “Anarchy and Hierarchy in International Relations: Examining South America’s War-Prone Decade, 1932–41,” *International Organization* 67, no. 03 (2013): 575–607, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818313000155>; Detlef Nolte, “How to Compare Regional Powers: Analytical Concepts and Research Topics,” *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 4 (October 2010): 881–901.

⁵⁰ See Lake, “New Sovereignty.”

World War II, as decolonization gathered steam, we found hierarchy and order operating across and among independent, sovereign states that retained their own governmental decision making.

However, more recent waves of scholarship on hegemony and related concepts recognize significant changes in world politics in the 21st century. These changes trigger new questions about the logic and future of American hegemonic order, both globally and regionally.⁵¹ They also open up new perspectives that allow us to look back on the older eras of American—and British—hegemonic leadership with the help of new frameworks and new puzzles. The Bush doctrine, with its rhetorical emphasis on unilateralism and preemption, and its concrete interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, led to a new focus on not just counter-hegemonic strategies, but also the role of legitimacy in international leadership.⁵² Russia's more recent interventions in Ukraine and Syria have led some to see the return of traditional *realpolitik* along multipolar lines: “Whether it is Russian forces seizing Crimea, China making aggressive claims in its coastal waters, Japan responding with an increasingly assertive strategy of its own, or Iran trying to use its alliances with Syria and Hezbollah to dominate the Middle East, old-fashioned power plays are back in international relations.”⁵³ The rise of China not only drives concerns with how to understand the political consequences of contemporary power transitions,⁵⁴ but has led to renewed interest in historical forms of Chinese order-building.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Goh, “Understanding ‘Hedging’ in Asia-Pacific Security”; Goh, *The Struggle for Order*.

⁵² Martha Finnemore, “Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity: Why Being a Unipole Isn’t All It’s Cracked Up to Be,” *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 58–85; Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005).

⁵³ Walter Russell Mead, “The Return of Power Politics: The Revenge of Revisionist Powers,” *Foreign Affairs* May/June 2014. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141211/walter-russell-mead/the-return-of-geopolitics> Accessed 26 December 2014.

⁵⁴ Julia Bader, “China, Autocratic Patron? An Empirical Investigation of China as a Factor in Autocratic Survival,” *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2015): 23–33; Gustavo A. Flores-Macias and Sarah E. Kreps, “The Foreign Policy Consequences of Trade: China’s Commercial Relations with Africa and Latin America, 1992–2006,” *The Journal of Politics* 75, no. 02 (2013): 357–71; Tessman and Wolfe, “Great Powers and Strategic Hedging: The Case of Chinese Energy Security Strategy”; Yong Wang, “Offensive for Defensive: The Belt and Road Initiative and China’s New Grand Strategy,” *The Pacific Review* 29, no. 3 (May 26, 2016): 455–63.

⁵⁵ Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*; Yuen Foong Khong, “The American Tributary System,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6, no. 1 (2013): 1–47; Andrew Phillips, “Contesting the Confucian Peace: Civilization, Barbarism and International Hierarchy in East Asia,” *European Journal of International Relations*, forthcoming (2018); Feng Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History*, Book, Whole (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015); Ji-Young Lee, “Diplomatic Ritual as a Power Resource: The Politics of Asymmetry in Early Modern Chinese-Korean Relations,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 2013): 309–36; Ji-Young Lee, *China’s Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (Columbia University Press, 2016); Ji-Young Lee, “Hegemonic Authority and Domestic Legitimation: Japan and Korea under Chinese Hegemonic Order in Early Modern East Asia,” *Security Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 320–52.

All of this suggests the emergence of a research program centered on the politics of hegemonic orders. The emergence of this wave owes much to concerns about the fate of the current hegemonic order and the dynamics of its contestation by means short of military conflict. It also derives from developments within the field, including research trajectories suggested by second-wave hegemony studies and by the rise of hierarchy-centric scholarship's interest in understanding the dynamics of complex hierarchies in world politics.

Hegemony Studies 3.0: The Politics of Hegemonic Orders

Following Barder, we define international hegemony as “the mobilization of leadership” by a predominant power to order relations among actors.⁵⁶ Hegemony is thus distinct from unipolarity, which refers to systems in which a single great power lacks peer competitors.⁵⁷ Hegemony is also distinct from hierarchy qua hierarchy, which refers, as we have seen, to *any* kind of vertical stratification.⁵⁸ Most hegemonic-order theories, then, explore conditions in which a political community uses “its superior economic and military capabilities—its position atop interstate hierarchies in these domains—to create international order,”⁵⁹ which is “manifest in the settled rules and arrangements between states that define and guide their interactions.”⁶⁰

From this perspective, it follows that a great deal of the subject-matter of the new hierarchy studies, then, analyzes the hierarchical characteristics of *international orders*—hegemonic or otherwise. Take the literature on informal empire. The relationship between the concept of “hegemony” and “empire” has always been fraught. Many agree that hegemonic relations describe patterns of leadership and control among nominally autonomous polities; empires obtain when constituent units no longer enjoy such nominal autonomy. Hegemons putatively control the foreign relations of other polities, while empires impinge on their domestic politics.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Barder, “International Hierarchy.”

⁵⁷ David Wilkinson, “Unipolarity without Hegemony,” *International Studies Review* 1, no. 2 (1999).

⁵⁸ Zarakol, *Hierarchies in World Politics*, 1; See also Jack Donnelly, “The Discourse of Anarchy in IR,” *International Theory* 7, no. 03 (2015): 393–425; McConaughy, Musgrave, and Nexon, “Beyond Anarchy: Logics of Political Organization, Hierarchy, and International Structure.”

⁵⁹ Paul Musgrave and Daniel Nexon, “Defending Hierarchy from the Moon to the Indian Ocean: Symbolic Capital and Political Dominance in Early Modern China and the Cold War,” *International Organization* forthcoming (2018).

⁶⁰ Ikenberry, *Leviathan*, 12. See also Ikenberry, ed., *Power, Order, and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁶¹ Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 40.

The problem comes with distinguishing between hegemony and *informal* empire, which proves very difficult in practice. Even the ordering of external relations among polities spills over into their domestic arrangements. Some therefore conclude that “hegemony” is just a euphemism for “empire,” while others suggest a variety of procedures for detecting when a hegemonic relationship is really one of informal empire.⁶² But from our perspective, the degree that relations among putatively autonomous polities resembles that of empire is a question of *order* and *ordering*. That is, hegemons may construct modes of relating with other states that are, say, more imperial or more confederative.⁶³

This emphasis on *studying variation within and among hegemonic orders* reflects a growing trend in the study of interstate hegemony, albeit one, as we have seen, with venerable roots.⁶⁴ The articles in this collection take up this concern in various ways. In “Contesting Hegemonic Order: China in East Asia,” [XX] uses an English-School framework to put the texture of international order at the forefront of our understanding of processes of bargaining, adjustment, and contestation. [XX] explicitly connects this approach to insights drawn from the new hierarchy studies about the complex hierarchies that make up international orders.

Similarly, in “Ordering Eurasia: The Rise and Decline of the Liberal Internationalism in the Post-Communist Space,” [XX] focuses on the structural consequences of uneven liberal ordering across Western and Central Eurasia. [XX] argues that we should treat order as an ecology produced from both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic activities, and that this ecology, in turn, creates opportunities and constraint for contestation over order. In “Partner Politics: Russia, China, and the Challenge of Extending U.S. Hegemony after the Cold War,” [XX] examines variation in American post-war and post-Cold War hegemonic regional orders, with a focus on “lynchpin” bargains—or lack thereof—with regional powers.

⁶² The lack of clear distinction goes a long way back, per Anderson, *The H-Word*, 3; See also David A. Lake, “Anarchy, Hierarchy and the Variety of International Relations,” *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 9. Some even consider “hegemony” another way of saying “empire.” See Niall Ferguson, “Hegemony or Empire?,” *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (September 2003).

⁶³ McConaughy, Musgrave, and Nexon, “Beyond Anarchy: Logics of Political Organization, Hierarchy, and International Structure”; See Ikenberry, “Liberalism and Empire”; Alexander Cooley, *Logics of Hierarchy: The Organization of Empires, States, and Nations in Transit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁶⁴ See, for example, Ikenberry, *After Victory*; Charles A. Kupchan, “The Normative Foundations of Hegemony and The Coming Challenge to Pax Americana,” *Security Studies* 23, no. 2 (2014): 219–57.

Drawing a sharper analytical distinction between, on the one hand, hegemonic powers and, on the other hand, order also allows scholars to examine how international orders themselves shape hegemony and bids for hegemony. Thus, in “‘Hegemony’ Compared: Great Britain and the United States in the Middle East,” [XX] points to the importance of variation in the “international context” for British and American dominance in the Middle East in shaping the effectiveness of their power-political efforts. Such insights forward the notion that hegemonic polities are both order makers and order takers.

Such analysis highlights another important aspect of the new phase of hegemony studies: *the embrace of a broader array of theoretical frameworks and theoretical insights to examine the dynamics of hegemonic orders*. As noted above, [XX] illustrates just this via an extension of English School approaches to hegemony and international society. Another immediate opportunity arises in bringing neo-Gramscian accounts of hegemony more firmly into dialogue with more realist-inflected alternatives. Neo-Gramscian frameworks, represented in this collection by [XX], see hegemony as “a structural concept of power wherein the constitution of a stable order is the result of a manufactured compatibility between dominant ideas, institutions and material capabilities.”⁶⁵ For them, the state takes a backseat to the structure of social production and its dominant classes. Thus, the post-war period created “the conditions for a hegemony of transnational capital by restructuring production and finance within forms of state and securing interests of new social forces at the level of world order through institutions in the global political economy.”⁶⁶

Neo-Gramscian approaches are significant for a number of reasons. They provide one way of treating hegemonic states as both order makers and order takers. They focus attention on more granular processes of hegemony. Second, they expand our purview of relevant actors beyond state. And they supply logics of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic strategies.⁶⁷ While the field has seen some efforts

⁶⁵ Burnham, “Neo-Gramscian Hegemony and the International Order,” 75.

⁶⁶ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, “The Gordian Knot of Agency—Structure in International Relations: A Neo-Gramscian Perspective,” *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 1 (2001): 24.

⁶⁷ See Stephen Gill, ed., *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Robert W. Cox, “Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method,” *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 1983): 162–75; Christopher Chase-Dunn et al., “Hegemony and Social Change,” *Mershon International Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (1994): 361–76. On counter-hegemonic strategies in interstate politics, see, for example, Rosemary Foot, “Chinese Strategies in a US-Hegemonic Global Order: Accommodating and Hedging,” *International Affairs* 82, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 77–94.

to integrate, say, hegemonic-stability theory and neo-Gramscian accounts,⁶⁸ we can likely gain much from more concerted efforts. [XX]’s “Counter-Hegemonic Strategies in the Global Economy,” while drawing more directly on the work of Susan Strange,⁶⁹ points in the direction of taking ideological hegemony much more seriously in the study of interstate hegemony.⁷⁰

There are a number of other promising approaches to theorizing international order. We mentioned these at the outset; they include: network-analytic frameworks, which locate order in networks of financial flows, institutional ties, alliances, and other relational structures of world politics.⁷¹ They also include practice-theoretic accounts that see international order in terms of social fields.⁷² Scholars in both idioms have explicitly begun to take up questions of hegemony and hegemonic orders. In their contribution, “*Raison de l’Hégémonie* (The Hegemon’s Interest): The costs and benefits of hegemony,” [XX] and [XX] deploy network analysis to help disentangle the question of whether or not hegemony “pays” for the hegemonic power. Although none of the contributors explicitly use field analysis, [XX] engages with Julian Go’s global-fields approach to understanding variation in patterns of British and American interstate dominance. [XX]’s effort to parse variation in international order in terms of ecologies displays a family resemblance with both network-relational and social-field approaches.

Hegemonic-order theory, as we have noted throughout, breaks with more deterministic approaches to interstate hegemony, it *stresses the potentially contingent character of the relationship between preeminent powers*

⁶⁸ G John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, “Socialization and Hegemonic Power,” *International Organization* 44, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 283–315.

⁶⁹ Strange, “The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony”; Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Susan Strange, *States and Markets*, Bloomsburg Revelations (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

⁷⁰ See also Ted Hopf, “Common-Sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics,” *International Organization* 67, no. 2 (April 2013): 317–54.

⁷¹ Stacie E. Goddard, “Embedded Revisionism: Networks, Institutions, and Challenges to World Order,” *International Organization* forthcoming (2018); MacDonald, *Domination*; Paul K. MacDonald, “Embedded Authority: A Relational Network Approach to Hierarchy in World Politics,” *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 1 (January 2018): 128–50; Zeev Maoz et al., “Structural Equivalence and International Conflict: A Social Networks Analysis,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 5 (October 1, 2006): 664–89; Oatley et al., “The Political Economy of Global Finance: A Network Model”; Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler, and Alexander H. Montgomery, “Network Analysis for International Relations,” *International Organization* 63, no. 03 (July 2009): 559–92.

⁷² Larissa Bucholz, “What Is a Global Field? Theorizing Fields Beyond the Nation-State,” in *Fielding Transnationalism*, ed. Julian Go and Monika Kruse (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 31–60; Julian Go, “Global Fields and Imperial Forms: Field Theory and the British and American Empires,” *Sociological Theory* 26, no. 3 (2008): 201–27; Go, *Patterns*; Musgrave and Nexon, “Defending Hierarchy from the Moon to the Indian Ocean: Symbolic Capital and Political Dominance in Early Modern China and the Cold War”; David M. McCourt, “Practice Theory and Relationalism as the New Constructivism,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2016): 475–85; Nexon and Neumann, “Hegemonic-Order Theory”; Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy*.

and the order that is built by and around it. This point was made, of course, in Kindleberger’s classic study of failed hegemony—the United States was able but unwilling to provide leadership—and the coming of the Great Depression.⁷³ It formed part of Ruggie’s critical intervention, which pointed out that a counterfactual Nazi German hegemonic order would have looked very different than the one that emerged after World War II.⁷⁴ Debates about what, say, future Chinese hegemony might look like also highlight some degree of contingency in the nature of international order.⁷⁵

But many of these approaches tend to assume that economic and militarily superordinate powers will, eventually, take up a hegemonic mantle.⁷⁶ This might be the case, but it requires much more critical interrogation.⁷⁷ Thus, in “International Hegemony Meets Domestic Politics: Why Liberals Can Be Pessimists,” [XX] argues that the central pillar of American hegemonic order—the United States itself and its domestic institutions—is weaker than assumed by theory and empirical narratives. [XX] criticizes theories of hegemonic order precisely for assuming that “systemic incentives” from the outside world provide the impetus to bind the hegemon to its order, and therefore create continuity and durability in hegemonic leadership. [XX] points out that these theories take for granted that domestic institutions facilitate, or at least stay out of the way of, those internationalist policies and commitments integral to hegemonic order.

Focusing on American political parties and electoral politics across the 20th century, [XX] shows how problematic this assumption is. Political parties—which stand at the center of American political institutions—can “create incentives that lead to the undermining of hegemonic credibility from within.” In particular, political partisanship and polarization prove a persistent problem in the generation of consistent and credible hegemonic leadership, which have emerged across the decades during times of low external threat to impede and ham-string the functioning of American hegemony. As [XX] argues, this helps explain—reflected in the Trump administration’s rejection of the hegemonic logic—that the most effective anti-hegemonic force may come not from abroad but from *within* the American domestic system itself.

⁷³ Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929-1939*.

⁷⁴ Ruggie, “Embedded Liberalism.”

⁷⁵ See, for example, Nordin and Weissmann, “Will Trump Make China Great Again?”; David Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security* 27, no. 4 (Spring 2003): 57–85.

⁷⁶ Nolte, “How to Compare Regional Powers.”

⁷⁷ For a key statement, see David Wilkinson, “Unipolarity without Hegemony,” *International Studies Review* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 141–72.

The other assumption that lies at the heart of hegemonic theory is precisely that “systemic incentives” *do* exist for the building and maintenance of a hegemonic order. In Gilpin’s formulation, the structuring of the rules and institutions of the international system by a rising state provides “returns” to the hegemon—such as security, growth, and prestige—that exceed the costs. But this notion has been treated more as an assumption than a question or point of inquiry. [XX] and [XX] develop a theoretical framework for understanding the costs and benefits of hegemony, looking specifically at the conditions that affect the potential complementarity between military protection and economic production. This question takes on great urgency in the arguments of analysts who trace American hegemonic decline to what they see as rising security costs and declining economic benefits. But what precisely are the American costs and benefits of hegemony? [XX] and [XX] “establish the core relationships that govern a given hegemonic actor’s potential trajectory from protection-production trade-offs to complementary over time.” They find that social networks associated with military alliances can have a positive feedback effect on a hegemon’s power position in ways that lowers its leadership costs and raise benefits.

As our earlier discussion of international order implies, this new phase of scholarship emphasizes that *hegemonic orders are fundamentally political orders*. This is less a novel insight than a question of emphasis. Once we treat international order as more than a structural artifact or systemic outcome, we turn our attention to the bargains, institutions, and relations that constitute hegemonic orders. Hegemonic orders have an architecture, manifest in the rules, norms, and arrangements stressed in traditional hegemony studies; they also have an infrastructure made up of interpersonal, interorganizational, and interstate political interactions. Both the architecture and the infrastructure of international orders, including hegemonic ones, are, at base, dynamic and malleable.

Indeed, hegemonic orders often take on characteristics that reflect a deep and ongoing tension between consent and coercion, cooperation and contestation. Thus, [XX’s “Partner Politics”] not only emphasizes variation within American hegemonic order but focuses on the bargains and bargaining that undergirds it. Such political bargains – which include security and economic dimensions – lie at the heart of hegemonic orders. Hegemons cannot establish order without, at minimum, the complicity of a small group of secondary states who support their leadership, as well as the rules and institutions of international orders.

These bargains, in turn, shape the legitimacy and functionality of hegemonic orders. They create partners for the hegemon and reduce the likelihood that secondary states will challenge, spoil, or undermine the order. [XX] shows that the American hegemonic order during the Cold War was essentially an aggregation of regional orders. These provided circumstances that facilitated tight partnerships with Japan and the Western European states. In the post-Cold War era, the globalization of the American hegemonic order fundamentally altered these circumstances.⁷⁸ It eroded old partnerships and bargains, and altered the coherence and stability of the American hegemonic ordering. [XX]’s approach to hegemony places less emphasis on the hegemon’s ability to sustain international outcomes—such as free trade or stable monetary orders—and more on the logic and mechanics of hegemony as a distinctive type of regional or global international order.

In “Counter-Hegemonic Strategies in the Global Economy,” [XX] explores that logic of resistance and revisionism in response to the American hegemonic organization of the world economy. The article looks at the strategies available to rising states as they seek to challenge the existing order. Drawing on Susan Strange’s typology of “structural power,”⁷⁹ [XX] argues that the rational revisionist state would attack the “ideational” dimensions of the existing hegemonic order rather than pursue a frontal assault on its material dimensions. With this framework, [XX] looks at the actual strategies of rising challengers to the American-led order: Russia and China. Russia has been the most aggressive in challenging the rules and institutions of the hegemonic order but—precisely because it has sought to challenge all the major pillars of the system—it has done so with only mixed results. China has pursued a more indirect strategy, and it has not been very successful in advancing an alternative ideology or normative vision of hegemonic order. The assumption [XX] makes is that the greatest danger to the stability of the American hegemonic order comes from the outside—from revisionist states. But the instabilities to the order may be of a more complex sort, involving political backlashes to slow growth, declining income, and global economic downturns, triggering arrays of domestic and international counter-movements.

⁷⁸ On American bargaining with the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, see Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, “Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion,” *International Security* 40, no. 4 (April 1, 2016): 7–44, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00236.

⁷⁹ See Strange, *Retreat*.

[XX] argues in “Empires of the Mind” that the ideational foundations of American hegemonic order constitute one of its most critical—but also neglected—features. Behind the material capabilities of the United States lies what might be called “ideational-infrastructural” power. This feature of hegemony manifests in a diverse array of transnational elite knowledge networks, which span the liberal-democratic world and beyond. Adopting a Gramscian approach, [XX] explores the way these knowledge networks tie states together under American hegemonic leadership, legitimate power and inequality, and manage conflict and cooperation. The article looks closely at several examples of these elite knowledge networks, such as the Kissinger/Salzburg Seminars, as they fostered transnational elite consensus and helped manage conflict and challenges emanating from the Third World. [XX] sees these elite networks as highly successful, capable of generating stability even as the material distribution of power shifts and domestic and international challengers to American hegemony—for example, the Trump administration and China—become more salient.

Finally, *hegemonic ordering takes place within existing international orders, which creates opportunities and constraints for hegemonic powers.* Furthermore, *hegemons may find themselves constrained by elements of international order that they helped produce.* This latter notion is critical to arguments about whether or not the United States successfully bound itself to its own order, and thereby made international order more legitimate for many (but not all) states in the system.⁸⁰ But hegemonic-order theories should aim to take the interaction between international orders, hegemons, and hegemonic ordering much more seriously. Hegemons rarely enjoy sufficient power to completely overhaul order entirely. Even after World War II, the United States bootstrapped order on pre-war institutions and had to accommodate the influence and preferences of other states.

As noted above, in “Hegemony Compared,” [XX] builds on compares the British and American hegemonic presence in the Middle East. Britain in the inter-war period and America in the post-Cold War period stood as unchallenged great powers in the region. They attempted to organize regional politics, influence domestic coalitions, support client states, and manage change across the Middle East. Yet the experiences of the two hegemons differed: Great Britain had a more, at least from its standpoint, successful experience than the United States in sustaining its clients and preventing outcomes that ran counter to its interests. Why is this? [XX] argues that differences in hegemonic

⁸⁰ Ikenberry, *After Victory*; Ikenberry, *Leviathan*.

capabilities, or even in the specific hegemonic strategies that the two great powers pursued, fail to explain this variation. Rather it stemmed from contextual variations in order, both in terms of the broader normative environment and the mobilization capacity of Middle Eastern states. Both factors increased the costs of hegemonic policies. The success of hegemonic control is not simply a matter of what the dominant states seeks to do, or how it does it. The character of the subject states and societies provide a critical determinant of if, and how, hegemonic ordering play out.

[XX, “Ordering Eurasia”] examines similar dynamics in the former Soviet sphere. The article illuminates the limits and unstable hold that liberal ordering principles and institutions have on Russia and its neighboring territories. In doing so, it highlights not only the limitations of American hegemonic ordering at its post-Cold War unipolar peak, but also the dynamic interplay of hegemonic ordering, international order, and counter-hegemonic strategies. As XX argues, the “shallow institutionalization” in much of the Former Soviet Union “rendered the liberal order far more fragile than was initially appreciated. Key to this effort was Moscow recasting these agents of hegemonic order as threatening the stability of Russia and other regional regimes. Beginning in the mid-2000s, in the wake of the Color Revolutions experienced in the contested borderland states (Georgia and Ukraine), Russia actively targeted all three vectors, offering its own forms of counterorder as the basis for re-engaging with the post-Soviet states as a Russian sphere of influence.”

[XX] and [XX]’s examination of whether hegemony pays for itself also calls attention to the deep bidirectional connections between the hegemon itself and international order. Although [XX] emphasizes the primacy of domestic politics, we could further explore how the factors [XX] identifies, such as party polarization, involve feedbacks from international order and transnational politics. For example, some see Trumpism as one manifestation of a transnational right-wing rejection of the liberal order. They point to intellectual and interpersonal connections between Trump’s supporters—including some in his inner circle—and self-proclaimed anti-globalists, particularly in Europe. We are still learning the extent to which Moscow aids and abets this right-wing backlash, whether through direct assistance or information warfare.⁸¹ This kind of contention over hegemonic order simply eludes

⁸¹ See Mike Lofgren, “Trump, Putin, and the Alt-Right International” October 31, 2016, *The Atlantic*. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/10/trump-putin-alt-right-comintern/506015/> and Jonathan Capehart, “It’s Not Just Trump: With Brexit and France Votes, Russia is Cultivating the Global Right,” April 18, 2017 *The Washington Post*. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2017/04/18/its-not-just-trump-with-brexit-and-france-votes-russia-is-cultivating-the-global-right/?utm_term=.23ca98fbf26c

traditional hegemony studies, but may form a crucial element of the political hegemonic orders.⁸²

Conclusions

Most of the contributors to this collection focus on dynamics of American hegemony, as well as challenges to it. This raises a perennial question: we know that general interest in interstate hegemony rises and falls over time. Some evidence suggests that hegemony studies peaks in the field during periods—such as in the 1970s and 1980s—of apparent hegemonic decline.⁸³ Of course, if our stylized story is correct, the current uptick—the one that marked the second major phase of interstate-hegemony studies and now carries us into the third—started in the late 1990s with the sense that the “unipolar moment” might prove more durable than expected, and gathered momentum after September 11, 2001, when Karl Rove could boldly proclaim of the United States that “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.”⁸⁴

Of course, we see no reason that hegemony and hegemonic orders are only a matter for the rear-view mirror. The next few decades will likely see continued contestation, adjustment, negotiation, and even conflict over international order. This will prove the case if current trends continue and erode American hegemony, or if they reverse and, say, the Chinese challenge goes the way of “Japan as Number One.”⁸⁵ Hegemonic-order theories will remain crucial to the study of world politics, whether at the global or regional level, for the foreseeable future.

The remit of hegemonic-order theories extends beyond the contemporary period and the fate of American hegemony. But third-wave scholarship on hegemony, should also provide important ways to cut into some persistent and deep puzzles about the intrinsic and extrinsic character of American

⁸² If authoritarian states continue to make claims on, and seek to reorder, international politics than we will need parallel accounts about their political systems. We find it notable that the Soviet bid for hegemony receives much less attention within hegemony studies proper.

⁸³ We thank one of our referees for this point.

⁸⁴ Karel van Wolferen, “Karl Rove’s Prophecy: ‘We’re an Empire Now, and When We Act, We Create Our Own Reality,’” Global Research - Centre for Research on Globalization, February 5, 2017, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/karl-roves-prophecy-were-an-empire-now-and-when-we-act-we-create-our-own-reality/5572533>.

⁸⁵ Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*, 1st Harper Edition (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1985).

leadership. These include a number of concerns, some of which are not taken up directly in this collection, such as:

- How much is the character of contemporary international politics and world order a consequence of hegemony in general, and the specific characteristics of the United States in particular—as opposed to deeper, longer-term, and quite possibly autonomous developments, such as industrial capitalism, globalization, and nuclear proliferation?
- Once we treat international order and hegemony as relatively autonomous, how do we understand their interplay? Older approaches saw successful power transitions as involving system-wide wars that ‘cleaned the decks’ of international order, but, for example, the new hierarchy studies suggest a more complicated relationship among and across different dimensions of super- and subordination in world politics.
- How do hegemonic orders create opportunities and constraints on weaker actors, and therefore lead to different kinds of counter-order and counter-hegemonic strategies? Can the order transform without the loss of hegemony? Can particular orders persist with a shift in leadership, and if so, under what conditions?
- How does the architecture and infrastructure of hegemonic orders actually function? Are there particular bargains that operate as “lynchpins” in hegemonic systems, either with particular states or in particular sectors (economic, security, and so forth)? How do hegemons succeed or fail when it comes to managing the complex relationships that undergird their orders? And what about regional and sector-based variation in hegemonic orders?

At the risk of repetition, we term this the shift to hegemonic-order theories precisely to, on the one hand, emphasize the significance of taking the “order” part of hegemony studies seriously and, on the other, signal a break from deterministic and structuralist understanding of hegemony of the kind associated with hegemonic-stability and power-transition theories. Indeed, the first phase of interstate-hegemony studies failed to provide theoretically-informed understandings of the architecture and infrastructure of hegemony. The second phase started to take that architecture and infrastructure seriously but focused on mechanisms of stabilization and the variables that accounted for stability. As we move into the third phase of interstate-hegemony studies, we still lack good ways to link up, for example, the study of that architecture, let alone its infrastructure, with proliferating analyses of how

weaker actors oppose or support preeminent powers. This requires viewing “hegemonic order,” including in its American guise, as a rich array of relations and articulated roles and evolving identities, which give hegemony its life and operation.

Seen in this light, the anomalies of hegemonic-stability theory—such as the failure to identify international public goods or the inability to provide coherent explanations for why hegemons might set in motion their own decline—point to the need to take seriously this more complex understanding of the internal architecture of roles, authority relations, and bargains that make up hegemonic systems. It also calls for a renewed focus on how hegemonic order reconfigure the interests and domestic orders of participants. This includes not simply weaker actors, but hegemons themselves. They not only structure international order but find themselves structured by it. In this sense, hegemonic orders are not simply a reflection or crystallization of the distribution of power. As complex hierarchies, hegemonic orders are productive of power and power relations.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Mattern and Zarakol, “Hierarchies,” Zarakol, “Theorising Hierarchies.”