

**INTERNATIONAL REGIMES AND HEGEMONIC POWERS:  
A SURVEY OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS**

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The study of international regimes has been in fashion among scholars since late 1970s-early 1980s. Academically speaking, it has been one of the most interesting areas of study within the IR discipline, and accordingly, the existence of international regimes has been considered as being in conformity with the prevailing IR paradigms. The continuing trend led many scholars in the field to write articles and books on regimes in various issue-areas of international relations, such as, security, trade, finance, environmental politics, and so on.

What has been interesting about these regime studies is that the definitions of 'regimes' used by different scholars have sometimes been sharply different from each other. So, they have not used a uniform definition of international regimes, and this creates a kind of conceptual confusion about what one should and should not mean by, and understand from, regimes. In order to avoid any such confusion, and for the purpose of simplicity, I will take Stephen D. Krasner's conventional definition of regime, for a start, and elaborate on it in line with my arguments.

The main reason for my borrowing his definition is that, as he himself argues, it is the broadest conception of regimes that "is consistent with other recent formulations". Thus, regimes, in Krasner's terms, are "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor's expectations converge in a given area of international relations". (Krasner, 1983, p.2)

One of the major issues in regime studies is the role of hegemonic state(s) in establishing and maintaining international regimes. Some scholars, such as those of Grotian perspective, deem

it to be not essential for the persistence of regimes, whereas, some others, especially those of structural approach consider the role of the hegemonic power(s) vital. Both sides justify their arguments well on their own terms and from their own perspectives.

My main aim in this article is to examine the role of hegemonic power(s) in regime formation and persistence, using examples from international economic and environmental regimes and by approaching the concepts of 'hegemony' and 'regime' from a different perspective.

### **The Role of Hegemonic States**

In order to see the role of the hegemonic states in international regime formation and persistence, one should firstly understand what a hegemonic state is, and what are the broader role and position of it in the general context of world politics. According to state-centric views, a hegemonic state is the one that in terms of structural power maintains a global predominance. It is the hegemonic state(s) that set the agenda of international politics, establish a certain order in the system and use their power, including coercive power, to assure the compliance of other states to that order and to the existing status quo.

Some regime theorists, especially, the Neo-liberal Institutionalists, take this argument further to issue-areas in IR. They, again, from state-centric perspective, differentiate between relative powers of states on particular issues, and maintain that stronger states in a given issue-area dominate the other (weaker) states and determine the rules of the game (i.e. norms, principles, rules, etc.) (Keohane and Nye, 1977, pp.50-51) Thus, for them, the formation and structuring of a regime depends, to a certain extent, on the power, interests and objectives of the hegemonic state(s). For example, in Ruggie's famous case of regime change from orthodox to 'embedded' liberalism in mid-1940s, the US acted as a hegemonic power: first, by setting the rules and institutions of the 'embedded' liberal economic regime; second, by backing up the functioning of

the system, using its economic and financial might; and third, by achieving the consent and/or compliance of other states, except the socialist bloc, to the newly-established economic order.

Krasner borrows the argument by Charles Kindleberger that one of the main reasons of the Great Depression was the lack of a hegemonic state to lead the world economy. In the interwar years, the USA was able but unwilling to provide economic order in the world, while Great Britain was willing but unable to do that. (Krasner, 1983, p.14)

While most of these regime theorists accept the essential role of hegemonic states in establishing regimes, they split into two groups when it comes to their persistence. For example, Oran Young talks about *imposed regimes* and argues that such regimes collapse together with a major decline in the power of the hegemon that imposes and sustains them. Stein, on the contrary, argues that the decline of the hegemonic state does not really matter. Collective interests alone can effectively sustain a regime. (Krasner, 1983, p.15) What is misleading in both of the above perspectives is that, being state-centric, they ignore major changes in global economic, political and social structures.

The argument becomes even clearer when one examines regime formation and persistence in environmental issues. In his article, "Politics Beyond the State", Paul Wapner argues that the role of transnational environmental activist groups (TEAGs) in bringing environmental issues into political agenda has been much higher than the role of the state. He adopts the *fluid approach* to the analysis of environmental politics and maintains that TEAGs, as independent actors, are more successful in creating environment-friendly societies, by enlightening them about the significance of environmental problems, than the state is. They have, sometimes, effectively altered buying and consumption habits of individuals; thus pressurising companies to produce what environment-friendly people would buy. The main domain that they manipulate is not inter-state arena, but the international civil society. (Wapner, 1995, pp.322-336)

So, in the case of environmental politics, some rules, norms, etc. are formulated not by states, but by some other actors, be them individuals, groups or NGOs. This means, environmental regimes are not creatures of states.

While talking about the increasing trend of negotiating global environmental regimes since 1980, Gareth Porter and Janet Welsh Brown argue that there has been no role of any hegemonic state in that increasing trend. Firstly, because there was no hegemonic power in environmental issue-area due to the nature of the issue. Secondly, because the US hegemony was declining since early 1970s. So, by 1980s, there was no hegemonic power to back up the environmental regimes. But despite the lack of a hegemonic state and the “US ideological hostility toward international environmental regulation”, many global environmental regimes have been negotiated successfully. (Porter and Brown, 1991, pp.19-24)

The question that arises here is, then, to what extent these international regimes, negotiated or established in the absence of a hegemonic power, work as effectively as the ones supported by hegemonic powers? The answer to this question is certainly negative, i.e. international environmental regimes mostly do not function as effectively as other regimes. The degree of compliance to environmental regimes is, by and large, low. On some vital issues, such as climate change and biological diversity, there are not even established regimes. (Porter and Brown, 1991, pp.21-22; Hurrell and Kingsbury, 1992, p.22) However, when we look, for example, to international economic regimes, we can see that they are doing well; at least, better than environmental regimes.

Thus, the hegemony, probably, does have something to do with the persistence or effective working of regimes. But is it necessarily hegemony of state(s)? The answer to this question will also clarify whether or not regime study is an effective way of understanding what is taking place in the world.

### **International but Not Regimes...**

At this point, it is worth going back to Krasner's definition of regime. Hedley Bull, in his famous book, *The Anarchical Society*, rightly argues that norms, rules and institutions, i.e. Krasner's regimes, are the means by the help of which *order* is achieved and maintained in international arena. (Bull, 1977, pp.53-76) It can be argued, therefore, that what regime theorists call 'international regimes', are just issue-specific components of a broader and all-inclusive international order. Thus, regime studies can not be kept separate from, and actually should be conducted in conjunction with, the study of the general world order, which itself is an outcome and an element of the global political-economic structure.

The emergence of the global political-economic structure, as many Marxist scholars have argued, was associated with the expansion of the capitalist mode of production on a world-wide scale, beginning from XVIII – XIX centuries. This expansion has been not only about the mode of production alone, but also about the values, norms and rules that sustained it. So, together with the mode of production, division of labour, market relationships and the liberal-capitalist order has expanded globally as well.

Accordingly, the founders and supporters, as the main beneficiaries, of this order have always been seeking to strengthen it, because it serves their interests. And as I borrowed from Bull above, an effective way of maintaining an order is to achieve compliance/consent of others to the norms and rules of that order. The institutionalisation of those norms and rules, is a further step towards the strengthening and persistence of that order. As order progresses further, it develops its own issue-specific norms and rules (and in some cases institutions) to deal with its own consistent issues more effectively. These norms and rules are always in conformity with the general order. Thus, in the modern world, all issue-specific norms, rules and institutions, i.e. regimes, should be consistent with the general ones and the existing liberal-capitalist order.

From this perspective, Ruggie's famous story of a "revolutionary change" from orthodox to "embedded" liberal regime

(Ruggie, 1983, pp.195-231) could be re-interpreted. As the label indicates, it was a 'liberal' regime anyway, and was in conformity with the existing liberal-capitalist order. In his article, he talks about changes in the principles and norms of the regime, which he refers to as the change of the regime itself, but he does not examine whether or not those changes altered the mode of production, the principle of private property and the existing liberal-capitalist world order.

One could, on the contrary, refer to that change as the strengthening of liberal-capitalist order, and its adaptation to the new circumstances, for the following reasons: First, the change was accompanied by the establishment of international economic institutions, such as IMF, IBRD and GATT, which strengthened the existing liberal-capitalist order even more. Second, in the face of the economic difficulties of the recovery from the damages of the Second World War, and vis-à-vis the expansion of the Soviet (state capitalism) influence towards the West, intervention of the Western states in their economies, seems to have been the best way of sustaining the liberal-capitalist order.

By the same token, the discussions about the rise and collapse of the Gold Standard System or of Bretton Woods System have to be carried within the general context of the evolution of the capitalist system. Have any of these changes led to an essential change in the global mode of production, in the position of bourgeoisie and labour in that mode or in the world capitalist structure? The answer is obviously negative.

In sum, regimes are the means of the hegemonic powers in the global capitalist structure. They are established to help with the persistence of international order. They may rise and fall, when necessary, but the order continues. Thus, to understand world affairs in an historical continuum, one should look at the global structure and order, rather than particular fragments of that order, which are labelled as 'regimes' by some scholars.

Having said all these, I will now move on to the next stage of my argument. As the issue of hegemony matters the formation and persistence of international regimes, and taking into account that it

takes place within the global capitalist structure and order, whose hegemony is it that matters?

### **Hegemony but Not States...**

One of the basic characteristics of the advanced as well as globalised capitalist structure is that the state power in such a structure, as Justin Rosenberg argues, “no longer embodies personalised relations of domination (which cancel the formal independence of the dominated), being impersonal, *mediated by things*. It is this structural shift which explains why units are no longer empires but bordered, sovereign states.” (Rosenberg, 1994, p.46) Thus, in the advanced capitalist structure, states do not necessarily need to invade one another for the purpose of exploitation, because there exist more ‘civilised’ and effective ways of it.

Gramsci and his followers have already shown that in developed capitalism, bourgeoisie constructs its hegemony through civil society by uniting with their historical social allies, promoting some minor interests of society at large, and finally, persuading the substantial part of society to give their consent to its hegemony. The state – the political society, which is dependent on civil society (at least because governments need votes and support of their populations) thus becomes nothing more than a tool for the implementation of policies designed in the civil society. As the civil society is the domain of bourgeoisie, whatever policy is consented upon in the civil society necessarily serves, or at least does not violate, the interests of the bourgeois class. (Augelli and Murphy, 1993, pp. 128-132) And the corollary of the interests of bourgeoisie is naturally the preservation of the existing liberal-capitalist order, because it enables bourgeoisie to sustain its hegemony in the mode of production. They further argue that in international arena the bourgeois class has constructed its hegemony in the same way: in alliance with its historical social allies, and through international civil society.

So, when we talk about international order, together with its regimes, and the role of hegemonic powers, we have to consider to what extent state-centric, anarchy-based views limit and mislead our explanations: States, being constructions of people, can not have interests, separate from the interests of those who construct and maintain them. Construction of the state can never be an end itself. The state is a means to serve interests of people.

As far as the interests of people is concerned, as I mentioned above, in capitalist societies, the interest of bourgeoisie always have priority over that of others. But this should not mean that the interests of others are not served at all. They can be tolerated to the extent they do not challenge the hegemony of bourgeoisie, the existing order and the fundamentals of the capitalist mode of production.

If the above put arguments are true, then what kind of imagined anarchy are we talking about? The concepts of hegemony and hegemonic order necessitate and bring about hierarchy rather than anarchy. If the economic-social, and thus political, hierarchy is (in Rosenberg's terms) 'impersonalised' and covered under the concept of sovereignty, this should not mean that it does not exist at all.

Having set my theoretical assumptions that 1) international regimes are nothing but consistent parts of the global order; 2) this order is liberal-capitalist in nature and is aimed at upholding capitalist mode of production; 3) the bourgeoisie of the advanced world has constructed its global hegemony through the existing world order; 4) the order is hierarchical rather than anarchical in nature, I would like to discuss the role of the hegemon(s) in establishing and sustaining issue-specific components of international order, that is regimes. The discussion will also reveal why some regimes are strong (well functioning), whilst some others are not.



## Global Hegemony with Illustrations

The phenomenon of the hegemony of bourgeoisie is apparent in the working of the regimes of liberal-capitalist order, with the international economic regimes being at the heart of it. As in the capitalist structure economy constitutes the base upon which civil and political societies ascend, maintenance of the existing Neo-classical economic structure is vital for the hegemonic class to preserve the order. Therefore, construction of economic regimes is the most crucial part of the task of sustaining the entire world order.

The three pillars of the international economic order, namely trade, monetary and development regimes, with their respective institutions – GATT/WTO, IMF and World Bank – have been mainly seeking the preservation of liberal-capitalist order and the expansion of the Neo-liberal ideology since their establishment in 1940s. Each of these institutionalised regimes manage one aspect of the preservation/improvement task of the international economic order.

When one looks at the principles and policies of, for example, the IMF, s/he can easily see that the organisation is not necessarily about solving the problems of its member countries, but making sure that those are not taking an economic path other than liberal-capitalism. This is evident in the well-known ‘IMF surveillance’ and the ‘conditionality’ of IMF funding. (Gill, 1995, pp.412-413) From this angle, the ‘IMF surveillance’ can be interpreted as “the IMF’s surveying whether or not a member country is violating principles and norms of the liberal-capitalist order in its domestic economic practice”, and the ‘conditionality’ of IMF programmes is a means of making sure that it is not doing so. That is why, money from the IMF comes only if the troubled country accepts to put forward Neo-liberal economic policies, by cutting down budget expenditures on social issues, such as, education, public pensions, etc. In other words, the ‘conditionality’ principle is a means of achieving compliance of member countries to the prevailing Neo-liberal order.

Since the bourgeoisie of the advanced capitalist societies is the leader of the world bourgeois class, the developed states, i.e. the

political societies of the developed world dominates, controls and manipulates the economic regimes as means of maintaining the international economic order. Thus, whenever, an economic regime fails to provide order, developed states are first to be alarmed and to reform/improve/change the regime. Stephen Gill points out that “after the failure of the existing methods of surveillance was revealed by the Mexican crisis of 1994-95” G7 states, gathering in Canada in June 1995, “opted to strengthen surveillance mechanisms under the aegis of the IMF, WB and BIS...” (Gill, 1995, p. 413)

As the maintenance of order depends heavily on the expansion and dominance of the hegemonic ideology, some economic regimes appear to be more ideological than functional. For example, GATT, since its foundation, has been an arena for confrontation between the bourgeois classes of different societies. It has been so, not only for North – South confrontation, but also for NAFTA –EU, US – Japan confrontations. It is very natural that the bourgeois class in each and every country seek their own profit when it comes to the issues, like market, exchange, terms of trade, etc. Therefore, every country argues for maximising its own profits in GATT/WTO negotiations and rounds. We have witnessed that even the original and most enthusiastic supporters of liberal trade – the Europeans and Americans – come to be the most protectionist countries in practice. To be honest, the rest are not very much open to trade either. It is primarily because of the fact that trade issues affect the profits of bourgeoisie directly.

Susan Strange rightly argues that when we look at the quantitative arrangements (such as quotas, Voluntary Export Restrictions and Orderly Marketing Arrangements) and some agreements such as the 1978 Multi-Fibre Agreement, we see that they are simply “agreements to disagree”, because they put rather than remove barriers to trade. (Strange, 1983, p.350) Thus, as far as free trade is concerned, GATT is more ideological than functional. The bourgeois classes of different countries may confront each other at various points regarding market shares, profits and so on. However, they are aware that the existing liberal-capitalist order serves their interest best. That’s why, despite competition and

confrontation, they come together in GATT and even sign protectionist agreements under the auspices of GATT, thus keeping rivalry and protectionism within the limits of the existing order.

In environmental regimes too, the preservation of the existing order appears to be the first priority. Many scholars in the field have already argued that major environmental issues can not be handled separately from international economic issues. For example, Hurrell and Kingsbury talk about the interconnection between economic development and environmental issues (Hurrell and Kingsbury, 1992, pp.35-45), and Porter and Brown argue that the solution of environmental problems through the establishment of effective international regimes will depend on the solution of North – South issue, which is basically economic. (Porter and Brown, 1991, p.124-127)

Due to the fact that all world events take place within the existing liberal-capitalist order, environmental issues and their solution are subject to the hegemony of bourgeoisie. Therefore, only those solutions to environmental problems that do not violate the bourgeois interests come true. To put it using the terms of regime theorists, only those regimes and regime negotiations which are not contrary to Neo-liberal norms and principles can be successful.

But unfortunately, the most important environmental problems, such as CFC production, deforestation and destruction of ecosystems, are mainly related to the persisting poverty and economic backwardness of the underdeveloped and developing parts of the world. As such, their solution can be achieved in two ways: 1) through redistribution of wealth, in which case the bourgeoisie of the advanced parts of the world will have to sacrifice their interest; 2) through developing the backward parts of the world, which needs transfer of technology and capital from the advanced parts of the world. These seem to be the only possible ways, for now, leading to the environment-friendly ‘sustainable development of the world’. (Porter and Brown, 1991, p.32)

The above ways are contrary to the interests of bourgeoisie in the advanced world, not only because they minimise their profits, but also because they are contrary to the logic and principles of the

existing order. For this reason, in environmental negotiations the advanced countries, except Nordic and few European countries, have always been reluctant to give any kind of non-liberal concessions. The USA, with the toughest bourgeoisie in the world, has, by and large, opposed any demand from developing countries that was contrary to the liberal-capitalist order. Again, the concern of the USA has been not only about material and/or financial losses, but also about preservation of Neo-liberal principles.

For example, when developing countries proposed the creation of an independent fund (with the contribution and under the control of the signatories of the Montreal Protocol) for assisting developing countries in introducing substitute technologies for CFCs, the USA opposed it. It withdrew from its opposition under international pressure a few days before 1990 London Conference, but "*insisted that the funding should not be considered as a precedent for dealing with other global issues*". (Porter and Brown, 1991, p.132) Although this case was not so much contrary to the existing order, the US representatives feared that this could be taken as a precedent for any kind of redistribution or transfer of resources in the future, because that would mean the erosion of the norms and principles of the existing order.

Thus, the main reason for the weakness of environmental regimes is that their creation and persistence is neither vital for bourgeoisie, nor consistent with the liberal-capitalist order. It is not consistent, because the Neo-liberal thinking excludes the possibility of depletion of resources and emergence of environmental problems. (Porter and Welsh, 1991, p.27) Accordingly, the founders and successors of this order have never created any mechanism for managing environmental issues. They probably have never thought that the order might face problems coming not from individuals and social forces, but from outside human sphere of action, from nature itself. If they knew they would certainly create issue-specific mechanisms (i.e. regimes) for dealing with it. In other words, they would include environmental issues in their conception of order.

In that sense, the introduction of environmental issues to the liberal-capitalist order was a real "revolutionary" change, at least for

three reasons: First, unlike the change from orthodox to “embedded” liberal system, environmental politics did not have any ideological connections to the existing order. In other words, the environmental issues unexpectedly rushed into the order in ideological and philosophical sense. Second, it was not introduced by the hegemonic class, but by lower civil groups – by masses. Thus, it was an indicator of the increasing mass conscience. And the last, it showed the weakness of the existing order and put an end to the liberal myth about the welfare of all mankind. It also revealed to what extent the Neo-liberal ideology is environmentally dangerous, or in Stephen Gill’s words, “ecologically myopic”.

In brief, environmental problems are among the strongest challenges to the existing global system and world order. If the system is strong enough, it will develop its own mechanisms, to solve these problems. If it does not, then probably that will be the beginning of the change of the system itself...

### **Concluding Remarks**

To conclude with, in order to understand formation and persistence of international regimes, one should, firstly, understand the phenomenon of order in international arena and see the ways of its preservation. International regimes, as constituent parts of the order, can hardly have their own existence beyond the limits of the existing global structure and world order.

Secondly, the role of hegemonic powers in creating and maintaining international order, and thus, international regimes, is paramount. However, defining ‘hegemonic powers’ from state-centric perspective is very confusing. Analyses of the whole world structure, together with its economic-social bases, give deeper explanations to the events taking place in international arena than the state-centric approaches do. It is simply because of the fact that the hegemony of social forces (in the contemporary world, hegemony of the bourgeoisie) is a more deep-rooted structural phenomenon in world politics than the hegemony of states is.

And lastly, since the international order is to serve the interests of the hegemonic social forces or the hegemonic class, regimes, as issue-specific parts of it, are not supposed to contradict or put obstacles to the general functioning of the hegemonic order. Accordingly, the hegemonic class is eager to support only those regimes that contribute to the maintenance and strengthening of the order. The strongest regimes are those which are vital for the hegemon(s) in sustaining the order, because they get the strongest support from the hegemonic power(s). From this perspective, emergence of a particular regime contrary to the interests of the hegemonic class would necessarily contribute to the weakening of the existing order, thus creating possibilities for a positive change in the global structure...

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## Х ц л а с я

### **БЕЙНЯЛХАЛГ РЕЖИМЛЯР ВЯ ЩЕЭЕМОМ ЭЦЪЛЯР: БЕЙНЯЛХАЛГ СИЙАСИ ИГТИСАДА ВЯ ЯТРАФ МЦЩИТ СИЙАСЯТИНЯ БАХЫШ**

***Афиз ЯЛИЙЕВ***

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Бейнялхалг режимлярин тядгиг олунмасы 1970-ъи иллярин сону, 80-ъи иллярин яввялляриндян бу йана бейнялхалг мцнасибятляр арашдырмачыларынын диггятини ян чох ъялб едян мясялялярдян бири олмушдур. О вахтлар бейнялхалг мцнасибятляр лексиконуна йениъя дахил олмуш ёбейнялхалг режимлярё анлайышы бу эцн артыг кифайят гядяр елми-концептуал мяна дашыйыр вя бейнялхалг мцнасибятляр дисциплинин ясас тяркиб щиссяляриндян бири сайылыр. Артыг бейнялхалг мцнасибятлярин бир чох сащяляриндя (мясялян, тящлцкъясизлик, тиъарят, малиййя, ятраф мцщит вя с.) мювъуд олан йа да мювъудлуъу фярз едиян режимляр щаггында бир чох ясярляр йазылмышдыр. Дюьрудур, бу ясярляри йазанлар бейнялхалг режимлярин арашдырылмасына мцхтялиф перспективлярдян йанашмышлар, анъаг онларын яксяриййятинин елми тядгигатларыны бирляшдирян цмуми вя чох фундаментал бир мясяля вар: бу тядгигатчыларын яксяриййяти юз ясярляриндя адятян бейнялхалг системин анархик хцсусиййятини вя суверен дювлятлярин бу системин ясас актйорлары олдуъуну вуръулайыр, бейнялхалг режимлярин дювлятлярарасы феномен олдуъуну вуръулайырлар. Мящз бу елми йанашма тярзи мягалямизин ясас тянгид обйектидир.

Мцяллиф бейнялхалг сийаси игтисаддан вя ятраф мцщит сийасятиндян мисаллар эюстяряряк, йухарыда гейд олунан елми йанашманын дюьру олмадыыны вя даща да писи, йанылдыъы олдуъуну иддиа едир. Мцяллифя эюря, бу эцн мювъуд олан бейнялхалг режимлярин яксяриййятинин гурулмасы, давамедиъилийи вя дабылмасы, щямчинин ефективлийи вя йа гейри-эффективлийи дювлятляр арасында баш верян

мцнасибятлярдян даща чох бейнялхалг сивил ъямиййятиндя баш верян просеслярдян вя трансформасийадан асылыдыр. Дювлятляр арасындакы мцнасибятляр ися садяъя олараг бу просеслярин вя трансформасийанын тязашцрцнцн сийаси формасыдыр...