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# Regimes as mechanisms for social order in international relation

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**As the state centric realist approach and other paradigms to the study of international relations appears too limited for explaining an increasingly complex and interdependent world, the need for a search for new ways to organize intellectually and understand international activities arises. This paper attempts to improve on our understanding of international cooperation and social order in the international system through the analysis of the regime theory. Anarchy in the international system does not entail continual chaos, as cooperative international arrangements do exist. Sovereign states have a rational incentive to develop processes for making joint decisions when confronting problems of common interest or common aversions. Also, self interested actors rationally forgo independent decision making and construct regimes. More germane to this paper therefore is the suggestion for transnational and trans-governmental actors in the coordination of activities in the international system.**

**Key words:** Regimes, instrument, world order, international relations.

## INTRODUCTION

In the search for social order within the international system, many theories have been formulated. One of such theories is the regime theory, implying a prevailing social system, pattern or the set of rules, both formal, as in constitutions and informal as in cultural or social norms that regulate the operation of government and its interactions with the economy and society.

In sciences, a regime can mean a particular state of affairs where a particular physical phenomenon or boundary condition is significant, such as the super fluid regime or the steady state regime.

Regime theory is a theory within the international relations derived from the liberal tradition that argues that international institutions or regimes affect the behaviour of states or other international actors. It assumes that cooperation is possible in the anarchic system of states, indeed regimes are by definition, instances of international cooperation.

Realism in the context of international relations encompasses a variety of theories and approaches, all of which share a belief that states are primarily motivated by the desire for military and economic power or security rather than ideals of ethics.

They assume that the international system is anarchic and that there is no authority above states capable of regulating their interactions. States must arrive at relations with other states on their own, rather than being dictated to them by some higher controlling entity. That is, no true authoritative world government exists. The realist therefore predicts that conflict should be the norm in international relations.

Contrary to this view, regime theorists say that there is cooperation despite anarchy. Often, they cite cooperation in trade, human rights and collective security, among other issues and that all these instances of cooperation are regimes.

Regimes are sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision making procedures around which actors expectations converge in a given issue area (Krasner, 1983).

This definition is intentionally broad and covers human interactions ranging from formal organizations, such as OPEC, GATT, to informal groups such as major banks during the debt crisis. Note that a regime need not neces-

sarily be composed of states or imply anything about particular government to which it relates. It is the relationship between the state, society, the market and global insertion where the use concerns international regulatory agencies.

International regimes lie outside of the control of national government and have more powers over a greater range than postal or telecommunication agreement, among others and constraint national governments. They therefore imply forms of institutionalized international collaboration distinct from government treaties, or international organizations (Faupel, 1984). Though Faupel related the concept of regime to routinised and institutionalized transactions between and among states, his definition remains rather broad and lacked the issue area orientation of Krasner. This lack of a definite conceptualization was brought to bare in his claim that the concert of Europe practicing balance of power policies could be perceived as an international regime and that the *détente* of the 1970s could have evolved into international regime if the USSR had understood or was willing to comply with the rules of the game.

Regimes must be understood as something more than temporary arrangements that change with every slight of power or interests. It is the infusion of behaviour with principles and norms that separate regime governed issues in the international system from the conventional issues guided mainly by narrow calculations of interest. The concept of regimes imply not only norms and expectations that facilitate cooperation, but a form of cooperation that is more than the following of short-term self interest (Jervis, 1983).

### Theoretical framework

The basic approaches to regime theory include the dominant liberal-derived interest based approach, the realist critique of interest based approaches and the knowledge based approaches that come from the cognitivist school of thought (Hasenclever et al., 1997). While the first two are rationalist approaches, the third is sociological. Although the realist approach dominates the field of international relations, as regime theory is by definition specifically a theory that explains international cooperation, it is a traditionally liberal concept.

The liberal school of thought of regime theory state that cooperation in anarchy is possible without a hegemon because there exist a convergence of expectations. Regimes facilitate cooperation by establishing standards of behaviour which signals to all other members that individual states are in fact cooperating. When states expect each other to cooperate, the probability of sustaining cooperation and maintaining social order within the international system is assured. In a world of sovereign states, the basic function of regimes is to coordinate state beha-

viour to achieve desired outcomes in particular issue area. A distinction must be made between regimes and agreements. Agreements are ad hoc, often 'one shot' arrangement. The purpose of regimes is to facilitate agreements and can have an impact when pareto optimal outcomes could not be achieved through uncoordinated individual calculations of self interest (Stein and Keohane, 1983). Thus, mutual cooperation becomes very rational as the sum of relatively small cooperative pay-off over time can be greater than the gain from a single attempt to exploit the opponent, followed by an endless series of mutual defections.

Robert Axelrod sees the single shot exploitation as the behaviour whereby states avoided 'tit for tat' (1984). In the prisoners dilemma, actions are based on the presupposition that present actions have future consequences and that it is therefore, in the interest of states to cooperate in the present, because, in the future, other states will defect on them (tit-for-tat strategy). Thus the theory assumes that states are concerned with absolute gains or advantages over others.

In contrast, neorealists argue that states are concerned with relative gains or advantages they gain versus the advantages of other states in the anarchic system.

The realists such as Joseph Greico (1990) propose power-based theories of regimes using hegemonic stability theory. Although, sometimes regimes theory functions as a counterweight to the hegemonic stability theory, realists also use it within regime theory itself to explain how regimes change. When used in this way, realists argue that the presence of a strong hegemon is what makes for a successful regime.

Regimes have no independent power over states, particularly great powers. As such, regimes are simply intervening variables between the real independent variable (power) and the observed outcome (cooperation). For example, Susan Strange argues that the post-second world war international organizations such as the World Bank, GATT, and the IMF are simply instruments of American grand strategy (Krasner, 1983).

In contrast to the rationalist approaches above, cognitivists critique the rationalist theories on the grounds that liberals and realists both use flawed assumptions such as, that nation-states are always and forever rational actors, that interests remain static, that different interpretations of interests and power are not possible. The cognitivists also argue that even when rationalist theories employ iterated game theories where future consequence affect present decisions, they ignore a major implication of such iteration learning. They use a post-positive methodology which believe that social institutions or actors can not be separated from their surrounding socio-political context for analytical purposes. The cognitivist approach then, is sociological or post-positive instead of rationalist. For the cognitivists, it is not only interests or power that matters but perceptions and environment as

well. The contemporary international social order is therefore a heterogeneous composition of several coexisting components, one of which is international governance without government implying obligations without hierarchical norms and rule setting process but voluntary agreements to play by a set of rules which are binding because they create convergence expectations and governed behaviour.

### **Regimes and social order in international relations**

...The same forces of autonomously calculated self interest that lie at the roof of the anarchic international system also lay the foundation for international regimes as a form of international order. The same forces that lead individuals to bind themselves together to escape the state of nature also lead states to coordinate their actions even to collaborate with one another... there are times when rational self-interested calculation leads actors to abandon independent decision making in favour of joint decision making (Stein, 1983).

In international relations, binding decisions arrived at through highly institutionalized, rule-oriented processes, are relatively rare, and such decisions do not constitute the essence of international regimes. Regimes are more like contracts, when these involve actors with long-term objectives who seek to structure their relationship in stable and mutually beneficial ways. The most important function of these arrangements is to establish a stable mutual expectations about others' patterns of behavior and to develop working relationships that will allow the parties to adopt their practices to new situations (Lowry, 1979). It should be noted here that international organizations represent purposive entities, international regimes are sets of norms and rules spelling out the range of admissible behaviour of different kinds of actors pertaining to particular sets of issues in international relations, they are issue area specific.

Robert Keohane, had posited that international regimes increase the probability of cooperation by providing information about the behaviour of others through monitoring the behaviour of members and reporting on compliance. Thus prescribing sanctions and thereby reducing the incentive to covertly defect (Keohane, 1984).

World politics lack authoritative governmental institutions and is characterized by pervasive uncertainty. Within this context, regime facilitate the making of mutual beneficial agreements among governments, so that the structural condition of anarchy does not degenerate to the Hobbesian state of nature.

International regimes generate the expectation of cooperation among members by creating iteration and the belief that interaction will continue for the foreseeable future, thereby increasing the importance of reputation and allow for the employment of complex strategies such as

the need for political regulations beyond the nation state; governance without government, in order to avoid undesirable outcomes in international and transnational relations. Other scholars also claim that international regimes can provide incentives to cooperate and deterrent to effect by altering the pay-off structure of the regime (Oye, 1986).

By institutionalizing cooperation, regimes can reduce the transaction costs of future agreements. By reducing the cost of reaching an agreement, regimes increase the likelihood of future cooperation. For instance, each round of GATT, resolve many procedural problems that do not have to be revisited in subsequent rounds, making cooperation easier and more likely.

As earlier stated, Grieco (1990) had argued that international politics currently exhibit behavioural patterns which reflect the operation of competing ordering principles, including governance by collective self regulation. Collective action or solving problematic social situations is possible among otherwise independent actors even if they are motivated by no more than the pursuit of self interest. Then, if relations by collective self regulation are realistic without reliance to the states' ultimate monopoly of force, this should be expected to happen also in a wider social setting.

A major part of international political relations has become the object of collective self regulation involving voluntary participation by states to achieve joint gains or to avoid joint losses in conflictual social situations. Social order need not be the result of spontaneous solidarity dispersed competition, or hierarchical control, it can also result from an organized concerted association (Streeck and Schmitter, 1985). This could be viewed from the operation of GATT, though from a hegemonic perspective. The industrialized states, (US, Japan, etc) have the biggest domestic markets and are each others major trading parties, they have shape GATT's rules in large part to serve their commercial goals and have the ability to offer reciprocal concessions and are strongest adherents of this positions. Even tariffs that have no intrinsic value can serve as bargaining chips with which a country can help to satisfy its partners need for reciprocity without hurting its own economic interests.

However, the major purpose here is to maintain the balance of advantages in trading terms. Apart from the GATT experience, many other areas of regimes exist such as the nuclear non proliferation regimes, regimes for the protection of the ozone layer, etc. It also covers formal international organizations which facilitate collaboration without compelling obligations such as UNESCO and some other agencies of the UN. Looking at the UN Security Council (SC), its' call for collective security sanctions against Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait and putting in place a monitoring and supervising machinery, moreover, after Iraq's defeat, the SC ordered the destruction of weapons installations in Iraq which was implemented under

its purview. This is a clear case of governance without government, a governmental body of an incipient world minimal state.

The EEC is another case in point where hierarchical supranational policy making is common. Very often, agricultural policies are initiated in Brussels while sovereign states are fully enmeshed in the joint decision trap to the extent that there is no alternative but to seek to influence the community policies.

The basic idea is that conflict tends to be pervasive in international relations and that international regimes could be conceived of as social institutions which regulate conflict between states by constraining their behaviour through the observation of norms and rules in their dealing with disputed objects.

### Basic necessities

The background here is to highlight the problem in the analysis of regimes. While the influence of norms at different times shapes the programs, it is the attributes of such programs that provide the evidence of their changing relative importance. The duty of regime analysis will therefore include the explanation of the formation, persistence and demise of international regimes, the attempt to account for regimes properties and their changes and to determine regimes consequences and effects.

The first duty is to investigate the determinants of regime formation as well as the determinants of regime persistence and demise. International regimes can be approached in terms of the concept of imposed order. Keohane's Hegemonic theory is used here to account for regime formation, the theory of hegemonic stability, imposed orders (compulsion, e.g. colonialism) differ from spontaneous orders (e.g. League of nations) in the sense that they are fostered deliberately by dominant powers or consortia of dominant actors. In short, imposed orders are deliberately established by dominant actors which succeed in getting others to conform to the requirements of these orders through some combination of coercion, compulsion and the manipulation of incentives.

However, overt hegemony occurs when the dominant actor openly and explicitly articulates institutional arrangements and compel subordinate actors to conform to them, e.g. Colonialism. On the other hand de facto imposition exist when the dominant actor is able to promote institutional arrangements favourable to itself through various forms of leadership and the manipulation of incentives, e.g. Nigerian activities in the formation of ECOMOG

Researchers may choose what could be labeled a microscopic perspective on their object in attempt to understated why international regimes arises in certain issue areas and not in others. They also have the option of adopting a macroscopic perspective, where all the international regimes within the international system are

made the depended variables of their research. This ambiguity is not restricted to regime formation and demise but also affect regime consequences. A better understanding of the conditions under which regime formation or demise can occur which is a prerequisite for reconstructing the forces behind the overall process of institutionalization in relations. The cognitivist have challenged the dominance of the power based and the interest based approaches to regime formation, persistence and demise. They criticize the realists and utilitarian for not taking into account the pervasive ambiguity of reality and consequently lay emphasis on the factors such as perception, knowledge and ideology (Haggard and Simon, 1987).

Jonsson responded to this by attempting to explain that contemporary cognitive theory depicting man as an intuitive scientist who uses various heuristic devices to make sense of the complex signals emanating from his environment, is capable of guiding empirical research on international cooperation and regimes (1993).

Regime analysis has however been too state-centric, ignoring the impact of domestic politics on both the creation and the maintenance of international regimes. To get hold of the domestic forces of regime formation, we must first establish the characteristic of regime conducive foreign policy. Only then can we study the domestic variables affecting the probability that such a foreign policy will actually be pursued (Zurn, 1993).

A good defence of contextualizing a theory of regime formation is the one by Krasner that human rights issues do not meet the conditions for an application of liberal cooperation theory because they are not instances of market failures (1993).

An attempt to understand the factors that determine specific properties of regimes with regard to their content and substances, the actors related attributes of a regime such as its scope and its strength which has to do with the overall compliance with regime rules must be analysed.

In order to understand why compliance mechanisms and monitoring provisions function well in some regimes and not in others, regime effectiveness is exerted by factors such as the content of norms and rules of the regimes. One relevant hypothesis that applies to regimes properties is the hegemonic stability which predicts the emergence of liberal economic regimes. However, one way of accounting for regimes properties is by explaining regime content in terms of the preferences of particular actors as could be seen in Krasner's proposition that human rights regimes reflect the preference and values of the most powerful states (1993). Interest in regime substance is not aroused by just any differences among regimes but by the variation in particular scope of this rules. However, the proposition that the strongest actors determine the rules of the game can sometimes be misleading. The reason is that hypothesis tracing institu-

tional features to some actors preferences, the precise nature of which is often concealed from the contemporary observer have only a very moderate predictive value and thus are by no means optimal.

On the other hand, hypothesis seeking to account for differences in particular properties of regimes include the contractualist explanation of the principle of institutional membership in terms of the function the regime is to serve whether coordination, collaboration, or cartelization (Keohane, 1993). Thus, the variables such as contribution of power, number of actors, and presence of an epistemic community affects the style of institutional learning that prevails in a regime, its scope and the stringency of its rules.

Regime variations is accounted for by many institutional variables such as geographic scope, status of NGOs, the revenue base, form of participation of members in the regimes decision making procedures and the range of issues covered by the regime (Hass, 1990).

However, the impact of regimes in ensuring social order in international relations is best demonstrated at the unit level of analysis with a focus on situations in which compliance with regime rules is inconvenient for government (Hurrel, 1993). A better understanding of regime effects can be made by turning to individual regime and seeking to ascertain their effect. Some of the consequences of regimes include change in actor's cognitions of issues of beliefs, change in actors capabilities, from goal attainment to fulfillment of efficiency of distributive justice (Rittberger, 1993).

It seems safe to conclude that regimes effects do not depend only on regime content but on the strength of the regime as well. When actors constantly disregard regime prescriptions, the regime can not be expected to have great effect, where as, reasonable effect on a given variable such as goal attainment are possible in the case of high degree of rule compliance.

## Conclusion

This discourse has highlighted a number of major characteristics of the international regimes. International regime is interpreted as a device to facilitate the making of substantive agreement in world politics by providing rules, norms, principles and procedures that help actors to overcome barriers to agreements. Regimes constitute an increasingly significant element of an international order, and one important component of envisioned world governance without a world state and therefore make it easier for actors to realize their interest collectively.

The problem of public good affects the supply of international regimes as indicated by the hegemonic stability theory but can ameliorate the problems of transactions cost and information imperfection that hinder effective decentralized responses to problems of providing public

goods.

Suffice it to say that with international regimes, actors will have the incentives to coordinate their behaviours, implicitly or explicitly, in order to achieve greater collective benefits without reducing the utility of any unit and thereby ensuring social order in the international system.

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