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Foreword

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I was greatly encouraged by the present proposal to relaunch the concentrated dialogue of the British Committee for the Theory of International Politics, and by the positive response of the many leading scholars listed in Barry Buzan's article 'The English School: an Underexploited Resource in IR'.

The working methods of the original Committee are well summarized in Buzan's article, and those methods and the scope of its enquiries are described more fully in Tim Dunne's most useful history of the English School of IR, *Inventing International Society*.[1] There is thus no need to look back over them here.

The Committee's interdisciplinary composition, with practitioners alongside academics, exploratory discussions groping after theory, and the readiness of its members to be influenced by each other, did help to produce significant results, and can as Buzan suggests be usefully adapted to further examination of IR theory and the gap between it and the current practices of the system. The contribution of practitioners is less visible because they do not normally publish papers on IR theory. In selecting future practitioners it will be well to remember that the role of conventional diplomacy—Foreign Ministries, embassies and so on—is declining with the development of technology and the transformation to an ever less Westphalian system. Future study groups will need to extend the range of practitioner experience beyond diplomacy to cover economic globalization and other effects of increasing interdependence.

When we come to the intellectual agenda of the study groups, it is clear that they will have to ask themselves new questions. Buzan's proposal lists six themes, which cover a very adequate range of subjects and academic disciplines, and enable future working groups to start from where the work of the Committee and subsequent English School scholars has reached.

From the first the Committee focused its attention on the structure and the practices of the European system, which Hedley Bull led us to understand as an anarchical society. We noted that in its worldwide expansion, its rules and institutions and its standards of civilization remained essentially European. Some of us were inclined to treat the existing society as unique, the only one worth studying, and also to view it as the implementation in practice of what came to be called the Westphalian theory of absolute and juridically equal independences. Butterfield and Bull were less interested in other systems, especially those whose members were unable to conduct an independent foreign policy.

[1] Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

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Martin Wight and I were the unhappiest about this limitation. We felt that in our search for a theory we needed also to study systems where some or most of the political entities were in varying degrees dependent. He and I wanted especially to discuss hegemonies and suzerain systems, where partially dependent states retained nominal independence and a high degree of autonomy in practice. Wight used to argue that the European system was what we call Westphalian only for brief periods, and was mainly a succession of hegemonies. It seemed to me that once you took to looking at the structure and the practice of past hegemonial and imperial systems, the worldwide one of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ceased to seem so unique and so anarchical, and appeared as one of a set of historical systems; and indeed one with pronounced hegemonial characteristics, quite a way along the spectrum of possible patterns. However the Committee did not get around to serious study of hegemonial and suzerain systems.

These ideas or hunches, and the groundwork laid by the Committee's discussions and papers on other systems, led me to begin the compilation of my *Evolution of International Society*.[2] I had much help and advice from Butterfield and Bull, who in our discussions both recognized that the comparison with past systems could throw light on the present one. The popular *Zeitgeist* of the decolonization age relegated hegemonies and empires to 'the dustbin of history', and asserted that Westphalian independent statehood was the only politically acceptable formula. So it was good to find that nevertheless a number of younger scholars in Britain and elsewhere were producing serious comparative studies of past hegemonial and imperial systems.

Most significantly there is the work of Barry Buzan and Richard Little. Papers like 'A Long Look Back' and 'Reconceptualizing International Relations' effectively developed the wider perspective that Wight and I considered essential. Their monumental new book *International Systems in World History*[3] refashions the study of international relations: taking it back to its very beginnings in the indispensable contacts between hunter-gatherer bands, and spelling out a coherent and comprehensive theory for the whole set of recorded and deducible practices. Notably their splendid Chapter 17, 'What World History Tells Us about International Theory', and their last summarizing chapter seem to me the fulfilment of what Wight and I had in mind as a necessary basis for further study. The whole book, and especially those chapters, will surely provide a milestone text for the proposed future discussions.

By now the battle against ahistorical and eurocentric limitations on international theory has largely been won. In Buzan and Little's vivid phrase, IR studies are out of the Westphalian ghetto. But 'anarchophilia' (to use their term) is still with us; especially the view that the only system relevant to the contemporary world is relations between independent states. The nominal constitution of the system, as reflected in the UN and international law, is indeed some two hundred separate and sovereign states. But in fact the practice of the system has moved far from the Westphalian assumptions.

Among the general questions which future working groups should address, we may note the following. Is the practice of the system best described as a collective hegemony of the most developed Western states? Or is it rather like a series of

[2] Adam Watson, *Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge,1992).
[3] Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

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concentric circles, with a core group centred round the United States dealing with a periphery of failed and incompetent states and quasi-states as well as other more independent ones? How far is the collective hegemony, or the core, impelled by both prudence and moral obligation to aid and intervene in those states that cannot manage for themselves? Is this aid and intervention a net benefit to the periphery and the world as a whole, even though it is not positive enough to satisfy Western publics and not always carried out wisely or well? What lines of continuity, and what differences, can we see between present practice and earlier colonial and trusteeship regimes and attempts to impose Western standards on China and elsewhere? What changes will the development and diffusion of technology bring to relations between the wide range of political entities in the global system?

Certainly the most conspicuous aspect of hegemonial intervention, namely peace-making and peacekeeping where practice has so obviously outrun Westphalian theory, needs more study. Non-intervention, once considered a cornerstone of international order, is now widely condemned as the failure of the core to meet its international responsibilities. But military intervention is occasional and localized, mainly concerned with warfare within peripheral states. Moreover, we can discern serious attempts to revise both IR theory and the legitimacy of present practices in this area. Already in 1984 Dame Rosalyn Higgins, now the British representative at the International Court of Justice at the Hague, wrote that the task of international lawyers on intervention was 'not to go on repeating the rhetoric of dead events which no longer accord with reality, but to try to assist the political leaders to identify what is the new [i.e. post-Westphalian] consensus'.[4] We also see the great powers reshaping their armed forces away from conflict with each other and towards collective intervention in the periphery.

More significant, I think, and much less analysed by existing IR theory, are two worldwide, sustained and growing fields of interaction: economic; and cultural, including standards of civilization. Above all, it seems to me that IR theoretical analysis of the role of economic factors is still inadequate. One dramatic insight of Buzan and Little's book is the major role played by economic and cultural exchanges in knitting the world together. This has been so from the interaction between hunter-gatherer bands before states existed, through the trade between Rome, India and China to the economically motivated global expansion of the European system.

The more developed core societies need a healthy global economy. To maintain it they provide continuous worldwide coordinated help of various kinds to the periphery. Donor states do so both directly and through international agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund which they control. The core operates a huge and still somewhat experimental centrifuge to the periphery. It provides material goods, or money to buy them; technology, training and know-how; and markets in core economies for goods from the periphery. More than half the transfer of resources is purveyed or mediated by private enterprise; and therefore so long as the peripheral states retain enough effective autonomy to set the terms, it needs to offer benefits to both parties.

[4] Rosalyn Higgins, 'Intervention and International Law', in Hedley Bull (ed.), *Intervention in World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 42.

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The mainly Western donors demand in return the observance of their standards of civilization—human rights, democracy, social justice and the environment. These standards are too difficult for many peripheral states where the practical alternatives are firm government or chaos. Even so, peripheral governments increasingly observe Western standards as the price of aid. Will these trends with their distributive overtones continue? Or can newer states expect to become weaned from their present dependence? How far is the influence of the great Asian powers—China, Japan, India—in the hegemonial concert likely to grow, making standards of civilization, and especially concepts of justice, less exclusively Western? These are issues of special concern to policy-oriented working groups.

Today's collective hegemony makes the world more integrated and safer, and less anarchic. How far does this process limit the freedom of action of all states, even the largest? How far is it eroding, and might it continue to erode, not only sovereignty but the basic premise of Westphalian theory, the state itself?

Western aid and hegemonial intervention have both ethical and profitable motives. Aid and globalization, and the hunger of the periphery for more equably distributed prosperity, provide a lever for the West to promote its cultural values. This lever, by which economic practice moves the Western cultural and ethical agenda, is perhaps the greatest dynamic of the contemporary international system. Can we say that this has been true since decolonization, though the picture was obscured by the strategic preoccupations of the Cold War? Even so, hegemonial authority and globalization still lack legitimacy. A future enquiry might well go beyond the limits of theory to examine how the present tentative structure of international society can be made both more effective and more legitimate. Incorporating this pervasive practice into a general IR theory is surely a major task for the reconvened English School. I hope particular attention will be paid to the role of economics and culture in these wider senses.

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