QUESTIONING GEOPOLITICS

Political Projects in a Changing World-System

Edited by
Georgi M. Derluguian and Scott L. Greer

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Series Foreword

Immanuel Wallerstein

The Political Economy of the World-System Section of the American Sociological Association was created in the 1970s to bring together a small but growing number of social scientists concerned with analyzing the process of world-systems in general, and our modern one in particular.

Although organizationally located within the American Sociological Association, the PEWS Section bases its work on the relative insignificance of the traditional disciplinary boundaries. For that reason it has held an annual spring conference, open to and drawing participation from persons who work under multiple disciplinary labels.

For PEWS members, not only is our work unidisciplinary, but the study of the world-system is not simply another "specialty" to be placed beside so many others. It is instead a different "perspective" with which to analyze all the traditional issues of the social sciences. Hence, the themes of successive PEWS conferences are quite varied and cover a wide gamut of topics. What they share is the sense that the isolation of political, economic, and sociocultural "variables" is a dubious enterprise, that all analysis must be simultaneously historical and systemic, and that the conceptual bases of work in the historical social sciences must be rethought.

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Introduction: Repetition, Variation, and Transmutation as Scenarios for the Twenty-first Century

Georgi M. Derluguian and Walter L. Goldfrank

The twenty-first century opens with uncertainties. On the one hand, the world scene continues to look familiar except for the surprising gap in the sites that were the Soviet bloc and the Communist alternative. On the other hand, the breakdown of the Soviet pole, which was long anticipated by the world-systems and geopolitical theories (see Collins, 1978 and 1995), removed the major organizing tension and a large amount of attached meaning from the world as we knew it. The United States remained by far the most powerful state in almost every respect, but it was challenged domestically and internationally to reconfirm its hegemonic status. The main set of the post-1945 interstate institutions such as the UN, the EU, IMF, or NATO were called to the formal word of their charters after decades of relatively quiet subordinate existence. The contradictory notions of "competitiveness" and managing chaos became the order of the day in the centers of world power. Meantime, a larger part of the world population found itself trapped in areas of chronic turmoil and seemingly hopeless marginalization within the world economy. New economic centers arose in East Asia to be hailed as the newest model and the prospective core of the world-economy before they suddenly stumbled in a crisis whose causes were as contested as much else in the contemporary world. All this was occurring amid the major technological and organizational restructuring of the world's production base that led to a substantial increase in the mobility of capital, information, and people across state jurisdictions.

The sum of these transformations came to be called globalization. Nobody earnestly doubts that a major transformation is under way, but there is little agreement on the extent of change, its key areas and prime movers, or the

eventual outcomes.We may, however, find at least some agreement in considering globalization an historical instance of regime change. The major theme of globalization debates is indeed the reconstitution of the norms, practices, and institutions (i.e., the regime) that structure the intersecting fields of world power relations, the world-economy, and geoculture. People create and impose the norms and institutions in order to make their actions predictable and therefore to minimize uncertainty. Regimes are inherently conflictual processes because of the differences in the perceived interests and positions of various groups within the world-system. The historical proportion of conflict and cohesion differs significantly over time, forming a cycle that, regarding the world configurations of power, we call hegemonic.

Conflicts and pressures increase during the more chaotic phases of regime transition before a dominant pattern can emerge and become accepted by the majority of actors who would consider the new order to be in their common interest. This always involves some coercion and disempowering directed against those groups that benefit less from the new regime. Yet bare coercion cannot work over longer periods of time without some consent of those who are coerced, and a wider consensus of those middle groups who willingly participate in the order. Machiavelli realized this clearly. Antonio Gramsci's term hegemony embraced precisely such a combination of coercion, consent, and consensus that he considered crucial for the exercise of social power (Gramsci, 1971: 57–58 and 80). These conditions cannot be met without the dominant state or social group within the system being able to support its coercive powers with a sense of moral and intellectual leadership plus the judicial control and the ability to redirect the flows of the means of payment (see especially Arrighi, 1994; Gill, 1990; Keohane, 1984).

It is a difficult combination to achieve and maintain. It always requires a fundamental restructuring of the historical system that evolves continuously and therefore does not allow simple reproduction of past hegemonic regimes. In our view hegemonic order existed in the modern world-system only periodically when the leading state (the United States after 1945, Britain after 1815, and Holland in 1648) acquired the undisputed capability to advance its vision of world governance and present itself as the model for emulation. In each epoch there existed alternative hegemonic projects as well: Spanish counterreformation imperialism against the Dutch, French absolutism against the British, German state corporatism and Soviet socialism against the United States. The defeats of alternative projects (which, notably, always threatened to subsume the capitalist world-economy and the interstate system of sovereign jurisdictions into a directly administered world-empire) were major formative steps in the constitution of new hegemonic order. The key question therefore is whether the current globalization represents the most recent defining moment in the creation of new world hegemony and structuring another era of expansion of the capitalist world-economy.

This volume brings together a very diverse group of authors who explore the

ideological, political, and organizational aspects of globalization. Although some of us do not explicitly pursue the concept of hegemonic transitions, we agreed that this angle helps to focus our explorations and avoid the methodological pitfall that Arthur Stinchcombe once wryly called "softheadedness on the future" (Stinchcombe, 1982). The current moment differs from the past instances of hegemonic transitions in the substantially higher degree of rationalization attained within the modern world-system. The evolving social scholarship is itself a historical result and an integral part of systemic rationalization. The future is unpredictable in principle because the social universe is an open complex system. Inevitably there will be the factors that we presently fail to recognize. Almost certainly there operate the countertendencies that substantially meliorate and may eventually cancel the trends that a current public fad proclaims the Hope (the Fear) of our times. The future itself is affected by our collective wills, conflicts, and decisions. Notwithstanding these humbling warnings, it is the responsibility of social scientists to make meaningful statements regarding the arguments that are being advanced in public debates and outline the historical options we are facing.

We use globalization as a common reference point. We doubt that it is an analytically useful term. It is rather the framework and the central marker of the debate about the present state of the world and its future trajectory. This word emerged in the last decade out of the intellectual confusion that was set by the demise of the two powerful and powerfully organizing oppositions—capitalism versus socialism; modernization (whether capitalist or state socialist) versus underdevelopment. Globalization itself is the direct successor of modernization in its bold promise—indeed the demand to spread the Western institutions of market economy and liberal democracy over the rest of the world. In the end (for this will presumably be the end) the world should become a unified and uniform field of isomorphous democratic institutions that would mediate lasting peace among states as well as social groups, and of self-leveling markets that would ensure steady economic growth.

From this angle globalization is evidently a programmatic statement rather than a spontaneous process driven presumably by natural technological progress. It is also a heavily Western-centric program with strong disciplining mechanisms—there are no reasonable alternatives left to making oneself (be it states, social groups, or individuals) competitive and compatible with the proposed global world. The prevalent program of globalization means a return to the original vision of Woodrow Wilson. Wilsonianism was rejected in a post-1918 world torn apart by the economic chaos, the conservatism of European imperial powers, the pressures of socialist movements, and the reactionary challenges of fascist states. It was no more practical in the stable geopolitical and ideological bipolarity of the Cold War. Is the Wilsonian vision about to experience a belated triumph almost a century later and, if so, what could be the actual configuration of such a regime? Will it be an unchallenged *Pax Americana* made possible by

the set of alliances and international institutions forged during the Cold War, in the earlier phase of the U. S. hegemony? It is certainly the intent of the U. S. ruling elite and, more widely, the dominant assumption based on the direct extrapolation of the political, economic, and ideological situation of the 1990s.

The prospect of neo-Wilsonian revival, however plausible it may look at the moment, is problematic for the very same reasons—it is so far an unproven political intent, an ideological assumption, and a simple analytical extrapolation of the fleeting situation following the Soviet defeat in the Cold War. One of the lessons of the Soviet demise warns us against simple extrapolations and taking ideological intentions for granted. Some time around 1975 Brezhnev's USSR looked very formidable to its friends and foes alike; it was scoring symbolic victories in the wake of the U. S. defeat in Indochina; it benefited from the detente in Europe; revolutions in Portugal and its fomer colonies; it looked appealing against the disarray and poverty of China in the twilight of Maoism; and let us not forget that the Soviet populations seemed very content with their stable lives and growing prosperity. It is not to say that the renewed American hegemony along Wilsonian lines of a unipolar and politically isomorphous world is totally impossible. Nevertheless, it is presently no more than an assumed possibility and a political project.

The arguments for globalization commonly stress two major processes: democratization and the rapidly increasing unity of the world, tied together by the transborder flows of information, goods, capital, and people. We agree that democratization and unification of the world are real and important trends. Yet we also believe that both processes are no less a challenge to the liberal world order than its foundations. In a world imagined as a global village (rather, given the rates of urbanization, a sprawling global town) worldwide democracy cannot be separated from worldwide equality. Historically, the biggest challenge to liberal ideology was being taken at its word by the impatient masses. (The same was even more true of Communist ideology and, incidentally, became a major factor in the demise of socialist states.) The future of neo-Wilsonianism hinges on its ability to ensure at least a plausible appearance of sustained and sustainable economic growth in the areas whose populations expect that the demise of old developmentalist dictatorships (of a socialist or the Third World nationalist kind) would be followed by renewed prosperity, personal safety, and popular access to the benefits of globalization.

The major doubt is whether there are resources sufficient to cover with investments what now amounts to the entire globe, including places like India, the former Soviet bloc, or Latin America. A closely related doubt concerns the new and yet to be specified institutions that would substitute for the largely extinct traditional mechanisms of community control and welfare. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a majority of the planet's population are no longer peasants but dwellers of peripheral slums, depressed Rust Belts (the biggest found in the former Soviet bloc), and those pockets of marginalization within the core that Americans call inner cities. The disorganized street crime,

addictions, and social decay could no longer be contained by the weakening states of these areas. In most places the immediate outcome of the demise of state-bound developmentalism was the cannibalistic privatization of state assets by corrupt bureaucratic elites and agile intermediaries who, wisely enough, turned their loot into the mobile form of money capital rather than risk fixed investment. This went hand in hand with the privatizations of state coercive apparatuses that competed with the purely criminal violent entrepreneurs, domestically and increasingly at the world level. This was no less true of post-apartheid South Africa than post-communist Russia or Mexico and Turkey. What can contain this disorder? Can we expect the re-empowering and re-ordering of the previous states, or their substitution with something else?

At a sober look the emerging global town looks more like Victorian London or Manchester rather than anything techno-futuristic. In many respects the global social picture of today resembles the situation created by the earlier industrialization in the European core states. Back then the problem could be alleviated by colonial expansion and emigration overseas, but the principal solution found at the time was domestic, thoroughly liberal, and essentially three-fold. It included the extension of suffrage to the propertyless classes; the incorporation of the immediate socialist demands into the state welfare reforms; and the taming and recasting of subversive nationalism into state patriotism (Wallerstein, 1996a). This produced the miracle of the pre-1914 liberal state and belle epoque, although the same enormous strengthening of the state's reach and capacity along with patriotic ideology have also made possible the horrors of twentieth-century warfare. Is the core's liberal achievement of the nineteenth century reproducible on a world scale? In 1917 Woodrow Wilson believed so. Today the outcome still looks very uncertain.

What if neo-Wilsonianism fails again? Presently there is no coherent alternative from the Left comparable to the old socialist project. Resembling the European situation before 1848, most antisystemic protests today are channeled into diffuse and largely irrational forms, including various forms of crime, assaults on the immediate conditions of life, and what has come to be generically called the fundamentalist revival, the ethnic conflict, and race problem. Such erratic pressures are disruptive, but they are not conducive to any positive systemic transformation. There is, of course, the lively universe of new social movements (many of which indeed revive the old causes of European movements from before the 1848 institutionalization of the "Old" Left, possibly with the environmentalists inheriting the scope and élan of abolitionists, and the NGOs becoming the newest missionaries to peripheries). The strength of new social movements is their plasticity, focus on specific issues, professionalization of their staff, and the ability to work with the private and governmental funding agencies. The same is no less the limit on the overall coherence and political strength of the movement sector that often finds itself a dependent force bound to national states and evidently outpaced by globalization. Soberly, the global civil society is today a fuzzy program bordering on utopian vision that is un-

likely to coalesce into a practical alternative without a dramatic leap like the movement watersheds of 1848 or 1968 (Steinmetz, 1994, Tarrow, 1994; Tilly, 1995).

There remains the conservative alternative of renewed multisided Cold War famously espoused by Samuel Huntington (1996a). His argument was subjected to devastating intellectual and moral critiques that, however, could not invalidate the political project. Huntington envisioned a world order of multiple exclusions organized around a few rival blocs whose rationale and internal cohesion are expressed in the ideological terms of civilizations. Unlike Huntington or, conversely, the extreme cultural constructivists, we think that civilizations are neither primordial bedrocks of history nor pure products of collective imagination. Civilizations are information networks and comprehensive sets of social practices that primarily evolved around the dominant religions in past world-systems and functioned as their ideological "cement" (Chase-Dunn and Hall, 1997).

Today there is only one civilization, if one wishes to use the term, the civilization of capitalist modernity. Civilizations in plural are particularist claims to the past made for themselves and assigned to others by the continuously reconstituted status groups within the modern world-system in their positioning within the political and economic hierarchy. In this sense Huntington's conservative project is neither unprecedented nor unimaginable. Racism formulated in civilizational terms was the inevitable reverse side of the nineteenth-century liberal belief in universal laws and values necessary to excuse the enduring inequalities of a modern world-system. Civilizational racism was openly central to the ideology of industrial imperialism generated during the British hegemonic cycle and, after 1945 more implicitly, remained the underpinning of the American and Soviet views of modernization and non-European backwardness.

The "clash of civilizations" is an organizing framework for consolidating the world power within a few internally disciplined civilizational blocs. It is also an invitation to eternal geopolitical struggle, for civilizational distinctions are presumably eternal and irreconcilable—which directly leads to a rather dreadful proposition whether another bout of world wars is possible. This question is the center of ongoing debate closely related to the main theme of this volume.

For well over twenty years now, world-systems scholars have been studying hegemonic cycles as one feature of the reproduction and evolution of the capitalist totality. Various economic and political processes have been suggested as causally relevant in accounting for one or more of these cycles, such as technological and organizational imitation of the dominant power by potential contenders, institutional rigidity or obsolescence of the hegemon, foreign investment by the hegemon to the detriment of its own productive base, imperial overstretch, and the rising costs of policing the interstate system. But however crucial these processes have been, an additional process stands out both as an empirical regularity and as a causal necessity: world war.

World war, and by that we mean war involving all the major core powers, has been understood as a crucial mechanism for the transition from one hegemon

to another. In the seventeenth century, the Thirty Years' War paved the way from Hapsburg to Dutch hegemony; at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Napoleonic Wars sealed Britain's triumph; and in the twentieth century, what we narcissistically call World Wars I and II were the crucibles in which the United States forged its dominance.

The conception of hegemonic cycles entailing the thirty-year "world wars" was first enunciated in the spring of 1975 when Immanuel Wallerstein presented an embryonic version at a Harvard colloquium. He later published a more refined account (Wallerstein, 1983). In fact, at the same moment that the 1970s global economic recession was leading to a revival of interest in long economic cycles (long waves, Kondratiev cycles), the relative international decline of the United States after Vietnam generated increasing interest in hegemonic or "political" cycles. (For a good summary see Goldstein, 1988). During the 1980s the decline thesis became the focus of considerable controversy well beyond the world-systems community of scholars. This controversy was sparked especially by the publication of Paul Kennedy's bestseller *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (Kennedy, 1987).

In the 1990s, the collapse of the USSR has calmed some of the fears of imminent nuclear war, at least of the all-out variety. Meanwhile, renewed economic vigor in the United States, combined with stagnation in Japan, economic dynamism in China, and the Asian crash of 1998 have cast doubt on the idea previously advanced by many analysts that Japan was on the verge of replacing the United States as the global hegemon. Yet for all the mixed signals of the 1990s, the relation between hegemonic transition and world war has continued to receive attention. One need not be a pessimist to assert that it is perhaps the single most important issue in the study of hegemonic cycles. Indeed, if world war is a necessary mechanism of hegemonic transition, as it appears to have been in the past, then given the present destructive capacity of the most sophisticated weapons, we must hope there will be no more such transitions. However, some of the other processes associated with hegemonic decline and transition do appear to be continuing (Goldfrank, 1999).

In current world-systems writing about the ongoing hegemonic transition, we can discern three scenarios. For shorthand purposes, we may call them repetition, variation, and transmutation. In the repetitionist view, articulated most recently by Christopher Chase-Dunn and Bruce Podobnik (1995), hegemonic dominance gives way first to shared governance by a consortium of leading core powers, then to increasingly conflictful rivalry, and then necessarily to a world war (or "core war") from which a new hegemonic power emerges.

The primary expositor of the variationist view has been Giovanni Arrighi (1994). According to him, each previous hegemonic cycle has entailed a major evolutionary transformation in the organizational scale of the world-system. The current one is likely to decouple economic from geopolitical power, reprising the sixteenth-century hegemonic combination of Genoese bankers and Hapsburg armies with Japanese bankers and the U. S. military ruling the world. Arrighi is