Plural International Relations in a Divided World
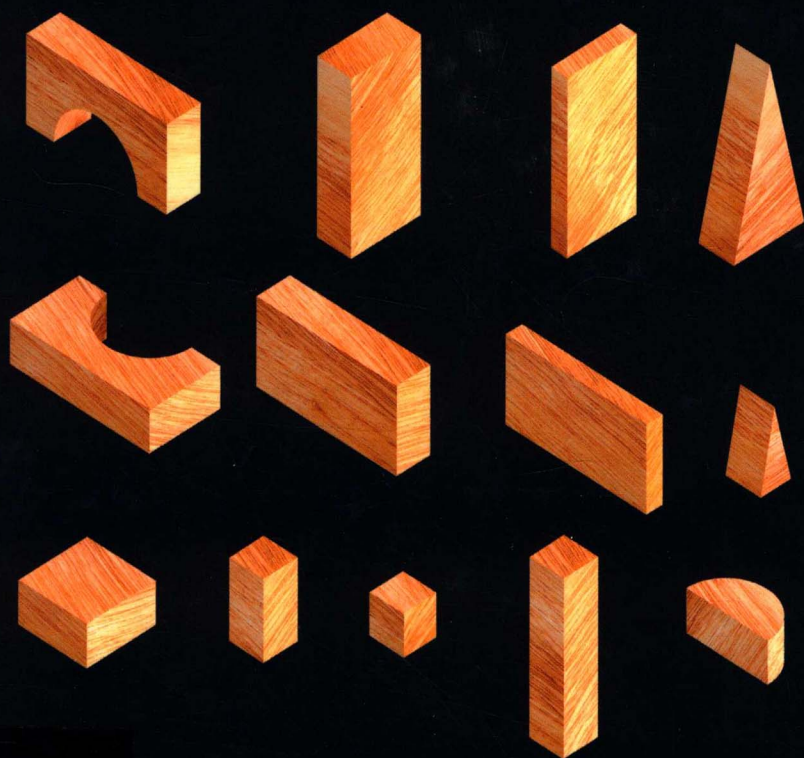
Stephen Chan

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Preface[1]

When James Der Derian tells the story, he is not given to embellishment, but his eyes twinkle.[2] He had persuaded senior US military officers, Generals, to participate in a war game, a simulation – to which they could apply all their standard sophisticated methodologies. They had to devise a strategy that would defeat the enemy. Except that, in this case, the enemy was amorphous, had no geographical homeland, no measurable military throw-weight, and did not seem to have readily understood values and interests. After much effort over many days the Generals pleaded to be allowed to fight a conventional enemy – one with a homeland they could attack, one with values and interests they could threaten, one with conventional stockpiles of weapons they could degrade. They could not chase shadows.

In the wake of 9/11, the US and NATO found an enemy with a homeland – Afghanistan. Later, they found another – Iraq. But in the wake of Afghanistan and Iraq, with the rise of Al-Qaeda and other groups, and more recently ISIS, the strategies for dealing with enemies that are not nations, with confessional beliefs that are not 'rational' values, with suicide bombers without calculations of cost or loss, with alliances that seem to have no headquarters, the West has fought itself to an expensive standstill. Even when the Western strategists adapt to the idea of an enemy without a fixed geographical base, the idea that something like Games Theory has no use – because the other side (if indeed it is one other side) behaves outside of rational expectations and, above all, calculations – is confounding.

In a real way, the Cold War was comforting because it gave real certainties. There was a Soviet Union; there was a China; each had armed forces and armaments not unlike one's own; each had state

interests and strategic interests which were recognizable. One might disagree with their values – to the point where no interrogation was made of them, except that they were opposed to one's own, and indeed the Others' values were denigrated and often demonized – but they were values that emanated from a certain guaranteed space that helped give them strength; but the very fact that there was space meant vulnerabilities, targetability, the possibilities of assault and victory.

Iran was also a state when, in the wake of its 1979 revolution, it held US diplomats hostage and began a campaign of threats against the West. The problem was that its rhetoric was somehow indecipherable, i.e. it was oppositional but religious, it gave no signals of negotiating space and therefore seemed one-dimensional, it seemed comic book but was heavily armed, it seemed implosive and dysfunctional but fought against Iraq – an Iraq spurred by the West to 'test' the new Iranian regime, possibly weaken it – with modern weaponry and strategic sense. It has taken until 2015 for the US to come to some negotiated accommodation with an 'irrational' state that, all the same, was seen as capable of developing nuclear weapons.

This conjunction – the command of sophisticated technology and sophisticated strategy, not to mention public relations and electronic communication – means that it is impossible to say that anything or anyone is 'mad'. If 'mad', there is a lot of method in it – and it is a difficult analysis to sustain to say that someone is mad in intent but sanely rational in method, persistence, resilience and, finally, negotiation.

The purpose of this book is to set out the 'rationality' behind many parts of International Relations today that have been either dismissed as irrational or declared an enigma because there were no investigative or methodological tools that were, in the Western lexicon, fit for the purpose of understanding, or even fully explaining, them. It will look at the rise of today's international system – but also forms of resistance to it, or forms of accommodation with resistance in reserve – and it will look at key parts of the world and their thinking about and towards the international. It will concentrate on thought within states, but also begin a disquisition about thought outside of state structures. In doing so, it undermines the basic premise of International Relations as a discipline – one that reflects the practice of statecraft – that states anchor the system because they accept the system; and that non-state actors are not part of the state system. But this is what the Generals in the opening paragraph to this Preface also thought.

I have been writing on these themes for some time. They have only recently entered the inner suburbs of the International Relations metropole, and that at the hands of better (and better organized) scholars than me. I am happy about this. Simultaneously, there is the danger of a new paradigm, new 'school', or new fashion developing that prioritizes, like Postcolonial Studies has done, the philosophies, virtues and scriptures of the 'Other' – so that, in opposition to the West, or at least as a remedy to Western domination of thought, a vast array of 'Other' thought is suddenly paraded by progressive International Relations scholars who are not linguists, theologians, or who have never been near the locales whence they source their new 'thought'. There is the additional danger that the new thought thus paraded is seen as self-contained – whereas, like Western thought, it has participated in multiple miscegenations in multiple eras of globalization. This book is thus about, among other things, how things are different but also about how things mix. Deciphering difference, and deciphering the right ingredients in the right quantity for the right mixture are new disciplinary skills which International Relations does not yet have. This book gives some warning signs at least that these skills are necessary.

This has been a long journey. The late R.J. Vincent, just before his unexpected and untimely death in 1990, encouraged me – as did, in his curious off-hand way, Chris Brown. 'Just keep doing it', was his advice. Vivienne Jabri provided huge moral encouragement back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the material that has found its way into this book intruded upon my life. John Groom simply said (wisely), 'if you're going to do this, keep up your Africanist work as well' – meaning I would have something to stand upon when Western hegemony wiped the multicultural theoretical ground from under my feet.

John Groom played a major role in organizing the European Consortium of Political Research Standing Group on International Relations convention in Heidelberg in 1992. Some 600 papers were delivered, of which only two, mine and that of James Piscatori, were on non-Western themes – although James Rosenau, having just then published his work on turbulence, came to our session and offered words of encouragement.[3]

At the 1995 ECPR Standing Group convention in Paris, John Groom's organizing committee offered me four sessions. He said he could not give me any more because of the need to maintain equity among the different convenors. I had speakers for seven. My co-convenor, Osmo Apunen, arranged for the Finnish embassy to

provide us with its premises for the extra three, and it was clear that interest at least, if not expertise, was beginning to be generated in what was still regarded as an off-beat project.[4]

As the project entered its mid-point development, Roland Bleiker,[5] Naeem Inayatullah, David Blaney,[6] Mustapha Pasha[7] and Christine Sylvester[8] became hugely empathetic colleagues or fellow-travellers. I owe all these people much for their support and like-minded research. I suspect Mustapha and Naeem were much responsible for my name being put forward for the 2010 International Studies Association award, Eminent Scholar in Global Development, and I thank them and their co-nominators.

Lately, and it had become plainly evident by the 2015 ISA Convention, the off-beat approach to International Relations has gained traction and the ISA theme of 'worlding', under the organizational aegis of Lily Ling and Pinar Bilgin, demonstrated this. Ling's work with both Bilgin[9] and Anna Agathangelou[10] represents a new generation of highly skilled and professional scholars with a considerably more refined and rigorous approach to their work than anything I attempted.

There are, I think it is fair to say, four major approaches to the idea of 'difference' in International Relations today – and, by 'difference', I mean both in cultures and epistemologies. The question of linguistics is not yet properly approached, as International Relations is primarily Anglophonic in its discursive *habitus*. These four are: firstly, the work of Ling and her colleagues, under the title of 'worlding' – where different 'worlds' confront IR, interrogate it and demand that IR in turn interrogates them sympathetically; secondly, there is the work of Oliver Richmond and his Postcolonial approach to IR. 'PoCo', as it has become known, has been late coming to IR and Richmond is its elegant if belated usher;[11] thirdly, there is Fabio Petito's 'postsecular' IR, which makes room for religion and the sacralization of IR, or what I once called the 'resacralization' of world views;[12] and fourthly, luminaries of the IR world such as Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya have looked at primarily South Asian approaches to IR as an alternative/antidote to Western IR.[13]

All these inflect the book that follows – but, finally here, there should be a note of a non-academic genesis, a certain original spur to this work which is simply normative and personal. In 1977 I began visiting Altaf Gauhar, then recently relocated to London after time as a political prisoner in Pakistan. He had acquired the means to establish an ambitious publishing house high in New Zealand House, overlooking Trafalgar Square. It was not far from where I worked in

the Commonwealth Secretariat at the other end of Pall Mall. It was Altaf who founded what is still the *Third World Quarterly*, now under the editorship of Shahid Qadir – who continues kindly and patiently to publish my work. In its early phase, it had a companion magazine simply called *South*, prophetically giving flesh to Julius Nyerere and Samir Amin's slightly later idea that the 'south' might wish to contemplate going it alone – no longer dependent on northern, largely Western, support and approval.[14] Altaf used to take me through the translations of the Quran he wrote while in prison, and exposed me to the nuances of certain verses or *sura*.[15] But, one day, looking around the vast office and looking out at the grand view of London, I simply asked, 'but why?' Why all this effort and expense? He simply said, 'but you see, Stephen, it is time after all, is it not, for the south to fight back – intellectually as well as by other means; for, after all, do we not also have our own thought, our own account of how our thought entered the world, and is this not also valuable?'

I was a very young man, then as now in fine cloth with long hair. I turned and looked at Altaf and knew I had learned a lesson for the rest of my life.

Pimlico 2016

Contents

PART I

1

Westphalia and Its
Influence on Theory

This book is divided into three parts, with case studies in each. The first part explores the advent of the world's current state system and the entry of states into it in the twentieth century. The second part focuses on Islamic states and non-states and their approaches to the state system. The third seeks to reconcile all the tensions and trends discussed in the first two parts, and to propose ways forward both for the discipline of IR (International Relations), and for international policy-makers in Western states who see a new world beginning to form around them – with characteristics of the old, but many features that are new.

The basic proposition of the book that follows is that Westphalia as a modern system is not static. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from which our cases are drawn, it has been a system upon which states have sought to impose conditions of hegemony or exception. States that have been powerful have used this power, either singly or in concert with other states with shared interests in the system being under their control. Other states have formed unions, congresses and alliances to manufacture sufficient joint strength to determine the system along lines more congenial to their outlooks upon the world. The use of cultural reference points and philosophical systems, often of great antiquity, is not a usage for its own sake or a chauvinism, but to give normative value to a struggle within a Westphalian system that is disadvantageous to many – perhaps the majority. However, until the twenty-first century and the advent of ISIS, nobody sought to withdraw from the system, or propose an alternative system. All sought legitimacy within the system for themselves, and sought more legitimate uses of power from those who were strong within the system.

More specifically, in terms of the progress of the book, this opening chapter looks at the birth of the Westphalian system, introduces what is the life-work of Henry Kissinger in its written form, but looks also at recent variations and ameliorations of classical 'Realist' International Relations theory, as put forward by the English School and the Copenhagen School.

Chapter 2 recalls the birth of the Soviet Union and its emergence upon the world stage, especially when it acquired nuclear weapons and embarked upon both a calculated strategic gamesmanship, and a search for balance within a doctrine of equivalence. China's subsequent emergence as a world power upset the two-actor pursuit of a bilateral game and an easy balance. Chinese foreign policy statements and rhetoric also meant the Kissinger-esque search for an international equilibrium based upon a concert of powerful states who would understand one another from the same rational foundations seemed threatened.

Chapter 3 looks upon the growing plurality of visions of the world, and at the advent of Ataturk's Turkey and Nasser's Egypt. Both were efforts at modernity and secularity. They should perhaps have been encouraged but, certainly in the case of Egypt, the Arab-Israeli wars greatly weakened both Nasser's leadership of Egypt and his dream of a unified Arabia. Israel became increasingly unlike a Westphalian state in its readiness to attack others – perhaps pre-emptively and, in its own terms, justifiably – but it meant a second half of the twentieth century where both Israel and Apartheid South Africa, two states with strong Western support, conducted an international relations at odds with the Westphalian principles espoused by the West.

Chapter 4 sees the emergence of India – and, here, the emergence both of a body of philosophical principles that were not Western, and the acquisition of nuclear weapons. The question was whether or not the possession of such weapons would be based upon the rational calculations of both the West and the Soviet Union, or some other form of rationality – especially in local, non-global wars. China, by then also a nuclear state, saw its possession of such weaponry as an indicator of power, and it sought to make use of such attributes of power to lead the Third World as conceived in Chinese eyes. The defeat of such aspirations to leadership saw the late twentieth-century Chinese turn towards economic penetration and domination. However, neither Chinese, nor Soviet, nor Western ambitions to penetrate Africa took into account the aspirations and ambitions of African states themselves.

Chapter 5 argues that the suppressed national and international

outlooks of Islam were missed as well. The rise of a seemingly bel-
ligerent Iran after its revolution of 1979 was one of the seeds of
later fears of a clash of civilizations. In fact, much of the foundation
thought behind the Iranian revolution derived from the thought of
Ali Shari'ati, and his fusion of European, Marxist, Shi'a and tran-
scendental Islamic influences. French-trained, his work had the same
impact upon a resurgent Iran as his contemporary, Frantz Fanon's
thought had on ideas for black liberation. If nothing else, Shari'ati's
work should have indicated to the West that international relations
could no longer be appreciated, or calculated, only on secular and
rational grounds. A resacralization of how to view the world was in
progress.

Chapter 6 sees how this resacralization, aiding and abetting an ide-
ology of resistance and a setting of one's own terms based on one's
own thought, was taken up in the Sunni world – very differently by
the Taleban, Al-Qaeda and, more recently, Islamic State. The com-
bination of faith as a marker, allied to ideological premises of how
international alienation was forced upon peoples, and linked also to
the sense of a purposiveness and uniqueness of peoples not previ-
ously or fully recognized by the West, is a feature also of Israel and its
own 'securitization' of outlook and discourse.

Chapter 7 therefore begins a disquisition about how to deal with
Islam, and with other 'irrational' world forces, within a genuine
pluralism and multiculturalism, and not a majoritarianism with mul-
ticultural facets and tropes. How to think this through in sympathetic
theological terms is a feature of this chapter.

Finally, chapter 8 projects the end of an easy sense of universalism,
an end to Henry Kissinger's equilibrium based on an agreed concert,
and looks at a world of far greater conditionality – that, all the same,
can be thoughtfully mastered. And the Westphalian system, for all
the efforts of Islamic State, is still vibrantly with us – but, despite our
own selves, is in fact being revised or at least inflected from within
and challenged from without.

Westphalia

On 24 October 1648 the Treaty of Westphalia was signed. It was
actually a series of agreements painstakingly negotiated over four
years by the great powers of Europe, and marked the end of the
Thirty Years' War – a period of protracted and extreme violence that
had destroyed much of the continent.[1] The memory of this was so

deep that, even 100 years later, philosophers such as Immanuel Kant contemplated the idea of universal justice, and ideal national constitutions.[2] But, at the time, the negotiations towards the Treaty were a vexed and almost cynical affair.

The war had begun in 1618, when the Austrian Habsburgs tried to impose Catholicism upon the Protestant Bohemians.[3] Soon, all of continental Europe took sides and the conflict became one of power politics as much as religion. The militarization of French society was the setting for Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*; and the tomes on military strategy by the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, were written at this time. Adolphus himself was killed in one of the great battles of the war, but not before he had introduced the use of mobile artillery and the refined tactical use of cavalry in concert with infantry and cannon. This had a profound influence on Napoleon nearly two centuries later, informed Clausewitz's observations of what Napoleon was doing, and set the stage for the technological variations used by Guderian and his Panzer divisions against France in World War II, and the Israelis against Arab armies in 1967. If the military legacy of the Thirty Years' War was long-lasting, the political and diplomatic legacy was even more so.

The negotiation of the Treaty of Westphalia involved 194 European states, represented by 179 ambassadors. Europe contained many small states at that time – Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Lichtenstein being remnants of this period. The ambassadors and their thousands of staff had to be housed and fed in a time of famine caused by the war – and the first six months were devoted to the question of who should sit where around the table. (This was echoed at the beginning of the Paris peace talks between the US and the various factions of the Vietnamese, 1968–73.) The map of Europe was much redrawn as a result of the Treaty – and it ended any aspirations for a Catholic Europe. Protestantism, and Protestant states, were there to stay.[4]

The major upshots of the Treaty were, however:

1. Peace could be established by diplomacy, particularly multilateral diplomacy – so the idea of a congress of states was created;[5]
2. Sufficient mass within such a congress, particularly if a balance of power could be established within this mass, could act as a major check against the aggression of one state against another;[6]
3. Domestic policy within one state, as in the case of religion for example, was not the concern of other states – so a doctrine of non-interference was born;[7]

4. States therefore had a recognized sovereignty, and a sovereign state effectively had a legal personality recognized as having rights in the eyes of other states; and all states had limits in their policies and behaviour towards other states.

5. Insofar as the balance of power in Europe created a co-existence between two great religions, it pointed to an era where states were secular in nature, or at least not bonded to any single universal religion.

6. And, as I have indicated in my comment on Kant above, being not bonded to any universal religion did set the way for an era of contemplation on universal ethics that were philosophically established. Being bonded to the European Enlightenment became a hallmark of later society that has lasted, with great contradictions and problems, to the present day.

Westphalia began a process that developed key attributes of a state system, with identifiable states within identifiable and recognized boundaries, and with identifiable rights and characteristics.[8] It was a difficult process. The success of the French Revolution, both in overthrowing monarchy at home and exporting constitutional systems by conquest abroad, led to huge mobilization against Napoleon's project. A great alliance of states fought against him. In a very real sense, Napoleon's outreach had, or was seen to have, a significant normative purpose.[9] It inspired Schiller's lyrics that were embedded in the choral climax to Beethoven's 9th Symphony. The young Hegel, fleeing his German city before the onslaught of Napoleon's armies, said he had seen the future approaching.[10] It was a curious development of the ideals of the French Revolution; it certainly was not intended to promote democracy, but it looked to the promotion of constitutional rule by monarchs, i.e. that citizens should have constitutional redress against them, and that monarchs could not exercise arbitrary power over their citizens. In reality, autocracies were replaced by new autocracies, but there was a change in Europe nonetheless, in that revolutionary citizens and new republics could challenge the old ruling houses of the continent. Insofar as this was a normative ambition, it was truncated by Napoleon's defeat and the 1814–18 Congress of Vienna – that once again emphasized the integrity of states, that they should not be available for conquest for whatever normative reasons and, above all, that a concert of great powers within the congress of states could and should keep the peace, promote the stability of the state system and, by extension, the states within the system.[11] The system became the focus, and individual

states became actors within the system. Henry Kissinger wrote his Harvard PhD thesis on this period, and it became arguably his greatest book.[12]

What Vienna meant was that states exercised their interests within a system of recognized states; that the greatest norm was the system's stability; and that this stability could only be promoted and maintained by a concert of great powers – and it was one of their interests to remain powerful.

The system, under these informal rubrics, had to adapt to crises – sometimes cataclysmic ones – and to the global spread of states. The rise of the US, the liberation of Latin America, the spread of colonialism – including the 1884–5 Berlin Conference that formally colonized Africa – all meant a more complicated and densely populated world.[13] When, what was once the epicentre of the world once again went to war in 1914–18, it took a non-European power, the US, both to swing the military pendulum against Germany, and to dictate a certain international state system after the war. The birth of the League of Nations as one of the derivatives of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference meant the advent of a simultaneous formal internationalism and multilateralism. It was not successful, but as a prototype it certainly pointed towards today's United Nations.[14] And it meant that the great powers – now with the normative antagonism of the new Soviet Union – no longer had ideological unity. Great tension was introduced into the concert; tensions would grow and proliferate after World War II with the advent of the People's Republic of China, the decolonization of Africa, the revolution in Iran, and more recently the challenge to the Westphalian system by militarized actors such as Islamic State or ISIS.

This has meant a curious series of hybrids within a common system that, all the same, understands the need – even if reluctantly or, at best, conditionally – to work together in their individual interests and in the interests of the system. The ideological divides of the twentieth century did not, however, obviate an agreement on the need for international law and, even though interpretation of that law was often divided, the understanding of the restraints it provided accorded the system, and its concert of balancing and constantly adjusting powers, with a shadow that was couched in legal but normative language to do with rights and limits, e.g. as in the laws of war.[15] Power politics, within the concert, and even when it sought to escape or elide the restraints of the concert, were always accompanied by a norm of jurisprudential limits. Powerful states balanced one another in the concert, and power was itself balanced by law.[16]