Dynamic Hierarchies in International Institutions

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The currents state of the international system is a fragile Hierarchy. States cooperate with one another according to a Kantian method of risk analysis in which states attempt to “maximize expected utility for the sake of avoiding unwanted outcome”­1. The authority of international organizations including the UN, the World Bank, The World Trade Organization, and the IMF, depend on the cooperation of states to ensure legitimacy. “The successful functioning of institutions depends on the operation of reciprocity”1. Such a fragile system does not result in a pure hegemonic power, but a system in which states cooperate according to specific and diffuse interests at a specific point in time. A system similar to Bull’s Anarchal Society, however including the possibility of dynamic hierarchal relationships according to the relative capabilities of the state. Or most similar to the Institutionalist Theory of Keohane.

In following David Lake’s framework, “political authority is understood as a relationship in which A… wills B to follow A and B voluntarily complies”. As a result, B’s behavior is driven by obligation, not force: B does something he or she would otherwise not do because of A’s will.”2 In relationship to the international system, states by obligation act on behalf of their interests balanced according to the limits set by formal and informal institutions to maximize utility. Thus, as in the case with recent sanctions on North Korea, states accept a state of dynamic hierarchy under the premise of reciprocal action by other states.

The organization of the international system, is by definition then hierarchic, but does not reflect directly the interests of a hegemon tentatively granted authority in order primarily to defend the commons. Lower ranking states act equally upon the greatest in rank to maximize utility within the system. Thus, the system is Hierarchal, however with multiple authorities bearing influence upon the equilibrium.

1. Keohane, Robert. *The Promise of Institutional Theory. 1995.*  MIT Press,
2. Lake, David. *Escape from the State of Nature: Authority and Hierarchy in World Politics.*
3. Lake, David. *Hierarchy in International Relations: Authority, Sovereignty, and the New Structure of World Politics.* 2005.