

Challenges to World Order

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As Vice Chancellor of the University of Exeter (roughly your equivalent of President or Chancellor) I have to turn down virtually all invitations to give lectures or talks, especially abroad. It is, I hope a mark of the fact that I have the very highest regard for this School and for its excellent faculty that this is only the second external talk I have given since January 2004. The invitation, in other words, was irresistible. This is because in my view this is not simply one of the oldest, in fact the third oldest, department of IR in the world, but it is also one of the very best. It has pioneered intellectual pluralism in a setting, the US academic community, in which pluralism all too easily gets suffocated by a dominant, and domineering, methodological consensus. It is not only the home of a pluralist group of scholars, but also of some outstandingly influential ones. I hesitate to mention some of them because that implies missing out others, but I do note that in addition to my very special and close friend Steve Lamy and other outstanding intellectuals, the School's faculty include some very significant post holders in the discipline of IR, including a former and a future president of the International Studies Association, a former president of the African Studies Association, the former president of the Middle East Studies Association, the Editor of International Organization from 1992 to 1997, the winner of the Bancroft Prize in American History, and several members of the Council on Foreign Relations. In short, this is a very serious and special place to study IR and I am glad to be here.

I note that tomorrow's conference is taking its lead from Barry Buzan's pioneering work on security, with a set of student presentations based on one of Buzan's five sectors for security studies. I also note that the theme of this conference is challenges to world order. Therefore, what I want to do in the 30 minutes or so at my disposal is to sketch out an argument that has the following moves:

First, I want to say something about international order. I want to problematise it, so as to disrupt the standard assumptions about it.

Second, I want to look at Buzan's notion of security, and to offer you a few basic criticisms of it as well as mentioning a few obvious alternative positions you might like to think of.

Third, I want to say something very specific about what I see as the major challenge to world order.

Finally, I want to link all of this to the theory of international relations, and to make good on the rather beguiling claim that the way in which we think about the world, and the categories in which we think, have incredibly important implications for what we 'see' in international relations, and, crucially, what we define as its major problems.

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My core claim will be that certain ways of thinking, of theorising, predetermine us to 'see' certain challenges to world order and to ignore others. To be specific, and hopefully clear, I worry that the discipline of international relations defines world order and the key challenges to it in a very restricted way, and my conclusion will be that the overriding imperative in the discipline is for us to understand that there is no one single way of thinking about the world, and that our task, to slip into the language of the philosophy of international relations, is to understand the world and not simply to try and explain it.

International Order

I want to try and be helpful for your discussions tomorrow by asking six questions about international order:

1) What is international order?

What is the referent point of discussions about international order. Is order something 'out there' or whether it is something we construct? My worry is that too much of the literature on international order presents it as something inherent in the world, as a 'given', as a kind of automatic balance that world politics requires to function 'properly'. I am not convinced that such a view captures the social world. I do not believe that international order is 'out there'. It is something we construct, not something we discover.

2) Why does international order privilege the state and protect sovereignty?

Debates about international order, rather than world order, privileges the state and sovereignty. Most discussions about it treat the state as the unit of international society, and see sovereignty as the essential building bloc of international order. I think that this is very problematic, since of course it assumes that state sovereignty is something that should be protected. Not only this but international order privileges the state as the unit of analysis. This concerns me since I see no clear reason why the state should be the referent point for discussions of order, nor do I think that it is obvious just why we should treat states as ethically privileged.

Now if this is 'how the world is', that is to say if this is a feature of the social world that our theories do not create, then fair enough; but if international order is something we construct then why should we privilege the state when the state may well be more harmful to its citizens than protective of them. Perhaps more people on the planet face a greater threat from their own state than they do from any other state. In the face of this, why do we make the state theoretically primitive and thereby reify it? What then is so special and defensible about sovereignty? Sovereignty is more of a prison than a protector for much of the world's population. Maybe sovereignty is something that we should wish to dismantle in the name of constructing a better world. Critically, if order is a construct why should we accept the state as the analytical unit for our analysis and sovereignty as the primary goal to be protected?

There could well be a host of other goals that we should advance, such as human rights, economic well-being, life chances, opposition to genocide, female genital mutilation, and so on.

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3) Is international order desirable?

My third question concerns whether discussions about international order do not implicitly assume that order is desirable. International order legitimises nonintervention and sovereignty, but what is the moral content of this legitimisation? This forces us to consider whether order is indeed desirable; desirable for whom? I imagine that one obvious answer to this question is that international order is to be preferred to international disorder because disorder carries with it the prospect of large-scale deaths through war. But note that this is to make a rather more specific claim, namely that certain types of order are to be preferred to others, and this simply re-raises the earlier question of what kind of thing is international order. Is it any order, in the sense of the order that happens to exist at any point in time, or is it order in accordance with certain criteria? In which case, note that what is being posited is that certain kinds of deaths are more important than others; for example, deaths as a result of politics (war) are more important than deaths as a result of economics (famine, and underdevelopment). Treating international order as both a primary goal and as desirable masks the fact that a given international order may be accompanied by large-scale 'economic' or 'ethnic conflict' or 'cultural' deaths. Precisely why is this order to be preferred?

4) What is the relationship between international order and identity?

My concern here is with the question of what kinds of effects do specific international orders have on political identity in world politics. International order, by protecting as its primary goal the preservation of the states system and state sovereignty, sets the limits to the kinds of political identities that are possible within world politics. Order is decidedly not neutral when it comes to the construction of political identities; indeed, it reinforces communitarian identities and undermines the possibility of cosmopolitan identities.

But international orders do much more than merely limit the possibilities of political identity. They also construct economic, religious, social, ethnic, racial, sexual and gendered identities. This is not some neutral process and yet it rarely dealt with in discussions about international order. Above all, international order reinforces the view that it is possible to resolve the relationship between self and other by positing a distinction between citizenship and humanity, and this in turn frames the possibilities of identity within the political community.

5) What is omitted in discussions about international order?

There are two aspects here. First, there is much to do with politics internationally that is left out of the focus by the main debates on international order. Second, international order tends to be written about from the perspective of the dominant powers in the international system.

As to the first point, many aspects of international life are ignored by any focus on international order. The most obvious example is that questions of

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race, ethnicity and gender are largely omitted, since they are not presumed to be parts of any international order.

With regards to the second point, it is clear that the literature on international order is based on a 'great-power' view of international relations, but why should this view be privileged? How might international order look from the peripheries of world power? Maybe any discussion of international order will unavoidably reflect a culturally determined view of what is important in international relations, but, nonetheless, it is important to note that a 'great power' focus is dependent on one reading of what matters most in international relations.

6) Is there an assumption of progress in international order?

There are clear indications that many writers about international order do indeed speak as if there is a progressive quality to succeeding forms of order. The democratic peace theory of Doyle (1986) and Russett (1993) seems most clearly to involve the notion of progress and a view of history moving in a direction. The major influence on my thinking here is Michel Foucault, and from a Foucauldian viewpoint, international order has little to do with progress since any new order imposes a series of exclusionary practices on some for the benefit of others. The fact that a new order may be more 'peaceful' may simply reflect a change of means for excluding rather than a change of ends. In this sense a new great power order may be more exclusionary and exploitative if it is hegemonic and 'peaceful' than if it is not. A Foucauldian view of order directs attention primarily to the thought that any order may be simply another form of domination by one group over another, and that the history of international order is nothing more than one domination replacing another.

In summary, my view of debates about international order are that the emerging international order protects one set of values and freezes the existing distribution of resources in the world. Order may indeed make it more difficult for these to be transferred more equitably, and for the striking inequalities in life chances to be equalised. If one looks at the world and sees great power rivalry and an international order that regulates that potential conflict, that is a choice. There are others, and in the current century it is probable that for humanity's sake the existing international order needs to be undermined. This is because that political/military order holds in place an economic and cultural order than is built on exclusion and hierarchy to the detriment of the vast majority of the world's population.

Buzan and Security

I now want to turn to the theorist who you are focusing your research conference around tomorrow. The work of Barry Buzan has both been enormously important in the development of security studies and been at the core of what has been dubbed the 'Copenhagen school'. There are many scholars involved in this school, but Buzan, has had the most influence on the debate. As Ken Booth argued in 1991, Buzan's 1983 book *People, States and Fear*, was 'the most comprehensive theoretical analysis of the concept of security in international relations literature to date'. The key move made by Buzan in this book was to broaden the security agenda so as to involve five sectors rather than the traditional focus on only one of these, military security. To this, Buzan added

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political, economic, societal and ecological security sectors. These new sectors needed to be discussed because of changes in the policy environment facing states in the 1980s. Importantly, Buzan also discussed the individual as the 'irreducible base unit' for discussions about security. But for Buzan, individuals could not be the referent object for the analysis of international security. That had to be the state for three reasons: it was the state that had to cope with the sub-state, state, international security problematic; the state was the primary agent for the alleviation of insecurity; and the state was the dominant actor in the international political system. In this sense, Buzan sought to widen the definition of security to encompass five sectors, and to focus discussions about security on three levels (the sub-state, the state and the international system). But in all of this the state was the referent object, as it is the state that stands at the interface between security dynamics at the sub-state level, and the security dynamics operating at the level of the international system. As such, despite the widening of the definition of security, Buzan presents what is a sophisticated neo-realist account of security.

The work of the Copenhagen 'school' has sparked considerable debate. The most extensive criticism has come from Bill McSweeney who argues that Buzan conceives of society and security an objectivist, positivistic way: 'Society is conceived as a social fact, with the same objectivity and ontological status as the state'. What this means is that the society and identity are seen as 'objective realities, out there to be discovered and analyzed'. This means that society, individual and security are all objective features of the world that we discover. Now, in my view, the work of the Copenhagen school is one of the most interesting developments in the contemporary study of security. But it remains the case that it remains focused on the state as referent unit, and this is a limitation on its ability to analyse important parts of the contemporary world. For those of you discussing its view of security tomorrow, you may want to think about whether its focus on the state as the unit to be made secure in world politics is the right focus for understanding a globalised world.

There are, of course, other accounts of security, and I only have time to list the main theoretical approaches that you might like to consider as alternatives to Buzan's categorisations:

- 1) Traditional Security Studies, which focuses much more narrowly on the military dimension of world politics, seeing this as the key determinant of international order.
- 2) Constructivist security studies, by which I mean those writers who have brought the assumptions of social constructivism into security studies. What this involves is adopting the infamous statement of Alex Wendt, that 'anarchy is what states make of it', to the security realm: thus security is not something that exists 'out there' waiting for analysts or politicians to discover it. Instead it is created by human intersubjective understandings, as the social world is something that is made and re-made by those in it.
- 3) Critical security studies, which in my view is the most sustained and coherent critique of traditional security studies. This approach is based on

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the pioneering work of Ken Booth and Richard Wyn Jones at Aberystwyth. It was Booth who coined the phrase 'critical security studies'. For Booth, security studies should be focused on human emancipation, which he defines as 'the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from the physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do. War and the threat of war is one of those constraints, together with poverty, poor education, political oppression and so on. Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin.

4) Feminist work on security is extensive, although much of it deals with security implicitly as a result of a thoroughgoing critique of the gendered assumptions of traditional International Relations; the central claim is that international relations is axiomatically gendered in its consequences. Thus Ann Tickner has argued that whilst security has always been considered a masculine issue, 'women have seldom been recognized by the security literature; yet clearly there are security issues that more directly affect women than men. Tickner's conclusion is that the evidence shows the fallacy of the view that the state is the guarantor of security for its citizens; crucially, the state is 'not neutral with regard to security provision for all individuals'.

5) Finally, I want to mention human security has risen to prominence in the debate following the 1994 United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which outlines seven areas of human security: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. It also identifies six main threats to human security: unchecked population growth, disparities in economic opportunities, migration pressures, environmental degradation, drug trafficking, and international terrorism. The concept has also been taken up by international bodies such as the World Bank and the IMF, as well as by some governments. The most significant of these has been the use of the concept by the Canadian and Japanese governments.

The concept of security is therefore a battleground in and of itself. There are those who wish to broaden and deepen it. To those working within the traditional area of the subject, broadening and deepening only threaten to undermine the utility of the concept and render it useless for analysis. If the concept of security refers to any threat then it becomes meaningless. But in my view, the concept of security can and must be contested.

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I want now to focus on the main challenges to world order, and I want to look at these by taking as my starting point the events of September 11. The events of that day have had nine main implications for thinking about world order.

The first is that states are no longer, if they ever were, the key actors in major international arenas. International terrorism does not map onto state structures, it works in the spaces between them. Fundamentally, globalization results in a world in which many of the most important political actions take place between non-state actors in arenas as diverse as the internet, banking, global civil society and international terrorism.

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Second, is the realisation that actors in contemporary world politics do not follow some kind of overarching logic, be it of security, military, political or economic. This shatters the assumptions of the main theories of international relations, and makes identity, which has been traditionally assumed to follow from interests, of primary analytical significance.

Third, the future world order will be marked by asymmetrical conflict in which the weapons of the powerful can no longer defeat the weapons of the weak. In this sense power is less fungible than ever, as the images of million dollar missiles destroying piles of rubble whilst creating thousands of future martyrs demonstrates

Fourth, more than ever, a time of virtual war, a war in which the propaganda battle is as, if not more, important than the military campaign. Humanitarian considerations will assume considerable, maybe literally decisive, importance, and can thus snatch political defeat out of the jaws of military victory.

Fifth, military force is becoming less and less easily related to political effects. Achieving military objectives is one thing, but achieving political goals is much more difficult, especially when wars such as the present one rely on coalitions. Portraying the conflict as one between good and evil may sound persuasive, but it cannot serve as the glue to hold together the kind of coalition necessary to wage a sustained conflict.

Sixth, it becomes more and more difficult to answer the question of what is victory. Compared to conflicts such as the Vietnam war, the Falklands war, the Gulf conflict and Kosovo, victory is a much more nebulous concept in the current conflict. Was victory achieved when the Taliban were overthrown, and a new government installed in their place, or would victory require a much longer-term project to bring stability to the country through economic regeneration? Is victory now defined as capturing Bin Laden? Killing him? Destroying Al Qaeda (what would that entail, and how would we conceivably know that we had achieved this even a few years after the end of the military conflict?)? Is victory the defeat of terrorism (which sorts qualify?) and the replacement of the regimes of the countries comprising the axis of evil? What exactly would count as victory in Iraq? Critically, the trade offs between these goals and likely effects in the rest of the world are almost impossible to estimate. Put most simply, each and everyone of these goals could be achieved, and yet the coalition could see a humanitarian tragedy in Afghanistan, a fundamentalist revolution in Pakistan resulting in radical Islamic hands on its nuclear weapons, the end of hope for any negotiated settlement in Israel/Palestine, the overthrow of pro-western regimes in the Middle East, as well as the creation of a new generation of future suicide bombers.

Seventh, one of the most basic problems will be how the West negotiates with opponents who hold such different views of the world. For Al Qaeda the conflict is not about narrowly defined foreign policy interests that can be traded off against other policy goals; rather their aim is to reverse modernization and to impose a form of society diametrically opposed to western notions. How do you negotiate with someone who is not interested in financial aid, in most favoured nation status, or in development, and instead wants to destroy exactly you kind of society?

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The eighth implication is that the events of September 11 shatter the key assumption of many proponents of globalization that the conveyor belt of economic development and the spread of liberal democracy were in some way inevitable, irreversible and universal. They are not, and notions of a direction, even a teleology, to history are simply wrong.

Finally, in my view the current conflict in Iraq shows all too clearly the dangers of seeing the world in terms of stark alternatives, such as those represented by notions of good versus evil and the clash of civilizations. Such dichotomies create the kind of oppositional thinking that will make coalition building difficult, especially in those parts of the world where 'other civilizations' dominate.

In this emerging world order, the US will be the leading world power, but assessing US power is complex. On the one hand, it is the only superpower, and no other state, or even group of states, can match its military power. In this sense the US presides over a unipolar world order. But this power may turn out to be less useful than military power in earlier eras. This is because politically and economically the world is not unipolar. Economically, the US has 31 % of world product, equalling the total of the next four countries (Japan, Germany, the UK and France), but this dominance is to a considerable extent offset by the extent of integration by the EU countries, which results in a world economic order in which the US has to deal with the EU as a roughly equal partner. Politically, the US faces an emerging world order in which there are increasing challenges to the dominance of its model of liberal democracy, and there are large areas of the world in which the American way is precisely what is rejected. Put simply, if the world military order is unipolar, then this has to coexist with much more multipolar economic and political world orders. This creates a friction between US military might and its ability to impose its political will. Nowhere is this juxtaposition clearer than in the Middle East, where the US has the military

power to impose settlements but does not have the political will or desire to impose them on all conflicts and on all proponents of terrorism and aggression.

This analysis implies that the US needs to steer a careful path between exercising its power and taking into account the views of its partners. The danger is that the US will act increasingly unilaterally, whereas in fact this is unlikely to strengthen the US's position in the long run. This is because, first, as Nye puts it, 'military power alone cannot produce the outcomes Americans want', acting alone cannot achieve all US international goals. Thus the success of the 'war on terrorism' will depend far more on diplomatic negotiations to develop cooperation than it will on any military victories.. This policy will require the US to define its national interest in a broader way than currently favoured by sizeable sections of the Bush administration and by the unilateralists. As Mick Cox argues 'Hegemony...requires the U.S. to listen to its allies. Indeed, historically it has been at its most effective when it has done precisely that. The process may be noisy, tedious, and slow. In the end, though, it is likely to lead to more positive outcomes than unilateral actions emanating from what many non-Americans - rightly or wrongly - already perceive to be an overly powerful giant always seeking to get its own way'.

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The problem of course is that these wise words may not prevail. There remain very powerful forces promoting a unilateral US foreign policy, often strangely allied to a form of isolationism, as if the world didn't really exist except where it significantly affected immediate US interests. This concerns me greatly since it seems likely to undermine long term US interests and sustain a world order that is very much in the interests of the few.

Theory and International Order

Finally I want to say something about the discipline of International Relations, and how it links to debates about world order. The events of September 11 are instructive once more, since the number of people murdered that day, about 3000, was magnified by the ways in which they died. My point here is simply to note that the ways in which the discipline of International Relations deals with such events simply cannot be explained by the number of deaths involved; it has much to do with how we see deaths by political violence as compared to deaths by 'economics', or deaths by 'naturally occurring diseases'. The discipline of IR makes very important assumptions about what constitutes violence and what kinds of deaths are relevant to explaining the world of international relations; Crucially, I believe that these assumptions rely on a prior set of assumptions about the social world, and that these in turn reflect social, political and ultimately economic power.

Turning back to the concept of Human Security for a moment, The UNDP Report for 2002 paints a rather different picture of violence on the planet. Let me simply quote to you five statistics in that report:

- 1) Every day more than 30,000 children around the world die of preventable diseases, a total of over 11 million a year;
- 2) The richest 5% of the world's people have incomes 114 times those of the poorest 5%; the richest 1 % receive as much income as the poorest 57%;
- 3) The income of the richest 10% (25 million) of the US population equals that of the poorest 43% of the world (2 billion). In the US the income of the top 1 % of families, which had been 10 times that of the median family in 1979 was 23 times in 1997;
- 4) 2.8 billion people live on less than \$2 a day, with 1.2 billion of them subsisting on less than \$1 a day;
- 5) By the end of 2002 almost 25 million people had died of AIDS, 75% of these were in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The picture that these data paint are of a very violent world, with violence taking many forms. But the discipline of International Relations does not 'see' these forms of violence as core concerns. And yet, some of these aspects of violence are absolutely critical to explaining September 11 because they help explain why much of the world's population celebrated the attacks, and why the West generally, and the United States specifically, is so unpopular, even hated. The problem is that the discipline of International Relations has defined its core concerns in such a way as to exclude the most marked forms of

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violence in world politics, in favour of a relatively small subset. But this does not have to be so. We construct, and reconstruct, our disciplines just as much as we construct, and reconstruct, our world. In that light, I fear that the discipline of IR by focusing on specific, and partial, notions of violence and inequality and by taking its referent object to be the state rather than the individual, has contributed to the domination of a very particular notion of world order dominating academic and public discussions, a notion based on those features of politics and economics that fit with Western interests and ignore other conceptions of world order. International Relations theory has concentrated almost exclusively on a particular world of international relations, and that has not been a world that most of the world's population could relate to. Their concerns, the violences that affected them, the inequalities they suffered, were all invisible to the gaze of the discipline, and in that very specific way the discipline has been culpable in serving specific social interests and explaining their agenda.

The challenge for all of us engaged in thinking about international relations is to try and question dominant notions of world order and dominant assumptions about what is 'right' or 'given'. I am not arguing for a relativism in which it is impossible to make choices between alternative positions about world politics. I want to suggest that we need a discipline that is open to a variety of issues, subjectivities and identities rather than taking the agenda of the powerful as the natural and legitimate focus for the discipline, one that enquires into the meanings and subjectivities of individuals in cultures different to those of the dominant world powers rather than assuming their rationality, interests and thus identities. I want to see a discipline that admits of many routes to understanding, rather than treating one model of social science as if it was the sole bearer of legitimacy and thus beyond criticism.

And that takes me back to this conference and ultimately to this School of International Relations, because those of you attending the conference tomorrow have an opportunity to begin that critical probing of the assumptions underlying competing conceptions of international order by asking, for example, questions such as should it be international or world order, should the referent unit be the state or the individual, and, ultimately, is international order the right goal to strive for? Not surprisingly given what I have said earlier, I believe that the School of International Relations is one of the very best places in the world to ask those questions, because here you have world class academics engaged in a variety of debates, and holding a wide range of academic and political positions. That is so very healthy, and it is also very very rare in a world where the orthodoxy of the discipline of IR serves to restrict the kinds of things that we can study. This is a school of IR where intellectual pluralism is alive and well, where the kinds of conversations between varying views of world politics is actively encouraged. Those conversations, seemingly so easy, so natural in a School like this, are, in my candid view, as important as they are rare. It is through those conversations that we will be able to understand more fully the variety of challenges to world order, and thus, hopefully, bring about an order that is genuinely more sustainable and ethical. Let me end by paraphrasing two great philosophers. First Marx from the 10th Thesis on Feuerbach; philosophers until now have only tried to change the world, the point, however, is to interpret it. Second, and

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clearly more philosophically, is Elvis: what is needed, to paraphrase him, is a little less action a little more conversation.

Thanks for listening to me, and for doing me the honour of inviting me to share in your 80th celebrations.