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### Anarchy, hierarchy and order

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## Anarchy, hierarchy and order<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** *How does order emerge from anarchy? While scholars generally agree that international politics is anarchic, there is much dispute about how anarchy orders relationships. This paper challenges prevailing views by attacking the problem of anarchy from behind. We examine how hierarchy creates order and argue that two mechanisms are responsible. The first is the direct actions of a leviathan; the second is an indirect effect, which counterintuitively results from insurmountable handicaps to central authority, that we call the threat of incompetent intervention. We then examine how these two mechanisms affect order as power decentralizes and highlight how bottom-up and top-down processes intersect. Our arguments are tested in difficult cases: highly developed states, where central authority is strongest, and international politics, where central authority is weakest. The arguments have broad implications for all the paradigms, trust in world politics and organizational change.*

### Introduction

Scholars broadly agree that international politics is anarchic; where they part company is on how anarchy affects order (see Mearsheimer 1994/1995; Angell 1933; Wendt 1999; Bull 1995). Realists see a Hobbesian world starkly divided between pacific domestic hierarchy and belligerent international anarchy; liberals see world politics as more malleable and potentially peaceful; constructivists see anarchy as an empty vessel, which can be socially constructed in a multitude of manners; and the English School sees a society of states suffused with structure, promoting legitimacy, rights, reciprocity and recognition. What causes order in domestic society and how does that differ from the origins of order in interstate politics? Given that smart people have reached such discrepant positions on this central issue, there is much to be gained by a more comprehensive account of the generation of order.

Because hierarchy is corrupted anarchy, this paper identifies paths by which hierarchy causes order and then examines dynamics as power diffuses. We focus on two mechanisms that generate order. The first is well known; hierarchs foster order by directly punishing undesired behaviour. Yet hierarchs quickly reach the

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bounds of their competence because of inevitable problems with monitoring and enforcement. By their nature, hierarchs are remote; they lack the local knowledge and deft coordination to impose adroit penalties. Thus, the second mechanism is the threat of incompetent intervention. Even when hierarchs are able, their interventions are often roundly disliked. This dislike motivates local actors to settle disputes according to norms instead of centralized rules. The threat of incompetent intervention is a latent force disciplining disputes wherever the strong intervene at the behest of the weak. The present work aims to bring attention to this neglected causal mechanism and integrate interdisciplinary insights on authority and order into international relations.

To make our case, we first outline the guiding puzzle of the work. In the second section, we lay out what we mean by anarchy, hierarchy and order, and then expand on our arguments. The third section furnishes empirical support for the main arguments in difficult cases: environments with strong central authority (that is, developed states). We then show that our arguments hold in settings of weaker central authority (that is, international politics). The fourth section is devoted to evaluating alternative views. And in the final section we summarize our arguments and sketch their implications for trust in world politics and the obstacles to organizational change.

### **Puzzle: where force meets norms**

The prevailing view is that authority causes order by making rules and enforcing them. The focus is essentially dyadic; central authority structures incentives and then penalizes malefactors. The problem with this view is that exceptions are myriad. Systems we think of as hierarchic are surprisingly inept at what central authority is supposed to do best: uphold rules. In short, the empirical puzzle is that there is a lot of anarchy in hierarchy (Milner 1993, 160; Clausewitz 1984, 80–84; O'Donnell 2003).

Examples of the weakness of powerful authorities abound. Whether at the top or the bottom of governmental structures, in liberal or non-liberal states, even the mightiest authorities struggle to preside over their jurisdictions. For instance, in his travelogue on tsarist Russia, Astolphe de Custine noticed that, curiously, the laws of an absolutist authority were routinely ignored, litigation was infrequent and parties were eager to avoid bringing the state into disputes:

In Russia, nearly every trial is stifled by an administrative decision, which very often *recommends* an arrangement onerous to both parties, who prefer the reciprocal sacrifice of a part of their claims, and even of their best founded rights, to the danger of proceeding against the advice of a man invested with authority by the emperor. (Custine 2002, 576–577; cf Buzan 1991, 97–100)

In this respect, tsarist Russia has much in common with the United States (US). US lawyers are trained to draft enforceable business contracts to protect their clients, but their clients go out of their way to make contracts more unenforceable (MacNeil 1985; Macaulay 1963). So, too, research into conflict in urban or rural areas finds that disputants do not understand the relevant laws, are little interested in them and go to great lengths to play by local norms instead (Ellickson 1991; Merry 1990).

Enforcement problems are visible at the highest levels of government. Woodrow Wilson observed,

Congress stands almost helplessly outside of the departments. Even the special, irksome, ungracious investigations which it from time to time institutes ... do not afford it more than a glimpse of the inside of a small province of federal administration ... It can violently disturb, but it cannot often fathom, the waters of the sea in which the bigger fish of the civil service swim and feed. Its dragnet stirs without cleansing the bottom. (Quoted in Acheson 1969, 100; cf Lippmann 1963, 35, 92)

Richard Neustadt famously chronicled the difficulty presidents have in exercising authority, illustrating his point with an anecdote about Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower:

'He'll sit here', Truman would remark (tapping his desk for emphasis), 'and he'll say, "Do this! Do that!" *And nothing will happen*. Poor Ike—it won't be a bit like the army. He'll find it very frustrating'. Eisenhower evidently found it so ... 'The President still feels', an Eisenhower aide remarked to me in 1958, 'that when he's decided something, that *ought* to be the end of it... and when it bounces back undone or done wrong, he tends to react with shocked surprise.' (Neustadt 1990, 10)

Few authorities are more absolute than states after winning wars. Nonetheless, even after decisive victories, states dictate terms with great difficulty. In the US Civil War and the Boer War, for instance, the US and United Kingdom quickly relinquished their hopes for extinguishing the grotesque racial systems in the southern US and South Africa (Marx 1998, chaps 5–6). Still, there is no denying that hierarchy is more orderly than anarchy—how does that happen if central authorities are so bad at enforcing their will?

### **Argument: the threat of incompetent intervention**

We focus on two mechanisms by which central authority creates order: directly via sanctions that inhibit the most flagrant fouls, and indirectly through the threat of incompetent intervention. The latter mechanism is counterintuitive; it is the incapacities of even the most capable central authorities that construct order. Because of inescapable monitoring and enforcement inadequacies, brawny hierarchs mete out comparatively ill-tailored settlements. For this reason, local actors prefer not to summon central authority, but will take steps to do so to gain bargaining leverage. The potential for unwieldy intervention bridles local disputes further than is commonly thought. To develop our arguments, we issue some caveats, define terms and elaborate our logic.

We caution that these two mechanisms are not capable of explaining the production of order in fine detail. Anarchy and hierarchy interpenetrate each other and expand and contract in reciprocal relation across time and space. How and why anarchy and hierarchy change are not the subjects of this work. We also do not consider numerous other mechanisms—particularly bottom-up, anarchic mechanisms—that would complicate, enrich but not undermine our arguments (Kacowicz 1998, 5–6; 2005, 38, 170–171; Martín-Gonzalez 1997; Mares 2001, 194; Deudney 2007, 42–56). We contend that the mechanisms we outline here are primary to the production of order.

Let us begin by defining the characters in our title. There are many conceptions of order, but we espouse a strong version: social systems are ordered to the extent that the frequency and magnitude of violent interactions is limited.<sup>2</sup> We warn that such a definition is related to, but significantly distinct from, justice. There is no justice without some order or order without some justice, but both are extremely intricate. To make the subject analytically tractable, we focus on order.

Anarchy is a condition that stretches over a given territory in which none is entitled to command, none is required to obey. Conversely, hierarchy is a situation in which some are entitled to command and others are required to obey (Waltz 1979, 88; cf Snyder 2002, 7; Hurd 1999). An ideal version of anarchy would not display articulated ranks—though in practice we often see subdued, albeit important, distinctions. Hierarchical systems always centralize authority more than anarchical systems, but hierarchical systems may be multipolar, and we are concerned with the centralization of power that exists within these systems. We use the terms ‘central authority’ and ‘hierarchy’ interchangeably because, in hierarchical systems, power is centralized in the hierarchy.

In a sense, anarchy is atrophied hierarchy. Thinking of anarchy and hierarchy as flip sides of the same coin gives us analytical purchase on how both work. Every theory of conflict is also a theory of cooperation just as every theory of anarchy is also a theory of hierarchy—each is the inverse of the other. We believe that it is possible to gain a better understanding of anarchy by capturing how strong hierarchy functions and then examining behavioural changes as the strength of authority declines.

The first, and best-known, mechanism by which central or hierarchical authority facilitates order is its ability to directly punish wrongdoers. Hobbes’s leviathan is likely the first thought conjured up by this statement, and rightly so. Generally central authority is skilled at decreasing the probability of very costly conflict by deterring malfeasance and punishing the undeterred, repaying transgressions with interest to keep deterrence robust. Leviathans are relatively adept at this because they are designed expressly for the purpose, and the worst offences are comparatively infrequent and easy to detect. In prisoner’s-dilemma terms, hierarchs are good at minimizing the probability that anyone receives the ‘sucker’s payoff’. Diminishing the odds of irrecoverable loss makes egregious conflict less likely and generalized trust less risky.

States, the latest and highest incarnation of a hierarchical system, are best known for their monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Keeping domestic tranquillity and defending borders from neighbours are core functions of states, and these functions are linked. There is less need for domestic hierarchy where international perils are muted.<sup>3</sup> Sociologists of the state are well aware of how central these roles are.

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<sup>2</sup>Order is an essentially contested concept; common definitions include a stable set of institutions, a self-sustaining system that channels interactions and social processes in consistent directions, an architecture of relations, and a configuration that guides social processes. These definitions emphasize stability instead of violence reduction. However, the idea that violence is reduced by stability is explicit in the works of Hobbes, Durkheim, Parsons and many others. We therefore believe that our strong definition is appropriate and consistent with existing theory. For other discussions of order, see Bull (1995, 6–8, 93, 308), Kelsen (1989, 31), White (2008), Buzan et al (1993, 70–77), Nys (1912) and Friedrich (1958).

<sup>3</sup>On the link between taxes and violence, see Tilly (1993), Mann (1988, 108) and Herbst (2000). On the lack of hierarchy in less dangerous settings, see Llewellyn and Hoebel (1983) and Clastres (1987).

As Michael Mann declares, '[i]t was not until 1881—probably for the first time in world history—that a Great Power (Britain) actually spent more money on domestic civil functions than on its military defence and aggression, and this was not stably the case until after the First and Second World Wars' (Mann 1988, xi, cf 108–110; see also Porter 1994, chap 1; Andreski 1968, 131–132; McNeill 1984; and Friedberg 2002).

Nonetheless, when it comes to resolving less contentious disputes, hierarchs confront severe limitations to their power. Why? For one, a hierarch's ability to gather and process information is severely limited. Pace Bentham and his panopticon, a hierarch cannot be everywhere at once and even if it could it cannot digest and issue decisions upon that much information. Hierarchs cannot make sense of the flood of available data and must rely on local knowledge, making central authority a product of legitimacy and power.<sup>4</sup>

For another, there is trouble with manual dexterity: hierarchs face incommensurability problems.<sup>5</sup> If we assume the impossible—that hierarchs can detect everything and possess the computing power to make sense of the data—they still face profound gaps in their authority because it is impossible to calibrate punishments as well as decentralized systems of enforcement. States cannot cheat on a cheating spouse or spread rumours about the town gossip. The sheer multiplicity of circumstances that may be relevant—the sensitivity of the defendant, the values of the plaintiff, mitigating factors, etc—are not obtainable because of informational problems and not employable because the variety and gradations of punishment are too numerous. Necessarily, hierarchs economize and distribute ham-handed penalties. In short, people are reluctant to bring all but their worst disputes to a hierarch because hierarchs are unavoidably coarse and clumsy.

Thus, the second mechanism is the threat of incompetent intervention. Although few actors want central authority to interfere in their disputes, the threat of third-party intervention remains a meaningful motivator of cooperation. All hierarchs have jurisdictions far in excess of what they can scrutinize, yet they must attend to problems when called to dampen escalation. So while disputants may look upon the state as a man-child whose mediation is trilaterally burdensome (that is, to the state and to the two disputants), the ability to summon the state is a useful threat and a risk worth running if it influences the other side. Central authority creates order, albeit via a roundabout route, and local actors retain autonomy.

The best way to analogize the role of hierarchs in dispute resolution is to think about two people in a rowboat.<sup>6</sup> Neither wants to end up in the water, but that

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<sup>4</sup>This idea descends from Hume (1987, 32–33), cf Tilly (1993, 127; 2005, 35), Scott (1998), Solnick (1998, 3) and Migdal (1988).

<sup>5</sup>For incommensurability we use Cass Sunstein's (1997, 80) definition: 'Incommensurability occurs when the relevant goods cannot be aligned along a single metric without doing violence to our considered judgments about how these goods are best characterized.' Cooperation is a situation in which two agents engage in a joint venture for mutual gains, where the actions of each are necessary but not under the immediate control of the other (Williams 1988, 7).

<sup>6</sup>The example can be found in Schelling (1980, 196). On the conceptual parallel between court, war and strikes, see, for example, Fearon (1995, 393, note 28), Waltz (1979, 114) and Clausewitz (1984, 358 [6.1]).

knowledge is useful for influencing the other side. Rocking the boat increases the odds of flipping it, and parties who can manage the risk above the level their opponent is willing to accept but below the level they themselves are willing to accept can signal preferences and successfully negotiate with their fellow boater. Changing the two people in the boat to two conflicting parties in hierarchy and capsizing to court, the analogy holds. Court costs time and money; it is a risky means for retribution and restitution, yet capable of hurting everyone. Parties are wary of going to court, but they may be willing to manipulate the risk of going to coerce the other side.

From this second mechanism flow two subsidiary points. One relates to signalling.<sup>7</sup> Costly signals indicate an individual's type and can be reliable indices of predicting behaviour and forming cooperative relationships. These relationships need not be beneficent (for example, bands of criminals and thugs). When interactions occur under the supervision of a hierarchy, very violent self-help is not on the table. With recourse to central authority providing a backstop, cooperation is less risky and hierarchs' penalties provide new focal points for sending costly signals to friends, foes and those who might be either. The social environment is fundamentally transformed.

The other point is that in hierarchy norms rely on central authority but reach into places that central authority cannot immediately access. Norms are essentially decentralized systems of self-help, and, because even the mightiest central authorities groan under monitoring and enforcement burdens, norms cannot be extinguished.<sup>8</sup> Actors often prefer flexible, lower-level sanctions like gossip, ostracism, and property damage to the plodding, oafish enforcement of the hierarchy. But in unstably acrimonious situations, the threat of involving a hierarchy can refocus minds on less formal solutions and pacific norms. Norms and central rules interact in complex ways, sometimes amplifying each other, sometimes undercutting each other, and that makes point predictions difficult.<sup>9</sup> Yet, from a wide angle, signalling and norms make much behaviour in domestic society look like international relations minus wars.

A critic might counter that hierarchs could simply try harder. To an extent this is true, but the informational and incommensurability problems grow steeper the farther the reach of a hierarchy. Detering attack and civil war are enormously expensive, deterring other forms of lethal force is more expensive still and the wide spectrum of tasks developed states have taken on are yet more expensive. States must detect infractions, verify that they occurred, reach a decision and execute that decision, all of which require tremendous effort and expense (Holmes and Sunstein 1999; Tilly 1993; Herbst 2000, 11–13). The monitoring and enforcement problems of central authority appear ineradicable.

It helps to imagine a dispute pyramid, with the rarest, most destructive conflicts at the top (for example, intense war) and the most common minor infractions at the base (for example, perceived slights). A situation is more hierarchical the farther down the pyramid central authority can trump conflicts.

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<sup>7</sup> On the signalling literature, see Akerlof (1970), Farrell and Rabin (1996) and Schelling (1978).

<sup>8</sup> Norms 'describe collective expectations for the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity' (Katzenstein 1996, 5; cf Posner 2002, 34).

<sup>9</sup> See Donald Black (1993) and Eric Posner (2002).

To qualify as a hierarchy, a polity must be able to grease at least the uppermost levels of contention within its purview.

There are the dangers of caprice and overreaching. On one side of the ledger, capricious and overextended hierarchs create some order because their interventions are bound to be more incompetent. Yet, on the other side of the ledger, incompetence can be pushed too far. Think of the difference between a constabulary entirely sober versus entirely drunk. Capricious and overextended hierarchs increase the parameters of probable outcomes, which tends to induce caution and reduce cooperation. The net effect is less order. If third party intervention is not reasonably dependable, it erodes the stabilizing effects of central authority (Hall 2003, 15; Montesquieu 1995, 389 [XXI.20]; Fukuyama 1995; 2004, 7; O'Donnell 2003).

So much for hierarchy; how does anarchy generate order? We argue that powerful states keep order in their spheres the same way—though in diminished degree—as central authorities do in domestic politics. To the extent that they can, states keep order between each other in like manner by making conflict unprofitable. This can take the form of dyadic deterrence or triadic dynamics between disputing parties and a potential outside intervener. However, anarchy saps the direct and indirect effects by which hierarchy nurtures order. Decentralized power makes trusting markedly more difficult because escalation and exploitation are easier and more ruinous. Consequently there is less order.

Our argument should not be misconstrued. Most actors would not explain their behaviour by reference to the distributions of power and authority. Over time, actors' perceptions normalize and crucial features of reality may blend into the scenery; abiding direct and indirect effects of leviathans can be internalized for decisional economy; even where relative power and authority are appreciated they may be too obvious to merit mention. The result is that actors and scholars sometimes take hierarchs for granted and underestimate their effect. But simply because we do not stare at the steel beams girding social interaction does not mean they are absent or unnecessary.

To sum up, we have argued that there are two primary mechanisms by which hierarchy encourages trust and cooperation:

1. Directly, by dominating the most intense forms of violence, decreasing the scope of actions available to subordinates along with the probability that cooperators will shoulder the 'sucker's payoff' of irrecoverable loss.
2. Indirectly, by the threat of incompetent intervention, which establishes safer focal points for costly signalling and stimulates subordinates to cooperate.

Order always relies upon local processes of negotiation, reconciliation and cooperation. Anarchy and hierarchy structure order through the same mechanisms, but authority is more diffuse in anarchy. This has the double effect of eroding the direct deterrent effects of hierarchy as well as the stabilizing indirect effects of hierarchy.

The main contribution of the argument is its elaboration of the threat of incompetent intervention. Creating order is not just a matter of *whether* hierarchs can project force, but *how* hierarchs can project force and intervene that creates order; that is, how hierarchical power affects the lower-level construction of order. Even muscular, smart authorities can be muscle-bound and choked by

information, yet these deficiencies counterintuitively promote order. The potential for awkward hierarchical interventions propels parties to arrange their relations to keep hierarchs at bay, and this mutes disputes.

## **Empirical support**

### *Strong hierarchy: business and personal disputes*

In theory, commercial contracts in developed states reflect what hierarchs are supposed to do best: monitor, adjudicate and enforce rules.<sup>10</sup> There is much domestic cooperation precisely because states are so powerful that they can detect when parties breach a deal, impartially decide what the compensation will be for the breach and enforce the terms of settlement. Yet scholars who study business contracts have found the mysterious habit of businesspeople championing largely unenforceable contracts.

Business people are leery of even using legal language to describe the terms of exchange. Business rights and legal rights are not the same thing. One lawyer observed, 'I referred to order cancellations as breaches of contract, but my clients objected since they do not think of cancellation as wrong. Most clients . . . believe that there is a right to cancel as part of the buyer-seller relationship.' A businessman counters, '[y]ou can settle any dispute if you keep the lawyers and accountants out of it. They just do not understand the give-and-take needed in business' (Macaulay 1963, 61).

Why are business people so blithe about their rights? They can afford to be; states will enforce obvious breaches of contract, and Anglo-American legal doctrine makes it nearly impossible for business people to cavalierly create unenforceable contracts. Were one side to unilaterally defect for great gain, the other side would have recourse to the severe force of the state. But beyond this basic function business people appear allergic to outside enforcement, and for good reasons.<sup>11</sup>

Courts are cumbersome. Not only is it costly to hire lawyers and prosecute a case, but it also may divert employees from more lucrative undertakings. Exacerbating these factors, courts are business interlopers; they use different reasoning, espouse different values and do not understand the subtleties of the case. The business world is too multifarious for any legal system to have the delicate tools to deal with the intricacies of most disputes, which is probably why business norms differ from legal norms in the first place. Since courts are blunt, leaden tools, the business community has evolved norms to fill in the spaces of the behavioural code. Nevertheless, having a contract disciplines behaviour, since it can be called upon when friendlier measures fail.

Actors call in the state in order to exclude it. Contracting parties play a signalling game within the bounds provided by the legal framework. People want cooperative partners who have low discount rates and seek long-run mutual gains. Relationships are full of accidents and deviations from standard operating procedures even when both sides have good intentions. Potential partners are best

<sup>10</sup> For expanded treatment of domestic examples, see Erikson and Parent (2007).

<sup>11</sup> For a fuller discussion of these reasons, see Laurence Ross (1970), Ian MacNeil (1978; 1985), Robert Ellickson (1991, 142–144, 189–191) and Lisa Bernstein (1992; 2001).

selected from among the spectrum of people who are less likely to seek instant gratification and exploit short-term vagaries. The less one seems to care about legal rights, the more one signals that one possesses the *bonhomie* and understanding of a flexible, desirable business partner.

Studies of personal disputes find similar patterns. Litigation is a strong signal that ruins relations. 'You have to keep the government and the courts out of it. Once you file a court complaint against someone, you can't be friendly' (Merry 1990, 81, 3; Ellikson 1991). And, worse, plaintiffs suffer a sorcerer's-apprentice problem: once they summon courts into an issue, both sides lose control and have trouble stopping the process. Courts are just one implement in a deep cultural toolkit that includes gossip, ostracism and threat or execution of property destruction. Central authority does cut violence at the knees, but, more often than not, calling in outside intervention is a detested option that is threatened and used for bargaining leverage.

Eleanor Maccoby and Robert Mnookin's (1992) longitudinal study of divorce found that a significant number of divorce settlements do not keep their initial terms. However, they very rarely end up in court because both sides took the initial agreement as a starting point and bargained from there. The lives of divorcing couples and their children are too dynamic to be captured in a contract and couples are well aware of the time, energy and money involved in going to court. They realize that judges face crushing informational problems and that their enforcement ability is circumscribed.

### **Weak hierarchy: international politics**

For reasons discussed above, fears of incompetent intervention on the world stage are probably under-documented, but examples are numerous. The US itself is a product of it. During the founding era, critical elites expressed that their greatest concern was foreign intervention and that local cooperation could redress this worry. Numerous problems all traced back to the ultimate anxiety of great-power intervention. But this anxiety helped liberate and unite 13 poorly connected colonies. Before the Revolutionary War, John Adams was alarmed 'that foreign powers would find means to corrupt our people, to influence our councils, and, in fine, we should be little better than puppets, danced on the wires of the cabinets of Europe' (Adams 2005, 32).

In 1783, James Madison addressed the Continental Congress and warned that should problems between the states escalate, '[f]oreign aid would be called in first by the weaker, then by the stronger side: and finally both would be made subservient to the wars and politics of Europe' (Madison 1999, 20). During Shays's Rebellion (a misnomer, it was more a peaceful protest than a rebellion), there was enormous sensitivity to the potential for outside states to exploit disorder. On little to no evidence, George Washington worried, 'there surely are men of consequence and abilities behind the Curtain, who move the puppets [sic] ... They may be instigated by British Councils' (Washington 1997, 631–632).

When bargaining at the Philadelphia Convention grew heated, delegates from small states threatened to invite outside powers to 'take them by the hand' if terms were not improved (Parent 2006, 83; cf Pocock 1980). During ratification, the danger of outside intervention was a dominant theme. The first and most

important subject in *The federalist papers* (numbers 2–7, which were among the most reprinted essays) is tamping down internal squabbles to avoid external intervention.

Reconstruction in the US affords further illustrations of our arguments. The period is unquestionably complex within and across regions, yet broadly speaking the power of the US government grew significantly. When it combined capability and will, central authority was sufficient to foil recalcitrant southerners, as it did the Ku Klux Klan in the late 1860s and early 1870s (Foner 2002, 440; McDougall 2008, 526). Central authority directly punished the south enough to achieve its minimal war aims; beyond this the Union floundered.

After the Civil War southerners closed ranks, turning increasingly uncooperative toward the federal government. Central authority was vexed by monitoring and enforcement troubles (Foner 2002, 436–438; McKittrick 1960, chap 14), and reluctantly delegated authority to former rebels. The outcome was the Black Codes and eventually Jim Crow, but it was also increasing segregation and black organization, which fended off invidious intervention by racist whites as much as circumstances allowed. Central authority threatened and mobilized southern authorities, which in turn threatened and mobilized former slaves—each strove to carve out a larger autonomous sphere and stave off outside intervention. In order to keep order, the government curtailed its intervention and ceded ground to local norms. The immediate goal of stability was achieved at the high cost of institutionalized racism.

Current international affairs show similar characteristics. As the sole superpower, the United States now possesses disproportionate control of the world economy, military power, the Internet, sea lanes, etc. In general, a sole superpower has correlated with great-power peace and unparalleled world GDP (gross domestic product).<sup>12</sup> Regardless, even the strongest states display glaring weaknesses (cf Hersh 2008, 66; Ricks 2007, chaps 8–9).

The literature on peacekeeping offers multiple examples. Kimberly Marten (2004) shows that, beyond bolstering basic security, intervening states swiftly reach the limits of what they can do in humanitarian crises. Even when very strong states intervened in weak areas, like Haiti, the Balkans or East Timor, a modicum of stability was the best that was achieved. Page Fortna's well-designed research (2004, 186–188) finds that outside mediators are no better at bringing peace than no mediator at all, and explicit guarantees of peace, while rare, do make peace last. Intervention itself speedily hits the limits of effectiveness, but the threat of external intervention—amplified with the presence of a strong external state—dampens conflict even in the anarchic conditions of international politics.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>On America's role in public goods provision, see Katzenstein (2005), Joffe (1984), Ikenberry (2002) and Asmus (2002). On American power, see Wade (2003), Posen (2003) and Brooks and Wohlforth (2002). On the low death rate among states since the Second World War, see Waltz (1979, 95), Wendt (1999, 323) and Fazal (2004, 319).

<sup>13</sup>On peacekeeping and intervention, see also Doyle and Sambanis (2006) and Edelstein (2004). On the related topic of failing states, see Fearon and Laitin (2004), Krasner (2004), Fukuyama (2004, 6, 40), Holmes and Sunstein (1999, 19, 71), Herbst (2000, 11–14, 266–267), Rotberg (2004, 3–9) and Walter and Snyder (1999).

### Evaluating alternative explanations

If our argument is correct, all the best arguments capture part of the truth, but also capture some error as well. For Kenneth Waltz, the debate on anarchy and hierarchy has advanced little beyond Hobbes (Waltz 1979, chaps 5–6; see also Strange 1982; Gilpin 1983; 2000).<sup>14</sup> In hierarchy, the leviathan overawes its subordinates and its commands are law. In anarchy, leviathans exist in a state of nature and compete for power and security; cooperation must take place in the brooding shadow of violence. To caricature, leviathans are indispensable for order, and little gets done without them.

This view is not so much incorrect as underspecified. A great deal of the order that leviathans bring about is oblique to their intentions and contrary to their rules. This is due to the high cost of central authority, which is costly not just to create and maintain but also to use. Waltz is abundantly aware of the creation costs, occasionally minds the maintenance costs (Waltz 1979, 111) but does not note the employment costs. Central authority is terrifically expensive under the best of circumstances and there are mammoth obstacles in the form of monitoring shortcomings and incommensurable enforcement that obstruct the direct desires of a leviathan.

In contrast, Robert Keohane believes that leviathans can be dispensable, and much gets done without them. Hierarchs set up institutions, but then institutions take on a life of their own and hierarchs become much less necessary. It is mutual interests more than enforcement that drives order. He is onto something; cooperation is more bottom–up than Waltz implies, and this captures a significant portion of how cooperation occurs. What Keohane misses, however, is the threat of incompetent intervention as a causal mechanism, and his argument would be much stronger with it. In emphasizing the velvet glove of agile local self-help, he underrates the importance of central authority's mailed fist in producing order (Keohane 1984; Keohane and Nye 1989; see also Milner 1993, esp 149–150, 160; Lake 1999; Young 1989; and Ikenberry 2000).

For Alexander Wendt, the material distribution of power, while not completely insignificant, places at best a distant second to the socially constructed nature of reality. Ideational factors determine the webs of social meaning and reality. Agents often select a course of action not because it is instrumentally profitable so much as because they are following a 'logic of appropriateness'. Ideas, rule and discourse disseminates them; how we think about the world has the utmost impact on what the world is like. This is in some sense correct; material factors are not destiny and legitimacy matters. However, it is a gross error to overlook the relation between concentrations of power and order. Material capability is a potent contributor to central tendencies and there are no examples of highly ordered, self-replicating systems without a well-endowed hierarch (Wendt 1999, 106, 110, 249; cf Cronin 1999; Crawford 2002, 2–7, 36–37; Klotz 1995, 9, 25; Mueller 2004, 2–4; Tyler 2006, 178; and Foucault 1995).

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<sup>14</sup> On Hobbes's more nuanced view of authority than he is given credit for, see Hobbes (1985, 21.6, 21.18, 22.8, 22.30, 29.6, 42.73). For other views on Hobbes, see also Williamson (1985, 165), Austin (1995, 21, 24, 30, 34, 223), Hart (1961, 23–25), Kelsen (1989, 33) and Ladenson (1990).

Barry Buzan's work is synthetic in nature and sympathetic to the goals of this paper. We have argued that the ordering mechanisms of hierarchy are the same as those of anarchy, and this harmonizes with Buzan's argument that international society has a great deal in common with domestic societies. As he suggests, much of the order we see is generated in a decentralized manner, and involves negotiation of who is a member in society, what are the rights and duties of members, what conventions ought to be abided by and what are legitimate ways to stake and defend claims. Like other thinkers, Buzan contributes valuable pieces of the puzzle, but not the threat of incompetent intervention (Buzan 2004, 6–7, 251–252, 260; cf Bull 1995, 54–56; Buzan et al 1993, 223–224, 245; and Linklater and Suganami 2006, 25, 51–52).

In brief, Waltz ably depicts the top–down dynamics of authority and order, Keohane and Wendt do a fine job conveying the bottom–up dynamics and Buzan blends both dynamics skilfully. Yet none of them has discussed the threat of incompetent intervention as a mechanism uniting top–down and bottom–up perspectives. And, as we saw in the preceding section, examples of this mechanism are common and consequential in domestic and international societies.

## Conclusion

We have argued that two causal mechanisms are responsible for much order in the world. The first is direct sanctioning by leviathan-like entities. But even the keenest, burliest central authorities face towering informational problems trying to monitor their jurisdiction and massive enforcement problems trying to impose settlements with finite resources. Nonetheless, apart from direct deterrence, hierarchs can create order indirectly through the threat of incompetent intervention, the potential for which quells escalation, stabilizes lower-level interactions, reconfigures common reference points and cultivates higher confidence in the actions of others. The result is order, though often at odds with the rules of central authority and via a circuitous course.

In addition, we have argued that anarchy creates order through the same direct and indirect mechanisms that hierarchy does, only in lessened form. It is important to keep in mind that central authority demands hefty resources to monitor and enforce tolerably within its ambit. It is also important to keep in mind that—regardless of resources—there are steep limitations to the top–down capabilities of all central authority. There will always be elements of anarchy in hierarchy and vice versa.

At least two salient implications follow from our arguments. One relates to trust in world politics. The prevailing view of trust (Kydd 2000, 326; Larson 1997, 5; cf Tilly 2005, 24) in the international relations literature is a dispositional account. That is, trust originates from the dispositions of actors—some are trustworthy types, others are not—and the issues are whether and how the trustworthy can identify each other to cooperate. While we agree there are more or less trustworthy actors in politics, we do not concur that dispositions are a first-order factor of trust. We believe that trust is mostly situational, and generalized trust is often the result of a powerful and potentially unwieldy external power

greasing the upper rungs of the escalatory ladder. Without the direct and indirect effects of centralized power, trust is far more dicey.<sup>15</sup>

The other implication relates to why organizational change is so hard (Simon 1997; Gerstner 2002; Betts 1991, chap 7). For reasons outlined in this paper, hierarchs are best at managing dire threats, but short of this they face critical scarcities of power. It is impossible to collect the necessary information to monitor subjects minutely, much less analyse and act on it in an expeditious manner. It requires special conditions for the preferences of central authority to penetrate lower levels of social interaction.<sup>16</sup>

We close with a connection to an enduring theme of political science. Machiavelli (1998, chap 9) asserted 'that the people desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great, and the great desire to command and oppress the people'. This paper has tried to explore the processes by which it is possible for the humble and mighty to both get their wish.

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<sup>15</sup> Again, it is worth stressing that order as we define it is not justice or progress and may not be positive. Our argument is at a high level of abstraction and should not be taken as an apology for objectionable state behaviours, like lying, internment or torture. We only seek to explain why states in anarchy have historically been less trusting than individuals in hierarchy.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of such conditions, see, for example, Edelstein (2004) and Neustadt (1990, 18, 24, 36).

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