Great Power Management: English School Meets Governmentality?

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There is a puzzling and, as far as I can see, unnoticed discontinuity between the five major institutions of international society identified by Hedley Bull. Four of them – war, diplomacy, international law and the balance of power – are hardly Bull's own inventions. One can argue about the exact meaning of 'war' or the 'balance of power' within the English School framework, but there is hardly any doubt as to the existence of the phenomena defined by these terms. This is not the case with the fifth institution: great power management. It is not immediately clear at all what the term can possibly stand for in practice; especially so if we take 'management' to be more than just a word and assign some analytical value to it. But then what exactly this value should be?

Bull himself provides little help here, and until recently, 'great power management' received little attention from subsequent generations of the English School, certainly much less than the other four institutions. This, I believe, is due neither to simple theoretical negligence, nor to the demise of great powers, but results from the difficulty in reconciling the practice of great power management with one of the major tenets of the English School; namely, its insistence on avoiding 'domestic analogy'.[i] Contrary to Martin Wight's argument, understanding international system by analogy with the state was practiced not only by international lawyers and confused theorists.[ii] This is how the great powers of the nineteenth century understood themselves. With one important qualification: by the time such understanding was articulated, the state itself was no longer understood in terms of the classical Hobbesian opposition of the commonwealth and the state of nature. The term 'management' is not after all Bull's theoretical invention, but appears instead precisely in this practical articulation by the great powers themselves in reference to the procedures established at the Congress of Vienna:

The advantage of this mode of proceeding is that you treat [other states] as a body with early and becoming respect. You keep the power by concert and management in your own hands, but without openly assuming authority to their exclusion. You obtain a sort of sanction from them for what you are determined at all events to do, which they cannot well withhold … . And you entitle yourselves, without disrespect to them, to meet together for dispatch of business for an indefinite time to their exclusion.[iii]

Only the authorship of Castlereagh and the context of the international congress betray the fact that this statement was made on behalf of the European great powers and not some European executive. Moreover, the familiar 'domestic' division of powers between the executive and the legislator is clearly echoed here in the distinction between 'management' and 'power by concert'.

Note, that only a century or so earlier, the distinction between the great powers and the rest is drawn differently, by the English ambassador to the Netherlands, William Temple, for example: in terms of the Aristotelian forms of

government rather than modern division of powers, and the 'managerial' stance of the lesser states, referred to as 'tradesmen', is not only opposed to the 'aristocratic' posture of the great powers but treated somewhat disparagingly.[iv] These changes parallel historic developments *within* European states, and it is possible to suggest that the victors in the Napoleonic wars recognised in the French undertaking not only a very old ambition to impose upon Europe a single *authority*, but also a genuinely new one: to establish a European *government*.[v] And while resolutely rejecting the former, they stealthily embraced the latter. Hence 'power by concert' and 'management' in the hands of the few, now recognised as 'great' in some distinctly new way; but still, as with the earlier 'aristocracy'/'tradesmen' distinction, by analogy with the historically specific ordering of the state.

In Bull, unlike in American realism, great powers are such not merely because of their material capabilities, but also 'by right'. However, in order to avoid domestic analogy, he prefers to conceptualise this right not in terms of 'ruling' – either aristocratic or executive – but by reference to specifically 'international' practices and institutions. Thus, 'great powers manage their relations with one another in the interest of international order', not least by preserving the general balance of power, or they 'exploit their preponderance in relation to the rest of the international society', by acting either in concert or unilaterally.[vi] Yet, this results in theoretical confusion. Either, in the case of the relations between great powers, great power management becomes indistinguishable from the balance of power; or, in the case of their relations with lesser states, international society becomes indistinguishable from the realist international system shaped by the distribution of material capabilities.

Not surprisingly then, later attempts at clarifying the nature of the great powers' rights effectively re-introduced domestic analogy, but in two distinct ways. First, Ian Clark started with the acceptance of Bull's point that international society, while being shaped by great powers, is also the condition of possibility for their very existence (as with the other four institutions), so that 'the absence of a great-power directorate entails the demise of international society altogether'.[vii] Yet, since the principle of consent underpinning the existence of the great power directorate is limited to the great powers themselves, they effectively occupy the position of a (quasi)sovereign within international society.[viii]

The second, more recent, line of argument proceeds not by establishing affinity between great power management and 'classical' sovereign authority but by questioning the juridical theory of sovereignty as such. On this view, lawyers and theorists criticised by Wight were mistaken not so much in projecting domestic sovereignty onto the international system but in their understanding of domestic sovereignty in the first place. This line of argument finds its inspiration in the writings of Michel Foucault, where the rise of Westphalian system is marked not only with further development of such 'political-military' instruments as war, diplomacy and the balance of power, but also with the emergence of a new instrument – 'a permanent military apparatus' which required a totally new hold on state's own power, but also the new means of control over power-management by other states.[ix] This new form of power-management, both domestically and internationally, is called 'police', which from the seventeenth century 'begins to refer to the set of means by which the state's forces can be increased while preserving the state in good order.' And since in the newly created Westphalian order 'there will be imbalance if within the European equilibrium there is a state, not my state, with bad police', action must be taken in the name of the balance of power so that 'there is good police, even in other states'.[x]

Note that in this formulation, great power management, although closely linked with the balance of power, is distinct from it. Also, as a mode of managing the balance of power and international society as a whole, it is neither limited to the concert of great powers, nor takes the form of the exploitation of their material preponderance vis-à-vis lesser states. In fact, over time, 'police' develops into explicitly liberal 'conduct of conduct' of individuals domestically and states internationally; an activity distinguished by its ambition to conduct the conduct of individuals/states themselves recognised as capable of freely conducting their own activities.

The crucial aspect of this mode of power-management extensively explored by governmentality literature in IR generally and in security studies in particular, is that 'governors' here represent entities whose power 'is not political power at all, but purely administrative power – power of the experts and interpreters of life'.[xi] At first sight, this seems to suggest that analytical and practical distinction between 'management' and other institutions identified by both Bull and Foucault as explicitly 'political' comes at the expense of 'greatness'. There is hardly anything 'great' about the

managerial pursuits of even the most powerful states, not only willingly assuming the role of global administrators but also often transferring this role to private agencies. By demoting states to the position of administrators, 'police' management does not merely modify the restriction on the membership in the great powers club, but tends to consign the establishment as such to the 'waste bin of history'; hence, the array of euphemisms, from the 'leader' to 'indispensable nation', recently introduced by the US in its self-acclamations.[xii]

Still, as always, the situation may well be more complex and ambivalent. After all, underpinning the 'police' expertise over life is a prior distinction familiar to liberalism from the very beginning: between those who, being capable of free conduct themselves, can be governed in this manner and those who, because of their ignorance of or aversion to liberal conception of freedom, can only be governed in some other way.[xiii] And this distinction remains resolutely political. The problem – or, rather, one of the many theoretical and practical challenges here – is that this explicitly political decision is no longer the sole prerogative of the state, even the most powerful ones. Various non-governmental agencies, especially those concerned with representing the whole of humanity, are identifying the sins of the world by offering their interpretations of life, while leaving to the states, as their 'secular wing' the managerial task of actually addressing the problems.[xiv] Consequently, it is not at all impossible to imagine a world in which something like 'great power management' is clearly at work, while 'greatness', 'power' and 'management' can no longer be unproblematically clustered together and allocated to single entity.

Notes

[i] See Hidemi Suganami, *The Domestic Analogy and World Order Proposals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[ii] Martin Wight, 'Why is there no International Theory?' *International Relations* 2:1 (April 1960), 35-48.

[iii] Gerry J. Simpson, *Great Powers and Outlaw States: Unequal Sovereigns in the International Legal Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99.

[iv] Istvan Hont, 'Free Trade and the Economic Limits to National Politics: Neo-Machiavellian Political Economy Reconsidered', *The Economic Limits to Modern Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[v] Paul Schroeder, 'Historical Reality vs Neorealist Theory', *International Security* 19:1 (1994), 108-48.

[vi] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study in World Politics* (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), 205-6.

[vii] Ian Clark, *Hegemony in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37.

[viii] Ian Clark, *International Legitimacy and World Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 101-2.

[ix] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collègede France, 1977–1978* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 305-6.

[x] Ibid., 313-15. Within the English School, see Iver Neumann and Ole Jacob Sending,*Governing the Global Polity: Practice, Mentality, Rationality* (University of Michigan Press, 2010).

[xi] Mika Ojakangas, 'Impossible Dialogue on Biopower: Agamben and Foucault', *Foucault Studies* 2 (2005), 16.

[xii] Richard Ned Lebow and Robert Kelly, 'Thucydides and Hegemony: Athens and the United States',*Review of International Studies* 27:4 (October 2001), 606.

[xiii] Barry Hindess, 'Politics as Government: Michel Foucault's Analysis of Political Reason',*Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 30:4 (2005), 389-413.

[xiv] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 36.

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