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Meet the English School

Author(s): Barry Buzan

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# From international system to international society: structural realism and regime theory meet the English school

Barry Buzan

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The purpose of this article is to relate the concept of “international society” to structural realism and regime theory. One aim is to bring together three bodies of theory—two largely American, the other largely British—and to show how they complement and strengthen one another. Another aim is to clarify the concept so that it can be used with greater analytical precision. To do this, I develop the argument along three lines. First, I establish definitions for “international system” and “international society” that enable a clear boundary to be drawn between them. Without such a boundary, the concept of international society is too fuzzy to be used either for comparative analysis of different international systems or for analysis of the historical development of any given international society. Second, I open up the question of how international society relates to world society and try to resolve the rather nebulous position in the existing literature as to whether these two ideas are complementary or antagonistic. Third, I use the logic of structural realism to show how international society can emerge as a natural product of the logic of anarchy. This provides an alternative, functionally based account to contrast to the largely historical work of the English school. The argument is that this functional account is better suited to analysis of the contemporary global, multicultural, international society because it answers questions about the expansion of European international society that are difficult to deal with if society is primarily conceived of in terms of historical community. It also provides the tools for conceptualizing a complex international society ordered in terms of concentric circles representing lesser degrees of commitment as one moves outward from the center. The current international society already has this structure, and the logic of uneven development suggests that future developments of it will also follow this pattern.

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In part, the article is a response to Ole Wæver's criticism that the English school has largely stagnated despite the fact that it occupies an "extremely interesting locale in the International Relations landscape," representing a tradition of thought distinct from realism and liberalism and able to combine elements of both and put them into historical context.<sup>1</sup> In part it is also a response to Andrew Hurrell's critique of regime theory that, in focusing too much on the particular and the rational, it has lost sight of some broader normative and legal elements on which the phenomenon of contemporary regimes rests.<sup>2</sup> Regime theory and international society are part of the same tradition, but due to the peculiarities of academic discourse, they have become largely detached from one another. Regime theory has made considerable progress in its own right and could now benefit from being reconnected to the older tradition of international society that both puts it into a broader context (systemically and historically) and connects it to the underlying political-legal framework of the modern international system. The literature on international society connects the study of regimes to both its intellectual roots and the earlier history of the phenomenon.

The idea of international society goes back at least as far as Hugo Grotius.<sup>3</sup> It is rooted in the classical legal tradition and the notion that international law constitutes a community of those participating in the international legal order.<sup>4</sup> Within the discipline of international relations, the concept has been put forward and developed by writers of the so-called English school, including E. H. Carr, C. A. W. Manning, Martin Wight, Hedley Bull, Gerrit Gong, Adam Watson, John Vincent, and James Mayall.<sup>5</sup> Bull has perhaps been its most

1. Ole Wæver, "International Society—Theoretical Promises Unfulfilled?" *Cooperation and Conflict* 27 (1992) pp. 97–128, and in particular pp. 98–100 and 121.

2. Andrew Hurrell, "International Law and the Study of International Regimes: A Reflective Approach," in Volker Rittberger, ed., *Beyond Anarchy: International Cooperation and Regimes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

3. Claire A. Cutler, "The 'Grotian Tradition' in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 17 (January 1991), pp. 41–65.

4. Hermann Mosler, *The International Society as a Legal Community* (Alphen aan den Rijn, the Netherlands: Sijthoff and Noordhoff, 1980), p. xv.

5. See E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1946), pp. 162–69; C. A. W. Manning, *The Nature of International Society* (London: LSE, 1962); Martin Wight, "Western Values in International Relations," in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), pp. 89–131; Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977); Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1979), pp. 105–12; Gabriele Wight and Brian Porter, eds., *International Theory: The Three Traditions—Martin Wight* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991); Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977); Hedley Bull, *Justice in International Relations*, 1983–84 Hagey Lectures, University of Waterloo, 1984; Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of "Civilisation" in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Adam Watson, "Hedley Bull, State Systems, and International Studies," *Review of International Studies* 13 (April 1987), pp. 147–53; Adam Watson, "Systems of States," *Review of International Studies* 16 (April 1990), pp. 99–109; Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992); John R. Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974); John R. Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge:

influential recent proponent, playing a leading role in getting published the seminal earlier work of Wight and spreading the concept more widely into the international relations literature.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its long gestation, international society remains better developed as a historical than as a theoretical concept. Manning's foundational work, despite its undeniably modern insights into the importance of perception, belief, and language in constructing international political reality, was too convoluted and eccentric in expression to attract a following (though it might yet find a revival among postmodernists). Wight's brilliant combination of historical depth and range, with the pattern-seeking instincts of a social scientist, set the style for most of his successors. The analytical tradition set by Bull and others largely followed Wight's historical track. The prime objective was empirical analysis of the modern European-generated international society. Wight's concern with exploring the concept across the history of the international system has only recently been followed up by Watson,<sup>7</sup> and little attempt has yet been made to link the historical study of international society to the more abstract American modes of theorizing about the international system.

Both Carr and, at much greater length, Manning make much of the fact that states (and therefore also the idea of a society of states) are in an important sense fictions, whose status rests on the strength and breadth of people's willingness to believe in, or merely accept, their reality.<sup>8</sup> This position is not unrelated to Benedict Anderson's discussion of "imagined communities": the process by which people bond their own identities to a community whose scale means that it is far beyond their ability to experience it directly.<sup>9</sup> Carr makes much of the rhetorical force and political value of such ideas to those great powers than can mobilize them to support the international legitimacy of their positions. This view opens up a more normative aspect of international society as a concept and provides two answers to the question of why one should adopt the idea as an approach to understanding international relations. The first answer is simply that it works well as an empirical tool (which is mostly what this article is about). Here the case is that the concept of society fits with the

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Cambridge University Press, 1986); and James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

6. See K. J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflict and International Order 1648–89* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and K. J. Holsti, "Governance Without Government: Polyarchy in Nineteenth-century European International Politics," and Mark Zacher, "The Decaying Pillars of the Westphalian Temple: Implications for International Order and Governance," in James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel, eds., *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 30–57 and 58–101, respectively.

7. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*.

8. See Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis*, pp. 162–69; and Manning, *The Nature of International Society*, especially chap. 3.

9. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

observed data and offers a way of understanding it that is not available using alternative concepts.

The second answer is more political: there is a case for promoting the concept on the grounds that it constructs a way of thinking about international relations that, if widely adopted, would have a beneficial effect on the practice of how states relate to each other. In other words, the very act of perceiving international relations in societal terms will itself condition behavior by opening new understandings of what is possible and what is desirable. The idea of society is self-reinforcing inasmuch as consciousness of it helps to consolidate and reproduce its reality. The idea that language is part of political action has long been part of the realist tradition and is by no means absent from this work.<sup>10</sup>

The next section sets out the central distinction between an international system and international society. It raises the question of when an international society can be said to exist and begins to approach an answer by examining two different models of how an international society comes into being. The following section takes up a second core distinction in the literature, that between international society and world society. It argues that the literature is unclear about how these two ideas relate to each other and that the nature of their relationship is crucial to understanding how, and indeed whether, international society can develop beyond a fairly basic level. Next I try to cast light on all of these questions by using structural realist logic to see how international society could evolve from an international system without the preexistence of a natural shared culture. Then I construct a definition of the minimum conditions for international society in terms of mutual recognition among sovereign states of their legal equality as actors and show how such a definition can be analytically deployed. Finally I summarize what is gained analytically by using the approach developed here and reflect on the utility of bringing the thinking of the English school, structural realism, and regime theory into closer contact.

### **International system and international society**

Bull and Watson define international society as “a group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behaviour of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognise their common interest in maintaining these arrangements.”<sup>11</sup> This

10. Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), section 3.

11. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, “Introduction,” in Bull and Watson, *Expansion of International Society*, pp. 1–9. The quotation is drawn from p. 1.

definition clearly establishes the principle that system and society are distinct. It also begins to suggest where the boundary between them lies, though it does not specify any detailed criteria for establishing it. It is particularly useful to the present enterprise because its conception of system is close to the mechanistic understanding of American usage.<sup>12</sup> It thus avoids the confusion that exists between system (as interacting parts) and society (as self-conscious and in part self-regulating) and opens the possibility for synthesizing the English school with structural realism. On the English side, the terminological confusion arises from Wight, who used the term “systems of states” to mean what is now meant by international society.<sup>13</sup>

The distinction between system and society is central. System is logically the more basic, and prior, idea: an international system can exist without a society, but the converse is not true. As Bull notes, the expansion of Europe starting in the fifteenth century created an international system long before an international society came into being.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, by Gong’s argument, a truly global international society (as opposed to a globally operating European one) did not begin to emerge until late in the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The international system existed because the projection of European power brought previously isolated peoples and political communities into regular contact with each other. For a system to exist requires the existence of units, among which significant interaction takes place and that are arranged or structured according to some ordering principle. The Bull and Watson formulation defines significant interaction as being action such that “the behaviour of each [actor] is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others.” In the international system, the units are states (or independent political communities). The interactions among them include war, diplomacy, trade, migration, and the movement of ideas.

Kenneth Waltz notwithstanding, the consequences of anarchy vary according to the level and type of interaction in the system. A system in which interaction capacity is relatively low, as during the ancient period of human civilization, is quite different from one in which it is relatively high, as in the late twentieth century. Whether or not interaction capacity is sufficiently developed to allow remote units to trade and fight with each other on a large scale, as in modern Europe, or whether it is only sufficient to allow the carriage of a few ideas, technologies, and individuals between remote cultures, as between classical Rome and Han China, makes an enormous difference to both the nature of international relations and the impact of anarchic structure.<sup>16</sup>

12. Richard Little, “The Systems Approach,” in Steven Smith, ed., *International Relations: British and American Approaches* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 70–91.

13. Wight, *Systems of States*.

14. Hedley Bull, “The Emergence of a Universal International Society,” in Bull and Watson, *Expansion of International Society*, pp. 117–26.

15. Gong, *The Standard of “Civilisation” in International Society*.

16. Buzan, Jones, and Little, *The Logic of Anarchy*, chaps. 4–9.

The question is, when can we say that the society part of Bull and Watson's definition—that states “have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognise their common interest in maintaining these arrangements”—comes into being? Writers such as Gong, Watson, and Yongjin Zhang have grappled with that question in trying to determine when specific non-European states (China, Ethiopia, Japan, Ottoman Empire, Siam) gained entry into the globalized European international society.<sup>17</sup> This enterprise has made some progress despite Roy Jones's dismissal of the whole idea of trying to define membership as hopeless.<sup>18</sup> As well as the question of who is in and who is out, there is also the larger and less-studied matter of when all or part of an international system can be said to have become an international society.

Bull's analysis does not give much guidance on this point. He argues that international society is closely associated with the idea of international order, where order means “an arrangement of social life such that it promotes certain goals or values.”<sup>19</sup> This definition is similar to the earlier one of Wight: “a system of relationships for certain common purposes.”<sup>20</sup> But if international society is a synonym for order, the idea potentially stretches across an enormous spectrum of possibilities, ranging from early, underdeveloped, and minimal at one end (such as norms against the seizure or murder of emissaries) to late, well-developed, and maximal on the other (a community of states enmeshed in a network of agreed regimes and institutions covering much of their interaction—an expanded version of the “complex interdependence” formulated by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye).<sup>21</sup> The huge scope of this spectrum underlines the need both for a boundary to distinguish between system and system-plus-society and for some kind of model to handle the different stages or levels of development of international society. Bull's crude notion that international society is subject to strengthening and weakening trends is a rather feeble analytical tool unless some benchmarks can be established against which to measure the extent and direction of change. Indeed, his failure to establish a clearer analytical framework caused him to reach wholly mistaken and unnecessarily pessimistic conclusions about the development of international society in the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

17. See Gong, *The Standard of “Civilisation” in International Society*; Watson, “Hedley Bull, State Systems, and International Studies”; and Yongjin Zhang, “China's Entry into International Society: Beyond the Standard of Civilization,” *Review of International Studies* 17 (January 1991), pp. 3–16.

18. Roy E. Jones, “The English School of International Relations: A Case for Closure,” *Review of International Studies* 7 (January 1981), pp. 1–13.

19. See Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 4; and Bull and Watson, “Introduction.”

20. Wight, *Power Politics*, p. 105.

21. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).

22. Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (Hemel Hempstead, England: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 166–74.

Before one can answer precisely when an international system acquires an international society, it is necessary to examine how an international society comes into being. There are two possible views, and it is helpful in understanding these to use the classical distinction from sociology between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* conceptions of society.<sup>23</sup> The *gemeinschaft* understanding sees society as something organic and traditional, involving bonds of common sentiment, experience, and identity. It is an essentially historical conception: societies grow rather than being made. The *gesellschaft* understanding sees society as being contractual and constructed rather than sentimental and traditional. It is more consciously organizational: societies can be made by acts of will.

The first view of how an international society comes into being is rather forcefully advocated by Wight: "We must assume that a states-system [i.e., an international society] will not come into being without a degree of cultural unity among its members."<sup>24</sup> This view results from historical analysis and fits closely with the *gemeinschaft* conception of society. Wight develops two examples to support his case, classical Greece and early-modern Europe. In both cases, international societies developed in subsystems whose units shared significant elements of culture, especially religion and language. The ancient Greeks shared a language and religion that differentiated them from so-called barbarians.<sup>25</sup> Most Western and Southern (though fewer Eastern) Europeans shared the cultural residue of the Roman Empire, most notably in the Catholic church and the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>26</sup> Watson continued the analysis in this vein, identifying an additional nine cases.<sup>27</sup> Since a prior shared culture occurs in most of the main historical examples of international society (either naturally or as a result of earlier imperial homogenizings), the force of this argument is strong. At a very minimum it suggests that the preexistence of a common culture among the units of a system is a great advantage in stimulating the formation of an international society earlier than would otherwise occur. Whether or not it is a necessary condition, as Wight argues, is arguable.

Unfortunately, historical cases are few: eleven altogether, if Watson is correct. Even worse, the period of European expansion has so shaped and dominated all subsequent developments of international society that we are unlikely to get any further clear historical evidence of how an international society forms *de novo*. Although the development of the better known cases of international society historically may have been associated with the preexistence of a common culture, there is no logical necessity for such an association. Indeed, the messy multicultural history of the Middle East, with its many waxings and wanings of empires, suggests that significant elements of interna-

23. F. Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1887).

24. Wight, *Systems of States*, p. 33.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 83–85.

26. *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

27. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*.



tional society can form in a subsystem that does not share a common culture.<sup>28</sup> This points to a functional view, more in accordance with *gesellschaft* understanding of society, in which the development of international society can be seen as a rational long-term response to the existence of an increasingly dense and interactive international system.

Whether or not units share a common culture, at some point the regularity and intensity of their interactions will virtually force the development of a degree of recognition and accommodation among them. As ruling elites recognize the permanence and importance of the economic and strategic interdependence among their states, they will begin to work out rules for avoiding unwanted conflicts and for facilitating desired exchanges. Failure to do so would mean enormous inconvenience and, more seriously, potential loss of competitive advantage for those who failed to take this step when others had done so. Although we have no fully documented historical model for this process, its logic is clear: international society could evolve functionally from the logic of anarchy without preexisting cultural bonds. This perspective solves some of the problems that arise for the *gemeinschaft* perspective when shared-culture international societies develop close relations with states outside their civilizational sphere. Examples here are Wight's difficulty in deciding whether Persia and Carthage were part of the Greek international society despite their lack of common culture<sup>29</sup> and Bull's problem in seeing how a European international society became a truly global one. Although European imperialism did provide important elements of a common culture for a global international society, the contemporary development of that society also contains a good deal of functional accommodation by states representing a diversity of cultures.

While not challenging Wight's hypothesis, Bull leans toward that functional line in trying to establish his basic view of society. Given the inevitability of relations with other units, a common desire for order is the minimum necessary condition to begin the evolution of international society along *gesellschaft* lines. Except in international systems with very low interaction capacity, states cannot choose whether or not to have a foreign policy. Note the location of most utopias outside the international system and the characterization of many dystopias as warfare states. A minimal desire for order begins to emerge when leaders realize the disadvantages of permanent chaos if interstate relations remain wholly unregulated. Bull posits three elementary goals as basic to any society: (1) some limits on the use of force, (2) some provision for the sanctity of contracts, and (3) some arrangement for the assignment of property rights.<sup>30</sup> The idea is that mutual self-interest will push leaderships into pursuing

28. See Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1, *A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), chaps. 3–6 and 8; and Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*, chaps. 2–4, 6, and 12.

29. Wight, *Systems of States*, chap. 3.

30. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 4–5.

common objectives in these three areas and thus into constructing an international order. As Watson notes, "The regulating rules and institutions of a system usually, and perhaps inexorably, develop to the point where the members become conscious of common values and the system becomes an international society."<sup>31</sup> This approach, with its strong orientation toward realist concerns with national security, provides a useful and effective framework for probing why otherwise competitive or even antagonistic units establish "by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognise their common interest in maintaining these arrangements." Watson's term *raison de système* captures this logic nicely.<sup>32</sup>

One weakness of this functional line, however, is that it omits the notion of common identity that is central to the concept of society. To deserve the label, societies have to contain an element of common identity, a sense of "we-ness," that comprises more than mere shared goals. Wight's *gemeinschaft* line takes such an identity to be a historical precondition for international society and therefore does not have to consider the issue. But how does shared identity come about in a *gesellschaft* society in which the units start out with different cultures? There are two possibilities. The first and simpler builds on the Waltzian logic that anarchy generates like units.<sup>33</sup> As interaction makes units more similar, it becomes easier for each to accept that the other members of the system are in some important sense the same type of entity as itself. Mutual exchanges of this acceptance enable a collection of otherwise disparate actors to consider themselves members of a community. Historical discussions of how non-European states came to terms with what Gong has termed the European "standard of civilization" are suggestive of how this process of convergence toward a shared identity works, the most striking case being Japan's conscious reshaping of itself into a Western state during the late nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

The second possibility for *gesellschaft* community concerns the more complicated situation of unlike units in anarchy. Waltz denies this possibility, but John Ruggie as well as Barry Buzan and Richard Little argue that Waltz is wrong to close off this element of structure.<sup>35</sup> Bull's term "neomedievalism" is gaining currency as a label for a system of unlike units, though he saw that possibility as incompatible with international society, which, like Waltz, he saw as strictly state-based. Nevertheless, there is no logical reason why neomedieval versions of anarchic systems could not develop international societies. In such a system, shared identity as a similar type of unit is by definition not a basis for

31. Watson, "Hedley Bull, State Systems, and International Studies," p. 151.

32. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*, p. 14.

33. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 93.

34. See Gong, *The Standard of "Civilisation" in International Society*; Bull and Watson, *Expansion of International Society*.

35. John Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Towards a Neo-Realist Synthesis," *World Politics* 35 (1983), pp. 261–85; and Buzan, Jones, and Little, *The Logic of Anarchy*, chap. 3.

society. In a neomedieval international system, the only possibility for shared identity is not in acceptance of likeness as units but in acceptance of a set of rules that legitimize the differentiation of units and establish the distribution of rights and responsibilities among functionally differentiated actors. Compared with the primitive possibility of shared identity among like units, this is a complex and sophisticated form of international society. It is difficult to imagine such an arrangement coming about from scratch. The historical case of medieval Europe had the enormous legacy of the Roman Empire, especially the Church, to underpin and enable it and is therefore a *gemeinschaft* model. It seems likely that any future neomedieval international society would have to evolve from an already stable international society of the like-units type. In the discussion that follows I will therefore concentrate mainly on the simpler form of like-units international society because it is the prior type. Nevertheless, the neomedieval form is worth keeping in mind as an evolutionary possibility for highly developed international societies.

In the *gesellschaft* model, it can be argued that shared goals and identity converge at some point; that is, that the development of common norms, rules, and institutions—of a sense of *raison de système*—must eventually generate, as well as be generated by, a common identity. A community arrived at by this route would be a narrower, more conditional, and more fragile one than that formed by a common culture. Unless there is some sense of common identity, however, society cannot exist. Curiously, Bull does not follow his own logic down this line. Indeed, he does not discuss common identity as an element of international society at all.

There are thus two distinct ways for an international society to come into existence: what might be called the “civilizational” (*gemeinschaft*) and the “functional” (*gesellschaft*) models. Historically, the civilizational model is the more powerful. Whether resulting from an original shared culture, as in the case of the classical Greeks, or from an imperial legacy of shared culture, as in the case of Europe, civilizational international societies have dominated the historical record. There appear to be no pure cases of functional international societies, but the functional process is nonetheless vital to understanding what happens when an international society expands beyond its original cultural domain. Unless a civilizational international society can either transcend its original culture or transmit it outward, it will inevitably be confined to some region of the planet. In a postcolonial world, a global international society can only be multicultural and must therefore have strong *gesellschaft* elements.

### **International society and world society**

A second key distinction acknowledged by most of the writers associated with the tradition is between “international society,” which is about the nature of relations among states (or whatever political units compose the international

system), and “world society,” which takes individuals, nonstate organizations, and ultimately the global population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements. International and world society may refer to the entire global system—and contemporary discussion of them tends to have that focus—but they can also refer to subsystemic phenomena (Europe, Islam, ancient Greece). It is therefore possible for more than one international or “world” society to coexist or for one part of the system to have an international society while other parts do not. The central question is how these two ideas relate to each other: are they complements or opposites? The literature has not yet explored this question adequately, and until the relationship is made clearer it is impossible to make much progress toward a layered understanding of international society ranged along a spectrum from basic/minimal to highly developed. The discussion in the previous section already has raised the issue. The civilizational and functional models of how international societies come into being seem to point to quite different conclusions about how international and world society relate to one another. In the civilizational view, especially as advocated by Wight, some element of world society is a precondition to international society. In the functional view, it is possible to imagine primitive international societies existing without any elements of world society at all.

Discussion of international society has taken place largely within the realist framework, with writers stressing the centrality of the state and the role of anarchic structure. World society is associated more with idealist thinking: a possible and desirable development for the future and, as a present trend, largely seen as antagonistic to the primacy of the state. These associations with realism and idealism are unfortunate inasmuch as they reinforce a tendency to think of the ideas as necessarily conflicting: states acting as bastions of mutually exclusive identities preventing the emergence of a world citizenry or global cosmopolitanism necessarily undermining the identity and legitimacy of states and thus corroding the foundations of international society. Andrew Linklater’s work is a good example of the attempt to use a global logic of human rights and human development to mount an assault on the state and to seek “a higher form of international political life . . . maximising the conditions for individual and collective self-determination.”<sup>36</sup> Surprisingly, this view also surfaces in the writings of Bull, who argues that the extension of international law to subjects other than states (e.g., human rights law) undermines the international order based on the society of states.<sup>37</sup> Some realists, such as Hans Morgenthau, saw world society as a precondition for a world government that would eventually bring the anarchic era of the international system to a close.<sup>38</sup>

36. Andrew Linklater, “Men and Citizens in International Relations,” *Review of International Studies* 7 (January 1981), pp. 23–37 and especially pp. 34–35.

37. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 151–53.

38. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1978), pp. 17–18 and 24.

There is a contrary tendency to see the two concepts as somehow developmentally linked, as in the idea that international society is a kind of way station on the historical road away from a raw and unmoderated anarchy and toward a world society. Bull hints faintly in this direction.<sup>39</sup> Manning does so more explicitly.<sup>40</sup> Wight makes the incisive observation that the basis of international society lies both in the recognition of similarities between political units and in a general sense of common humanity, but he does not take the point further than that.<sup>41</sup> It is on this view that I plan to build, arguing that beyond a certain point, an international society cannot develop further without parallel developments in its corresponding world society.

None of the authors in the tradition has attempted to resolve the relationship between international and world society. This omission allows, and is perhaps in part caused by, persistent ambiguities in the concept of society itself. Even sociology, whose job one might think this to be, has failed both to define society as a unit of analysis and to separate social processes from economic and political ones.<sup>42</sup> At least two distinguished sociologists have advocated rejection of "society" as an analytical concept on the grounds that no unit can be found to correspond with it.<sup>43</sup> However, from an international relations perspective, it is not all that difficult to construct societal actors in terms of the strong identity groups generated by nationalism and religion.<sup>44</sup> Only when this relationship is clarified can one make any progress toward a theoretical model of how international society develops. Without such a model, the concept is trapped in history and doomed to remain theoretically nebulous despite the rising significance of the phenomena that it describes.

The tension between international and world society is quite strong in Bull's writing, and his failure to explore common identity goes some way toward explaining the poorly developed and unsatisfactory relationship in his work between international society (and international order and international political system) and world society (and world order and world political system). In Bull's view there is no global world society, and he does not say much about it. He says more about world order and the world political system, seeing these simply as more-inclusive categories than international order and international political system, containing relationships among a wide range of actors in addition to states. But it is clear by inference, and by his references to universal values, that the key difference between world and international society is that the former is based on units at the level of individuals and the latter, at the level of states (though international society can also be seen in

39. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 319.

40. Manning, *The Nature of International Society*, chap. 14.

41. Wight, "Western Values in International Relations," pp. 95–97.

42. Leon H. Mayhew, "Society," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 14, 1968, pp. 583–85.

43. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Politics of the World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p. 2; and Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, p. 2.

44. Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan, Marten Kelstrup, Pierre Lemaitre, et al., *Identity, Migration, and the New Security Agenda in Europe* (London: Pinter, 1993), especially chap. 2.

individual terms as existing among the ruling elites of states). For Bull, international society rests on common norms, rules, and identities among states, whereas world society would rest on common norms, rules, and identities held by individuals across the system. In structural terms, the modern political system of international society is anarchic, featuring the sovereignty of states as the foundation of societal relations among them. The political structure of a potential world society is ambiguous. It could be a hierarchy (world government); it could continue to be international anarchy; or it could be primal anarchy at the individual level—the stateless society of classical anarchism—that effectively eliminates the political sector. Although it has not been much discussed in relation to world society, the very idea of a global society based on individuals presupposes rather high levels of interaction capacity. Only on a densely networked and interactive planet—some version of Marshall McLuhan's global village—could a shared identity and common norms develop at the individual level across the system.

As noted above, in some ways these two levels of society appear fundamentally antagonistic. The cultivation of distinct national identities and the explicit fragmentation of the global polity into sovereign units appear at first glance to be the antithesis of world society. Conversely, if the global citizenry share a wide range of common values, what is the point of organizing politically into separate states? But note how this superficially plausible antagonism depends on the assumption that identities must be mutually exclusive; that is, that people can hold only one identity at the expense of another. This is a rather nineteenth-century view of exclusive nationalisms. A postmodern view suggests that people are quite capable of holding several identities in parallel. One can, for example, be English, British, European, and Western all at the same time without the same conflict that would arise if one tried to be, say, both English and Scottish or English and French at the same time. Alongside this layered set one could also hold other large-scale identities as a member or supporter of various political, cultural, gender, professional, or religious movements. From this perspective it becomes possible to imagine the development of a world society alongside national or civilizational ones without there being any necessary erosion of one by the other.

A similar analysis can be applied to international law. Bull makes much of the potential conflict between international law and the international society of sovereign states.<sup>45</sup> He worries about the extension of legal rights to nonstate entities and individuals (human rights), fearing that such extensions will undermine sovereignty and therefore the bases of international order. His worry could be justified, but it is not necessarily so. Imagine a set of open, liberal states in which human rights are firmly embedded in each member's domestic constitution. All states are also committed to relatively open economic and cultural interaction. Among such states, an international law

45. See Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, chap. 6; and Bull, *Justice in International Relations*, pp. 11–18.

(i.e., a regime) of human rights would do little more than codify and standardize existing practice.

The case for antagonism between world society and international society is neither automatic nor firm. Opposed to it is a set of arguments suggesting that if international society is to progress (or in Wight's view even to come into being) beyond a rather basic level, then it can, and possibly must, be accompanied by world society developments. The key link is in the level of making foreign policy. In pluralist societies, mass opinion sets constraints on what kind of foreign policies can be promoted and sustained. In an international system characterized by high interaction capacity and complex interdependence, policies of openness require public support across a wide range of issues. Only if publics share certain values can such policies be sustained. Bull seems to lean in this direction, though apparently without seeing the full significance, when he talks about the need, at least among elites, for a common culture, including language, art, epistemology, welfare values, and morals.<sup>46</sup> To the extent that such a common culture emerges among the masses as well, it should enormously reinforce the possibility for international society.

There is therefore a plausible case that world society and international society can only develop hand-in-hand. An international society cannot develop past a fairly primitive level without being supported by the development of elements of "world" culture at the mass level, and this is true on both the subsystem and global scales. Conversely, a world society cannot emerge unless it is supported by a stable political framework, and the state system remains the only candidate for this.

To pursue this argument in more detail and to resume progress toward answering the question of when an international society can be said to exist, it is helpful to return to the process of how an international society develops in a primitive international system, this time thinking it through more fully in structural realist terms. This is not an attempt to represent the actual history of how any given international society developed. Instead, it tries to develop in abstract the functional line that international societies can evolve naturally from the logic of anarchy. One of its uses is to provide a basis for rethinking some of the assumptions about international society that have come from the historical approach. It should also provide a clearer way of thinking about the relationship between international society and world society and lead us toward identifying a boundary between international system and international society.

### **System before society**

The easiest way to construct an abstract developmental model of international society is to imagine an anarchic international system before any societal

46. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 315–17.

development takes place: pure system, no society. For such a system to exist, by definition there is significant interaction among the units: they have become sufficiently numerous and powerful that their activities regularly cross paths. Some peaceful interaction will occur (trade, individual visits, intermarriage), and these, along with conflictual contact, will inevitably transmit ideas and technologies. Trade automatically creates pressure for codes of conduct that facilitate the process of exchange and protect those engaged in it. Without some assurances of security, trading activity would be severely restricted, or even extinguished, by piracy, theft, or excess taxation.

While levels of contact remain low (i.e., the system has a low interaction capacity), the internal conventions of society toward strangers and the utility of exotic trade may well keep interaction quite peaceful. But as interaction capacity increases, contact becomes more intense and the probability of conflict rises. Different societies will find their boundaries rubbing up against each other and will fall into dispute over territory, resources, and status. Some societies will respond to the fact that there is a good living to be made from piracy and aggression and will specialize accordingly. Horse-mounted herds-men, for example, have sometimes found that the tools and skills of their life-style give them a military advantage over more sedentary agriculturalists. Others will acquire imperial ambitions, finding internal legitimation for expansionism in their religion, economy, culture, or simply in their superior power. Once this level of strategic interaction is reached, all the units within the system come under the pressure of the security dilemma and the balance of power. Since the units share no culture, do not formally recognize each other, and have no established conventions for diplomatic communication, it is easy for the behavior of each to take on a highly self-centered and self-righteous character in relation to the interests of others. In individuals, an excess of inner-driven over relational behavior is defined as autism. The international relations of a system without any society are thus analogous to those of a madhouse: idiosyncratic, unpredictable, only weakly mediated by communication and a sense of *raison de système*, and easily moved to violence.

It is possible to imagine a primitive international system existing in this mode for a long time but difficult to imagine it doing so without developing at least a few basic elements of international society. In such an underdeveloped system (or, as I have earlier called it, “immature” anarchy<sup>47</sup>) the struggle of individual units to survive automatically leads to balance of power and the reproduction of the anarchic structure of the system.<sup>48</sup> Casualty rates might be rather high: some units would be obliterated (note the fates of Assyria, Carthage, the Hittite Empire, the Incan Empire, and many others). The overall configuration of boundaries and membership would be unstable. In a natural or free-for-all balance of power of this type, it is possible that one unit might gain control of the system, temporarily transforming anarchy into a hierarchical structure,

47. Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*.

48. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.



until internal weakening and disintegration allow the reemergence of international anarchic relations (China, Persia, Rome). Such imperial episodes transmit elements of common culture throughout the system, as the Hellenic and Roman empires did, and these elements can play an important role in facilitating the development of international society when the system returns to anarchic structure.

Watson postulates a spectrum of possibilities for systemic political structure, ranging from anarchy on one end, emphasizing the independence of units (e.g., classical Greece), to empire on the other, where the system is controlled by a central imperial authority (e.g., China and Rome). In between lie hegemony, suzerainty, and dominion, indicating increasing degrees of domination over the system by a major power.<sup>49</sup> The two ends of this scheme parallel Waltz's distinction between anarchic and hierarchical systems, Wight's between a system of states and a suzerain state system, Immanuel Wallerstein's between a "world economy" and a "world empire," and Michael Mann's between "multipower actor civilizations" and "empires of domination."<sup>50</sup> Watson's innovation is to present a spectrum rather than a dyadic choice and to suggest that the ends represent extreme and unstable positions, with the middle range being the more natural condition of international systems.

If we assume as a starting point a raw unsocialized anarchic system in which strategic interaction among the units is in play, Waltz's "shoving and shaping" forces of socialization and competition would be at work, pressuring units to adapt to the practices of the most successful (and powerful) by punishing those that did not with weakness, insecurity, and possible loss of independence.<sup>51</sup> This kind of intense and regular interaction necessitates the development of some conventions for communication and negotiation among the units, which in turn creates pressure for some form of recognition. Even if all of the units remain fundamentally at war, seeking to expand their influence and territorial control whenever opportunity allows, there will still be periods of truce, there will still be incentives to trade, and there will at times be the need or desire to form alliances against other rivals or to negotiate cease-fires. The element of common humanity would also sometimes create points of contact over issues such as obligations to the dead. Where long-term rivalry results in standoff, as between Rome and Parthia or classical Greece and Persia, the durability of the facts on the ground creates incentives for the parties to recognize at least the reality of each other's existence.

Unless one unit is able to dominate the system, the pressures of life in the anarchy virtually force the eventual development of at least a few basic

49. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*, pp. 13–18.

50. See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 114–16; Wight, *Systems of States*, chap. 1; Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1974, especially p. 390; and Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, chaps. 4 and 5.

51. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, chaps. 5 and 6.

elements of international society. This would be true even if each of the units contained its own language and culture group, with little or no common culture among them, though it is easier if prior imperial or hegemonic episodes have spread some elements of common culture. A version of this situation arose during Europe's encounter with Asia during the nineteenth century, when Europeans used the idea of a "standard of civilization" in deciding whether to treat Asian states as legal equals or as subordinates. Reflecting on this problem at the time, the international lawyer John Westlake argued that any country "with an old and stable order of its own, with organised force at the back of it, and complex enough for the leading minds of that country to be able to appreciate the necessities of an order different from theirs . . . must be recognised as being civilised, though with other civilisation than ours."<sup>52</sup>

Here we find Bull's functionally driven logic of order that was sketched above. Units that have no choice but to interact with each other on a regular, long-term basis, and that begin to accept each other as essentially similar types of sociopolitical organization, will be hard put to avoid creating some mechanisms for dealing with each other peacefully. They will need to be able to exchange emissaries or ambassadors. They will need to be able to make agreements for truce, alliance, or division of property. They will need, in other words, to be able to create some level of order in their relations in terms of Bull's three core values of security, contract, and property rights. To do these things they will perforce have to give at least *de facto* recognition to each other as units and to develop some arrangements for diplomacy and making treaties. All of this will be true even if peace in the system is merely an interlude between renewed rounds of fighting, for in a system with even moderately developed levels of interaction capacity (sufficient, say, for sustained force projection or trade over distances of a few hundred kilometers), the costs and inconveniences of not having such mechanisms would be intolerable. In Waltzian terms, those units that failed to adopt such mechanisms once others had done so would weaken themselves sufficiently to risk elimination from the system.

### **The boundary between international system and international society: mutual recognition of sovereign equality**

In this model of immature international anarchy, a preexisting common culture does not provide the basis for a *gemeinschaft* international society. But through the interactive operation of trade, war and the balance of power, the transfer of technologies (both mechanical and social), intermarriage, travel, and the homogenizing effects of periods of hegemony, suzerainty, dominion, or

52. Cited in Gong, *The Standard of "Civilisation,"* p. 59.

imperial rule, units will tend to become more similar to each other. This is Waltz's logic of anarchy generating "like units."<sup>53</sup> The process never reaches total homogeneity, but it can quite early reach sufficient levels to facilitate communication and some level of diplomatic exchange and recognition. Finding himself in the grip of this functional logic, Watson concedes that "no international system as defined by Bull has operated without some regulatory rules and institutions," even though these are not sufficiently developed to constitute an international society.<sup>54</sup> In other words, elements of international society exist even in a primitive international system.

At some point, the logic of contact and the desire for a degree of international order will result in the formation of an international society, but what is that point? By Watson's logic, the boundary between a system without and one with international society cannot be defined by the mere presence or absence of rules and institutions among states. Bull's definition is not precise enough to avoid creating a large gray zone in which some norms, rules, and institutions exist, but not enough to justify calling it an international society.

Watson evades the issue by suggesting an intermediate level of regulated system between mere interaction and shared culture.<sup>55</sup> In taking this route he demonstrates the difficulty discussed above of reconciling the *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* understandings of society. Given his Wightian predispositions toward a prior shared culture, he is clearly reluctant to accept that the unfolding of *gesellschaft* functional logic will produce a society and a sense of community sufficient to stand comparison with the *gemeinschaft* understanding of society. It may produce common interests, norms, rules, and even values and institutions, but these do not add up to a society in Wight's *gemeinschaft* sense. The gap between the functional development of *gesellschaft* and the historical evolution of *gemeinschaft* points to the intermediate zone, or gray area, as an alternative to a distinct boundary separating international system from international society. But this gray zone in which Watson seeks refuge does not solve the problem. It merely creates two boundary problems instead of one (system to gray zone and gray zone to society) and lends support to critics such as Jones, Mann, and Wallerstein who dismiss society as analytically useless because of its operational imprecision.

The need for a firm boundary between system and society is underscored by the kinds of questions that arise in any attempt to trace the historical evolution of international society. Since the logic of anarchy works more powerfully over shorter distances than longer ones (especially when interaction capacity is low), international societies, like international systems, will emerge initially within regional subsystems and only later develop at the level of the international system as a whole. This region-first logic is true for both *gemeinschaft* and

53. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

54. Watson, "Hedley Bull, State Systems, and International Studies," pp. 151–52.

55. Watson, "Systems of States," pp. 100–102.

gesellschaft societies. It has three implications for the boundary issue. First, it means that international society will, to begin with, be unevenly distributed in the international system, with some regions (perhaps only one) having it and others not. There is therefore a need to establish boundaries not only between system and society per se (i.e., whether or not any international society exists) but also between societal subsystems existing within larger nonsocietal international systems (i.e., where two or more international societies exist contemporaneously). Second, it opens the possibility that some of Wight's civilizational, gemeinschaft international societies will face the challenge of expanding into regions alien to their founding culture. If this happens, as it did in the cases of classical Greece and modern Europe, it brings the functional logic of developing international society into direct contact with the historical one. How do expanding gemeinschaft international societies incorporate members that do not share their culture, and what happens when one international society challenges another? Third, this pattern of uneven development means that even when some measure of international society takes effect over the whole international system, some part of the system will have more developed (or at least more elaborate) international societies than others. As in economics, uneven development is the rule. The consequence once international society begins to operate throughout the system (or perhaps, to start earlier, once a global international system exists within which there is at least one societal subsystem) is that layers of concentric societal circles will develop. States in the core circle will have more shared values, and much fuller sets of rules and institutions, than those in the outer circles. The existence of international society is not simply a yes or no issue. Within yes, a spectrum of both levels of development and degrees of participation is possible.

Given that the gap between gesellschaft and gemeinschaft does pose a real problem in generating a consensus understanding of "society" in its international application, how is a distinct boundary between international system and international society to be demarcated? A solution can be found in the idea of shared identity, which was noted above as a necessary ingredient in the concept of society. If clear-cut criteria for shared identity can be established, then the need for a gray zone disappears, and the path to a distinct boundary is clear. In order to work in the functional model, this shared identity needs to be rooted at least initially in the behavioral criteria of gesellschaft rather than in the cultural ones of gemeinschaft. By these criteria the defining boundary between international system and society is when units not only recognize each other as being the same type of entity but also are prepared to accord each other equal legal status on that basis. Mutual recognition and legal equality signify not only a turning point in the development of rules and institutions but also acceptance of a shared identity in which states accept each other as being the same type of entity. This act denies the possibility of suzerain, dominion, and imperial relations (though not hegemonic ones) and sets the minimum conditions for societal relations among culturally diverse units. As Wight puts it, "It would be

impossible to have a society of sovereign states unless each state while claiming sovereignty for itself, recognised that every other state had the right to claim and enjoy its own sovereignty as well."<sup>56</sup>

Historically, this transition occurred in Europe with the emergence of sovereignty as the basic principle of interstate relations.<sup>57</sup> The claim of exclusive right to self-government provided a clear basis for legal equality despite differences in power among the units. It raised territory to political primacy and imposed on states an obligation of nonintervention in each other's internal affairs that was, and still is, very clear in principle though extremely difficult and complex in practice.<sup>58</sup> To get the flavor of this difficulty, try answering no to the philosophical question: Is all interaction intervention? By accepting each other as sovereign equals, states form the sense of community among like units that is the essential ingredient of any society. Note also how this definition confirms the centrality of international law to international society. In its most basic and essential form, international society is a legal construction. From this point of view, the emphasis that Waltz puts on the powerful tendency of socialization and competition under anarchy to force the development of like units takes on a new significance, for it identifies the logic by which the natural dynamics of anarchic international relations creates the conditions for a basic *gesellschaft* international society to develop.

The formation and operation of such an international society marks several changes from a presocietal international system, though much remains the same. Balance of power and war carry over much as before, since both are main features of an anarchic international system. As can be seen in the history of Europe during the eighteenth century, states still need to seek security by adjusting to shifts in the distribution of power and status.<sup>59</sup> That is why war and alliance remain legitimate instruments of policy. But the possibilities for formalizing and extending diplomacy and international law are much improved by the institution of sovereign equality. Diplomatic representation becomes more secure and more continuous, and as Bull notes, international law can move away from natural law into the wider realms of positive law.<sup>60</sup> With the foundation of legal equality, much scope opens for the development of law as a way of ordering relations among sovereign states, though it can only develop where consensus allows. As previously, great powers remain the most influential actors but now have the additional responsibility of maintaining the framework of order represented by international society.<sup>61</sup>

56. Wight, *Systems of States*, p. 135.

57. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 33–38.

58. Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society*, pp. 18–21.

59. Holsti, *Peace and War*, chap. 5.

60. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 33–38.

61. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, chap. 9, especially pp. 200–205.

The status of sovereign equality gives even less powerful units some protection against elimination. The formal mutual recognitions required under sovereign equality serve to institutionalize the external status of sovereignty. Without an international society, units can only assert their claim to autonomy and establish it by sustained and successful defense against challengers. With an international society, units can have their claims validated by the recognition of others. This validation gives them standing as sovereign members of a community and reinforces, though as the Poles know by no means guarantees, their right to exist as an independent entity. The right to exist adds importantly to the security of units by defining the boundaries of legitimacy and order within which they function. In contemporary international society, legal equality has been the basis for the delegitimization of many threats of intervention, annexation, secession, and coercion that were earlier seen as part of the natural behavior of states in an anarchic system.<sup>62</sup> In extremis, as demonstrated in recent times by cases such as Cambodia, Chad, Lebanon, and Somalia, external sovereignty can even keep in existence states whose internal sovereignty is extremely weak. External recognition of secessions, as in the cases of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, seals the internal demise of larger units.

At the most basic level, the development of international society can proceed with no parallel evolution of world society. At most, some minimal elements of common culture among ruling elites is required, but in monarchical, autocratic, or authoritarian states this can be constructed without reference to the masses. Ruling elites may favor the arrangements of international society simply because they facilitate the maintenance of the elites' rule. Among other things, some alleviation of external pressure frees resources for the consolidation of domestic control. International society favors states first, and there is nothing necessarily benign about the first emergence of international society as far as the mass of the population is concerned.

One major change that comes with the advent of even a rather basic international society is that political order and the balance of power become explicit foreign policy goals for many (not necessarily all) states. In his analysis of early-modern Europe, K. J. Holsti, for example, puts much emphasis on the development of antihegemonic goals as a driving force in the negotiations that produced major war-termination agreements at Westphalia (1648) and Vienna (1814–15).<sup>63</sup> Most of the major powers were actively concerned to take measures that would prevent any one state, or any one dynasty, from dominating Europe. This goal reflected a passionate concern to protect the system of independent sovereign states: Watson's *raison de système*. Interna-

62. Alan James, "The Equality of States: Contemporary Manifestations of an Ancient Doctrine," *Review of International Studies* 18 (October 1992), pp. 377–92.

63. Holsti, *Peace and War*, chaps. 2 and 6.

tional order was based on the legitimation of anarchy as defined by international society.

Once the balance of power is recognized as a possible basis for order, rather than being, like the security dilemma, simply an automatic consequence or mechanism of the anarchic system, then the great powers can, if they agree, consciously manage their relations to preserve a balance.<sup>64</sup> In the nineteenth century this was done by agreements over allocation of territory and colonies. During the cold war it was achieved by superpower agreements on levels of nuclear armament. In this way the principle of balance can become a means of reducing conflict among the great powers and of moderating the security dilemma among them. It also gives great powers some security (again not a guarantee) against elimination from the system. A development along these lines may, as is well-established, increase threats to minor powers or units outside the society that can find themselves being used as resources for adjustments by the great powers.

But the shift to consciousness about order and the balance of power does create another significant difference between international systems with societies and those without. In those without, the operation of the balance of power works automatically to reproduce the system structure. As units struggle to preserve their independence, they work to preserve the anarchic structure of the system. As long as at least two of them are successful, anarchy endures. But in systems with an international society, the process of reproduction becomes conscious and intentional, even if there is no specific awareness of or desire for anarchic structure as such.<sup>65</sup> Mutual recognition as sovereign equals by states is an affirmation of anarchic structure. It gives systemwide legitimacy to the idea that political fragmentation defines international order, and over time, it allows the working of international law and diplomacy to consolidate and institutionalize that idea. Conscious pursuit of the balance of power as an ordering principle of great power relations has the same effect. It reinforces the right of great powers to exist and institutionalizes an oligopolistic view of international order.

## Conclusions

On the basis of the definitions and clarifications worked out above, it is possible to construct a relatively clear image of exactly what is meant by international society in the contemporary international system. Present day international society is a hybrid. In part it stems from the *gemeinschaft* international society that developed in modern Europe and imposed itself on most of the planet

64. Richard Little, "Deconstructing the Balance of Power: Two Traditions of Thought," *Review of International Studies* 15 (April 1989), pp. 87–100.

65. Buzan, Jones, and Little, *The Logic of Anarchy*, chap. 9.

during its imperial heyday, and in part it reflects a *gesellschaft* process by which different cultures embedded in a system with high levels of interaction have learned to come to terms with each other. We have certainly come a long way from the period in which international society was largely a globalized expression of the European *gemeinschaft*, from which most non-European cultures and peoples were excluded by their colonial or unequal status. The bottom line of this international society is the mutual recognition by nearly all states of each other as legally equal sovereign entities. By that criterion only a tiny number of states are now outside international society.

This truly global international society is by definition a postcolonial phenomenon. As one would expect from its partly *gemeinschaft* origins, it has a European (now Western) core that is much more highly developed than the rest of it in terms of having a higher number, variety, and intensity of rules, norms, and institutions binding its members in a network of regimes. And as one would expect from its partly *gesellschaft* origins, it is globally multicultural in character and significantly differentiated in terms of the degree of commitment with which states adhere to it. The overall cohesion of this society has been substantially increased by the demise of the Soviet Union, which until 1990 led a challenge to the West in almost all areas of norms, rules, and institutions except those concerning state sovereignty and nuclear weapons.

The ending of the cold war removed the obscuring distraction of superpower rivalry, leaving a clearer picture of a postcolonial global international society constructed in terms of concentric circles of commitment. A small number of pariah states are partially excluded by the refusal of many others to accord them diplomatic recognition. A few states such as North Korea and Myanmar (Burma) place themselves on the outer fringes of international society by accepting little more than the basics of diplomatic recognition and exchange. In the middle circles one finds states such as Argentina, China, and India that seek to preserve high levels of independence and select quite carefully what norms, rules, and institutions they accept and what they reject. In the core one finds the main generator of and support for the global network of regimes. One also finds a dense network of overlapping regimes into which states voluntarily bind themselves in pursuit of increased security, economic efficiency, environmental management, societal openness, and a range of other objectives. The European Community has progressed so far down this road that the density of its international society is beginning to assume statelike qualities, bringing into question the continued existence of an anarchic international system among its members.

The Persian Gulf War in 1991 illustrates particularly clearly how the concentric circles of international society operated and identified themselves in relation to one violent and fundamental challenge to the existence of one of its accepted members. In the center circle stood the United States, which was willing to lead only if followed and to fight only if given wide support and assistance. In the second circle were others prepared to fight, including some



members of the Western core (principally Britain and France) and others usually further from the ring's center but with immediate interests in the region (principally Egypt and Saudi Arabia). In the third circle were those prepared to pay but not to fight, primarily core members such as Japan and Germany. In the fourth circle were those prepared to support, but not fight or pay. This group was large and contained those prepared to vote and speak in favor of the action, some of whom also sent symbolic military forces (such as Denmark). It included the Soviet Union and China as well as a mixture of states usually resident in core and middling circles. The fifth circle contained those states satisfied to be neutral, neither supporting nor opposing the venture but prepared to accept United Nations Security Council resolutions as legitimate. Within these five circles stood the great majority of the international community and all of the major powers. In the sixth circle were those prepared to oppose, mainly verbally and by voting (i.e., still within the rules). This contained Cuba, Jordan, Yemen, and a few other Arab states. In the seventh circle stood those prepared to resist: Iraq. This case is only one (rather extreme) instance. It does not show, though it suggests, the normal configuration and membership of the circles of international society. What it does illustrate is the fact and the significance of the concentric-circles structure of international society itself.

If international society is understood in these terms, it is clearly more than a regime. It might be seen as a regime of regimes, adding a useful element of holism to the excessively atomized world of regime theory. But it is also the legal and political foundation on which the whole idea of regimes rests. There has to be some sense of community before even a norm of reciprocity can emerge, and it is to this that the international society tradition draws attention.<sup>66</sup> As Hurrell argues, purely rationalist (and positivist) conceptions of regime leave out the element of community that is expressed in the international law that fundamentally constitutes the system of sovereign states. International law defines what states are, and they cannot therefore be independent of it. This backdrop of international law, and the community of mutual recognition of sovereignty on which it rests, is not merely a regime but something much more basic: the political foundation that is necessary before regimes can come into play.<sup>67</sup>

The combining of regime theory and international society opens up a fascinating research agenda about how a global international society develops. Is the European Community a model for where advanced international society leads (i.e., to integration), or should it be disqualified as a model for the international system as a whole on the grounds that its own development is too much influenced by the pressure to become a larger (and therefore more powerful) unit in a surrounding international system? Can one identify levels of

66. Hurrell, "International Law and the Study of International Regimes."

67. *Ibid.*

development of international society and specify them in terms of a spectrum of regimes in the economic, political, and military sectors, stopping short of full political integration? Can one specify the details and the membership of the different circles of international society by examining states' patterns of adherence to rules and norms, membership in institutions, and participation in regimes? Can one identify what conditions the development of international society and what might cause it to go into decline? There is no guarantee that international society is a one-way process, and as the collapse of the world trade and financial regimes during the interwar years suggests, unraveling is almost certain to be a painful and probably violent business.

The question of how international society develops requires a clear view of how international and world society relate to each other. It was argued above that elements of world society are a precondition for international society if the latter is conceived of in *gemeinschaft* terms but are not necessary to the initial stages of a *gesellschaft* international society. This does not lead to the conclusion that world society is either irrelevant or opposed to the idea of a *gesellschaft* global international society. Indeed, when one thinks through the higher levels of possible development of international society, involving dense networks of regimes, it becomes apparent that such regimes make the states and societies within them progressively more open to each other economically, politically, militarily, and societally. Pluralist, democratic states are those most attracted to high levels of international society, and in such states openness can only be sustained if societies themselves have converged to a significant degree. As international society develops, substantial elements of world society become increasingly necessary to the stability and furtherance of that development, a truth recently discovered by the governments of the European Community in their crisis over Maastricht.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, at higher levels of development, international society and world society, far from being contradictory ideas, become symbiotic. International society provides the political framework without which world society would face all the dangers of primal anarchy. In return, world society provides the *gemeinschaft* foundation without which international society remains stuck at a fairly basic level. This interrelationship tells us much about how and why the contemporary global international society is organized into concentric circles. Because humankind is so deeply differentiated culturally, it also tells us how difficult it will be—perhaps impossible for the foreseeable future—ever to create a uniform global international society.

Extending from this line of thought on international society are questions about how the different rings of its concentric circles do (and should) relate to each other. Here lies the problematic agenda of intervention. International society sets the rules for what is and what is not legitimate intervention. These rules can be difficult to fathom even close to the core of international society, as

68. Wæver et al., *Identity, Migration, and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, especially chap. 4.

the case of the former Yugoslavia demonstrates. The question of how, or if, they operate across the rings is even more difficult. Do core members have the right to intervene in outer-circle states over issues on which those states do not accept the norms or adhere to the regimes? In concrete terms, does the international community have the right to prevent a state outside the nuclear nonproliferation regime (e.g., Pakistan) from acquiring nuclear weapons? Does it have the right or responsibility to attack a member discovered cheating (e.g., Iraq or possibly North Korea)? One cannot answer these questions adequately from within the perspective of the specific regime. A clearer view of what is and what is not legitimate and/or necessary intervention can only be developed on the basis of a fuller understanding of international society as a whole.

Much of this research agenda becomes available because of the joining of English school thinking to structural realist theory. That link makes possible a *gesellschaft* conception of international society that fits neatly into structural realist ideas about the shaping effect of systemic pressure on units. "Like units" become a critical input into defining the boundary between international systems with and without international societies, and international societies become, like the balance of power, a natural product of the shoving and shaping forces of anarchy. This synthesis strengthens both bodies of thought. The link rescues the English school from the stagnation of its historical *cul-de-sac* by giving the concept of international society a much firmer claim to theoretical status. For structural realism it opens useful connective channels to both history and liberal theory that are compatible with existing structural realist analysis. This fitting together of the English school, structural realism, and regime theory would appear to contain no substantial drawbacks and to offer many advantages in constructing a coherent theoretical foundation for a wide-ranging and policy-relevant research agenda.