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What is This?

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Abstract

This article suggests that institutions of violence in the international system sanction Great Power (GP) authority in this system. We argue that the degree to which Great Powers (GPs) construe various threats as challenges to their international authority informs their use of force against the sources of these threats. Serious challenges to GP authority prompt punishment not only to achieve rational and utilitarian ends (such as secession of harm or deterrence), but also to reproduce authority and reify it. We examine in this respect the US-led War on Terror and argue that the US response to the 9/11 terror attacks was largely constituted by the acute and unprecedented challenge to America's GP authority that these attacks symbolized. We conclude by reflecting upon the dilemmas the United States now faces to its GP authority.

Introduction

This article suggests that institutions of violence in the international system sanction Great Power (GP) authority in this system. Authority in this context is understood mainly as the social conventions that define what legitimate power is and what are the acceptable ways to resist it. Furthermore, we argue that the degree to which Great Powers (GPs) construe various threats as challenges to their international authority is an important factor informing their use of force against the sources of these threats. Serious challenges to GP authority prompt punishment not only to achieve rational and utilitarian ends (such as secession of harm or deterrence), but also to reproduce authority and reify it (Foucault, 1977).

We examine in this respect the US-led War on Terror and argue that the US response to the 9/11 terror attacks was largely constituted by the acute and unprecedented challenge to America's GP

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authority that these attacks symbolized. In this manner, we offer a viewpoint on the War on Terror that considers this campaign in constructivist *systemic* terms. We do not argue that other explanations or understandings of the War on Terror are invalid. Domestic political factors, ideological considerations, and material security concerns certainly played a significant role in the decisions of the Bush administration on how to respond to the terror attacks, and, as we mention in our conclusions, these other factors complicate Great Power responsibilities as well. Yet adding the systemic dimension of GP authority and the threats to it could enrich our understanding of this ongoing campaign, which became one of the most important developments in international politics in the first decade of the 21st century.

Three further points underscore the need to pursue such an inquiry. First, several recent events bear witness to the notion of Great Power authority as a relational social fact. One might observe interactions, both constructive and critical, between the United States and China. On the one hand, there is the tentative cooperation between the two, backed by the force of a United Nations Security Council Resolution (1851), to combat what is considered by both to be an illegitimate form of violence – piracy in Somalia. On the other, there is the recent criticism issued by the US Department of State that China needed to come to terms with the Tiananmen Square massacre on the latter's 20th anniversary. One spokesperson stated in blunt terms that "China, as an emerging great power, still has work to do."[1]

Theoretical developments in international relations literature attest to a second context relevant for this article. Debates in the so-called "English School" of IR theory have recently focused upon the interactions and relationships that exist between an international society of states, on the one hand, and a conglomerate of non-state actors who may be responsible for a turn toward a world society (Buzan, 2004). Some of these studies even posit that the units of both forms of order have existed alongside one another in a largely complementary fashion for some time (Clark, 2007). Yet, while some have posited the role Great Powers play in cementing international society's principles through institutions of violence (Bull, 1977: 108–12), these debates have not yet fully explored the manner in which GPs recognize, and respond to, threats to the constitutive principles of international society, and ostensibly to their role as the authorities of that realm, from transnational rivals.

Third, while terror as a tactic has been used by various groups over time, and while its use by definition challenges the legitimacy of the sovereign state by deploying a competitive form of violence within borders, al Qaeda's emergence as a transnational organization distinguishes it in terms of its systemic challenge to the Westphalian order and to the Great Power authority which enforces it. Thus, while al Qaeda indeed threatens US sovereignty, it also threatens the principle of sovereignty itself, in part by challenging the form of institutionalized, transborder violence legitimized by Great Powers.

In the following pages we first present the connections between institutions of violence in world politics and GP authority. We then outline the authority threat posed by al Qaeda. We also deploy the concept of "situational conservatism" to explain the high level of international cooperation in the US-led war in Afghanistan in 2001/2. Finally, we conclude by raising questions about the "authority dilemma" the US faces in several contexts as a new administration takes over its leadership.

I. The Institutional Sources of GP Authority

We argue that institutions of transborder violence and GP authority are mutually constitutive and together produce and reproduce meanings for power and resistance. We see international institutions of violence as intersubjective ideational and normative structures that constitute the

boundaries of legitimate practice for states and other actors within the context of the wielding of cross-border force. When actors wield force, because of the social context in which it is deployed, actors must legitimate this practice within the logics of the community (Ashley, 1984: 259). Such legitimatizations help reinforce the logic of these institutions.

In our view, institutions of cross-border violence outline the realms of possibilities for states and other violence-wielding actors. These realms of possibilities are founded on the following three interrelated and mutually constitutive tenets: (1) concepts about the legitimate ends and accepted territorial scope of cross-border violence; (2) notions of legitimate actorhood in the sphere of cross-border violence; and (3) justified causes for the actual enactment of cross-border violence and the appropriate means for its employment. Accordingly, in the contemporary system the ends and territorial scope of cross-border violence are informed by the institution of sovereignty; the principle of legitimate actorhood relates to the monopoly of states over the right to use/authorize cross-border violence; and the means and justifications for actually employing it are apparent in the laws of war. These three components, which we discuss further below, work to regulate such violence and mold it into customary patterns, which result, as we further argue, in GP authority.

Sovereignty. Max Weber (1946: 78) defined sovereignty as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory." While sovereignty institutionalizes violence, making it legitimate coercion within the state, such meta-political authority (Thomson, 1994) cannot be kept for long within the state if other states (especially the materially powerful ones) do not intrinsically acknowledge the former's right to exercise this capacity. In a society of sovereign states, actors inherently limit the ends of violence in their relations (Wendt, 1999: ch. 6). Thus, sovereignty exists on two levels, it is the monopoly of force within a state's borders, but it is also "an organizing principle for the international system" (Mendelsohn, 2005: 48).

For Stephen Krasner (1999) this organizing principle actually stands for "organized hypocrisy," because powerful states often forcefully infringe on weak states' meta-political authority while paying lip service to the norm of non-intervention and sovereign equality. Yet, as Chris Brown notes, states "offer such explanations, not, as Krasner suggests, as a matter of hypocrisy, but because failure to do so would, as it were, end the "game," and, at the same time, end their capacity to claim the status of sovereign since this status only exists by virtue of the existence of international society" (Brown, 2002: 36). Brown's observation helps highlight the important distinction between actions deemed "legal" versus those deemed "legitimate," or, as Richard Falk averred, "legality clarifies the core obligations relating to force, while legitimacy tries to identify and delimit a zone of exception that takes account of supposedly special circumstances" (Falk, 2005: 35). Nation-states may contradict a legal norm, but because they are members of international society, they must justify their contravention of a legal rule with a legitimate reason for the breaking of the rule. This implies then that there exist reasons which are legitimate but not legal, leading some scholars to posit that, whether a law exists or not, members of international society find themselves constrained in only pursuing actions that they can, in the words of Nicholas Wheeler, "plausibly legitimate" (2000: 4). If sovereignty, and indeed international society itself, were mere fictions, then why would states feel compelled to legitimate their disobedient actions in the first place? The order of an international society still remains a powerful connection for nation-states. Yet notice here that authority is not removed from this distinction – nation-states are legitimate actors in international society not just because they can use cross-border force, but because they also have the authority to speak, as we discuss in the following subsection.

Accordingly, in international society, a forceful compromise of sovereignty in the form of interventions could indeed be a reality, as Krasner rightly points out. This is simply because states have

never relinquished their right to use transborder force. War, unfortunately, is still legitimate. But it is important to highlight that in different historical periods sovereignty sanctioned various limits and ends for the use of force and, at the same time, condemned others. For example, in previous centuries, sovereignty's territorial scope sanctioned the Right of Conquest (Korman, 1996), which enabled states to legitimately annex occupied territories, and sovereignty's legitimate ends included, among others, armed campaigns for purposes of monarchical glory, revenge, or religion (Dingott-Alkopher, 2007). Such ends are no longer accepted as plausible legitimating motivations for cross-border violence today, and thus no state will admit that it uses force to advance these goals. In this sense, even if the powerful infringe on the norms of sovereignty, sovereignty still establishes expectations among states regarding the legitimate ends and territorial limits of cross-border violence.

Legitimate Actorhood. For more than a century now, only sovereign states have been acknowledged in international society as having the legal and normative right to wield transborder violence or to authorize it (Dinstein, 2001: 71). Thus, "war" can be regarded not just as a violent competition between states or as an institution of international society (Bull, 1977), but, in meta-theoretical terms, as a norm of exclusion and a device to set a group (of states) aside from other wielders of violence – a "structure of closure," in Alexander Wendt's terms (1999: 292). Of course, the exclusion of non-state actors from war is not complete even in the present (consider the private military companies that operate in conflict zones such as Iraq or Colombia, under the authorization of states). However, compared to previous centuries, when non-state violent actors had varying degrees of legitimacy and were much more involved in war and other violent practices (e.g. pirates and mercenaries – Nadelmann, 1990; Thomson, 1994), today the state *monopolizes* the legitimate right to participate in war and/or to authorize others' participation in it. Non-state actors who employ unauthorized violence are deemed illegitimate: criminals, terrorists, or pirates, for example. In addition, while in the past states were much more open and direct about their involvement with non-state violent actors (see, for example, Spruyt, 1994; Ritchie, 1997), currently states often hide their contacts with such groups or look for ideological or other causes that would justify such relations. Such behaviors, too, point to the perceived legitimacy of the cartel of states in the sphere of cross-border violence.

The Laws of War. The laws of war (formal and customary) are the third part in the international institutions of violence. These laws consist of norms that govern the immediate causes that allow states to wage war (*jus ad bellum*), and norms that stipulate accepted conduct when war has actually erupted (*jus in bellum*). Accordingly, under current *jus ad bellum*, "wars of aggression" are deemed illegal. In contrast, the principles of self-defense and collective security are the sole legitimate causes for wielding international war in the UN system. While states do not always adhere to the laws of war or agree on what self-defense and aggression mean, this does not imply that they do not consider these rules as constraints (Dinstein, 2001: 89). As we mentioned previously, once states recognize a rule – not necessarily agreeing on its interpretation – they are faced with the constraint of legitimating their employment of force. Legitimacy is important for self-esteem, which is a fundamental interest for all states (Wendt, 1999: 235–7). Yet legitimacy also reduces the uncertainty in the operative environment by investing actors with status and authority. Below we argue that authority, as much as superior material capabilities, is a foundation of GP security.[2]

Jus in bellum relates to the various arms control agreements and regimes, as well as the prohibitions on the use of certain weapons (such as chemical weapons and landmines). *Jus in bellum* also establishes the prohibition on targeting non-combatants in interstate war (the 1899 and 1907 Hague Protocols, as well as the 1947 and 1977 Geneva Protocols). In addition, several international

conventions proscribe violence against civilian aircraft and sea vessels. *Jus in bellum* also prohibits violence against state leaders and diplomats (Thomas, 2000).

These institutions mitigate the disruptive elements of the use of cross-border force, and thus establish and reproduce a certain degree of international order in which hierarchy and authority can exist. In this sense, a strong institutional threat means a challenge to the ideational structures and social conventions that define from the outset what power means in world politics, which actors are considered powerful or weak, and how one should react/resist to the exertion of power. The next section explores how institutions of violence are interrelated with GP authority.

Power and Authority

In domestic politics, the modern state is considered to be a viable authority once it monopolizes legitimate violence within its territory, with the resultant construction of hierarchy. In international politics – despite the lack of a central government – structures of authority and governance also exist (Bull, 1977; Simpson, 2004). Inasmuch as the institutions of the international political economy confer privileged rights and duties on certain actors – consequently vesting them with superior authority – because they possess more issue-related and legitimized power capabilities (production assets, market shares, "hard currency," etc.), institutions of cross-border violence can also confer special rights on certain actors.[3] Economic institutions and regimes regulate the means of production; organized violence regimes and institutions regulate and restrain the means of destruction. Those holding the greater destructive power capabilities within the boundaries of legitimacy delineated by the institutions of violence are constructed as Great Powers.

In its most fundamental aspects, GP authority rests on superiority of military and economic power, as realists often argue (Krasner, 1976, 1985). Yet realists have not paid as much attention to the viability of how authority structures depend not only on technological and other ostensibly objective factors and capabilities, but also on the willingness of actors to acknowledge the meta-constitution of the order. Ostensibly weak actors can also threaten the hierarchy of the international system by introducing into it extra-institutional praxis of wielding destructive force. Weak actors cannot destroy GPs in the material sense, but they can nonetheless seriously damage them, jeopardize their ability to exact costs for deviation from norms, and ultimately undermine their authority.

At this point, a distinction between authority and power is called for. "Authority and power are two different things," argues Jacques Maritain, relying on St Thomas Aquinas. "Power is the force by which you can oblige another to obey you. Authority is the right to direct and command to be listened to or obeyed by others" (cited in Udoidem, 1988: 10). Hence, for authority to exist in international politics, strong and weak actors alike must intersubjectively share an understanding of the institutions that define legitimate power.[4] In this way, as Hans Morgentau acknowledges, international order is sustained not merely through a balance of material force, but also through a "silent compact," which represents a perceptual consensus on power and legitimacy (Morgentau, 1978: 226). Authority is thus dependent on a collective understanding of what types of coercion one is entitled to use against others and what types one should *avoid*. When actors decide to limit their use of violence to certain means, methods, timing, ends, causes, and so on, a society comes into being. While this society still lacks a central constituted government, the potential exists for actors to construct clear-cut status markers. Such construction is made possible by the aggregation of *legitimate* power capabilities and according to the employment of legitimate policies of coercion. These practices still engender relations of authority in that actors have given up certain means

and forms of power to damage each other and, consequently, accepted the leadership of those with the higher status.

On the other hand, if the weak decide to deviate from the shared expectations regarding the use of violence, the authority predicament leads the GPs to employ counter-violence not only in order to retaliate against the aggressor, but also in order to punish it. That is, a Great Power faces a quandary in that it must not only deter, but also re-inscribe its own identity as an authority in international society. Or, put slightly differently, the predicament of Great Power Authority is that GPs must do more than just protect their physical integrity – they thus use force in situations where their existence may not be imperiled but their authority has been challenged. Punishment is not only meant to rectify the injury itself and thwart similar events in the future; it is also designed to manifest authority – as legitimate power – and reproduce it. As Michel Foucault notes regarding the public execution: "It is a ceremony by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted" (Foucault, 1977: 48). Punishment restores the sense of inevitability and certainty that authority-bearers seek through authority – but it reinforces authority as well because it re-inscribes the boundaries of the legitimate by highlighting the distinctions between normative and non-normative use of force. As one theorist has recently observed: "without punishment, rules can progressively lose their meaning and force" (Lang, 2008: 25).

Yet precisely because punishment re-inscribes the boundaries of the legitimate, the punishing GP itself must, if it wishes to retain authority, avoid an unjust or a too disproportionate punishment. Thus, for example, Anthony F. Lang (2008) has argued that the international system contains a variety of punitive practices (sanctions, interventions, and counter-terrorism policy) that can serve to restore authority. Torture may appear to have this function, but, as Lang suggests, its use contradicts other rules of the international legal order. In terms of authoritative bodies, Lang sees judicial actors, such as the International Criminal Court, as being better candidates for adjudicating counter-terrorism authority at the global level than the use of military force by individual members, even GPs such as the United States (Lang, 2008: 126–7).

Thus, while the institutions of violence create GP vulnerability to actors that do not accept the legitimacy of this structure, they enable from the outset the very category of a "Great Power" and also create responsibilities for the GPs, including self-restraint (Bull, 1977). Martin Wight agrees that a powerful state requires some form of societal recognition from other major powers in the system in order to enjoy the privileged status of a GP. But he also believes that "the complementary truth was expressed by the young Napoleon, when he said that the Revolutionary French Republic at the height of its victories needed 'recognition as little as the sun requires it,' and by the nineteenth century Russian statesman who said that 'a great power does not wait for recognition, it reveals itself.'" (Wight, 2002: 45–6). We differ from this position slightly, as we see societal recognition as always essential to the status of a GP – without it, rivals and enemies will be much more determined to deny the privileges of the GP status claimed by that state. In the remainder of this article we explore how terrorism challenges GP authority and how the GP response to this extra-institutional practice might undermine this authority too.

II. Al Qaeda and the Threat to the Authority of the Hegemon

In this section, we outline al Qaeda's challenge to the Great Power authority of the US. We believe that this unique challenge also elicited the strong American response to al Qaeda and stood at the heart of the "War on Terror." We are not the first scholars to advance this position about al Qaeda's unique status as a transnational terrorist organization. As a study by Barak Mendelsohn (2005) asserted, al Qaeda threatens international society in a number of ways, most vividly in challenging

the nation-state's sole legitimacy to use force. Whereas other terrorist organizations in the past, such as the PLO or the IRA, used violence for the purpose of attaining statehood or autonomy, al Qaeda rejects the state system all together, on the grounds that the secular state (especially in the Arab world) derives its authority outside of God, and that secular boundaries immorally divide a community of Muslims (Mendelsohn, 2005: 61). And whereas other terrorist groups have sought support in the institutions of international society, al Qaeda rejects the United Nations as a "tool that serves the narrow interests of the strong powers" (Mendelsohn, 2005: 62). Cian O'Driscoll (2009), in addressing the Just War condition of "proper authority," makes some of the same observations as Mendelsohn, and extends a few more. Most notably, he observes that "al Qaeda's membership reflects a cosmopolitan constitution. Members hail from different parts of the world, and their individual biographies often relate a disdain for national boundaries. Zacarias Moussaoui, for example, is a French citizen of Moroccan descent who settled in London, where he became a born-again Muslim. His story is indicative of a general pattern among al Qaeda militants: most travel widely and have little connection with their homelands." Taken together, this suggests that al Qaeda and its members stand "outside" of international society, a position which we think Great Powers recognize as well.

While we endorse such interpretations, we also believe that, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the threat to international society, scholars should specifically focus on the challenge that al Qaeda's terrorism created to the authority of the US as a hegemonic state and the other GPs as a special class of states. This is because we consider the GPs to be one of the most important agents of international society (although, of course, the GPs are, in their turn, constituted by international society in an ongoing mutual relationship).

In this context, it is important to note that al Qaeda's terrorism was not only different in quantitative and material terms from previous cases and threats of terrorism the US faced. Al Qaeda's threat also contained strong institutional challenges to the authority of the US as a GP. One key point in this regard concerns the issue of taking responsibility for terror attacks. Here, it is important to note that the previous perpetrators of the most deadly anti-American terror attacks – Libya (the 1988 Pan Am bombing, 243 victims) and Hizb'allah (the 1983 Marines' Barracks bombing in Beirut, 241 killed) – never took responsibility for these attacks.[5] Although the US still holds Hizb'allah and Libya responsible for these attacks, it did not punish them through military means for those aggressions. Part of the reason for this avoidance of punishment was that the lack of open admission on the part of Hizb'allah and Libya diminished the ability to legitimately chastise them or to gain broad international support for such punishment.[6]

Assuming that Libya and Hizb'allah did carry out or order these attacks, as the US claims, it is not entirely clear why they did not take responsibility for them. After all, both these actors were very hostile to the US during the 1980s, and Libya did confront the US openly and directly in 1986 (over Libyan territorial claims in the Gulf of Sidra), even though the (expected) material cost of this confrontation was high (see Stanik, 2003). Furthermore, scholars of terrorism highlight the fact that, for propaganda reasons, terror groups and their sponsors often hurry to publicly take responsibility for a terror attack (Laqueur, 1987). Indeed, in the 1990s Hizb'allah took responsibility for deadly terror attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets in the world (the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires and the 1994 bombing of the Jewish center in that city), despite the certainty that Israel would retaliate harshly in Lebanon.

Whatever may be the reason for previous terrorists' or their sponsors' lack of admission for their intensive anti-American attacks, it is essential to acknowledge that attacking a GP with methods and means that considerably deviate from the institutions of transborder violence is a unique challenge and threat. Challenging through terrorism a "regional" power such as Israel is not the same

thing as posing an intensive terrorist challenge to a state that considers itself – and is considered by many others in the system – as a GP, such as the US. Attacking a GP through means and methods that greatly deviate from the institutions of violence highlights the fact that power – and the allegedly material and objective distinctions between strong and weak – is to a considerable extent socially constructed. Such deviatory attacks reveal the social definitions of power by spectacularly exposing the vulnerable points in the structure of power. Under these circumstances, and especially when the attack is claimed by its perpetrator, the GP might be infuriated by the perpetrator's lack of deference and by the disregard of hierarchy in world politics. Insulted powers tend to retaliate disproportionately to the material damage that has been inflicted on them (O'Neill, 1999: 141–6). As a result of the insult and the infringement of the GP's rights and privileges, the GP may in these cases be provoked to a greater extent than when confronted within the rules of the game of international violence or when a deviant attack remains unclaimed. If confronted within the game rules, the GP can save face by arguing that the balance of motivation and interests favored the weaker actor (Mack, 1975), who thereby was able to damage the GP to a considerable extent. If a deviant attack remains unclaimed, the GP will find it more difficult to legitimately impose costs on the perpetrator – as indeed happened in the Hizb'allah and Libyan cases.

In light of this, al Qaeda's rejoicing in associating itself with the deadliest anti-American terror attacks of the 1990s and 2001 is notable.[7] Al Qaeda leaders and spokesmen have either praised and endorsed the September 11 attacks or claimed responsibility for instigating and planning them. Furthermore, they went so far as to declare "war" on the US – a seemingly absurd statement from the viewpoint of current international law, which allows only states to declare and engage in "war." They also continuously threaten the US with more intensive terrorism and further humiliations if the US does not abide by their demands. Al Qaeda's pretension to create a balance of terror between the hegemonic power of the international system and a "mere" transnational network, and its intention to expose the "superpower myth," are highly degrading to a country such as the US, which throughout the 20th century has been engaged in such a relationship exclusively with the USSR – a peer GP. But it is not merely the degradation that troubles the US. Rather, it is the new idea that the huge military potential of a superpower is not enough to deter smaller actors from attacking the US homeland.

The 9/11 attacks also differed conceptually from what Donald Snow calls "uncivil wars" – vicious and uncontrolled violence that often appears to be little more than rampages by groups within states against one another (Snow, 1996). The fact that such horrendous outbursts of violence as the Rwandan genocide or the Algerian civil war were kept within the borders of a state or a region is important in the context of the challenge to transborder institutions of violence. Their containment within certain states or localities was especially crucial for the preservation of the concept of sovereignty – not in the sense of external non-intervention in domestic affairs, but rather in the sense of boundaries between polities. Boundaries are supposed to prevent not only external intervention, but also the leaking of internal violence and domestic strife into the boundaries of other states and into the international system.

In the mid-1990s, when Snow published his work on uncivil wars, it was believed that "very few of these [uncivil] wars ... affect the major powers greatly" (Snow, 1996: 3). Quasi-states or bellicose regions such as sub-Saharan Africa or the Balkans represented to many scholars and policy-makers anarchy in its Hobbesian sense and were thus prone to uncivil warfare. The attacks of 9/11, on the other hand, undermined the prevailing conceptualizations and categorizations of world politics as unruly and violent versus orderly and peaceful spheres (see Goldgeier and McFaul, 1992). They challenged the sense of ontological security of the peoples in the West, undermining national routines by shattering the "stopping power of boundaries."[8] This blurring began in 9/11, and the train bombings in Madrid in March 2004 and the July 2005 bombings in

London further blurred this distinction between the spheres of the world and undermined the meaning of state boundaries and their ability to contain intensive non-state violence. Clearly, the institution of sovereignty does not manage to contain the violence of al Qaeda, as its members reject the sovereignty of the states where they were born. Hizb'allah has at times claimed to represent if not a nation-state then at least a political community of Lebanese Shia, and has not only found popularity with this community but also represented it in the Lebanese parliament (see Steele and Amoureux, 2009). Al Qaeda, on the other hand, if it can be said to represent any community does so on behalf of the abstract "umma" or Caliphate, making it in O'Driscoll's (2009) words "a deterritorialized and non-spatial political community; that is, a political community that is not demarcated by borders or tied to some physical space or piece of land." This of course represents a threat to the constitutive principle of sovereignty that we articulated via Weber and Thomson in the opening pages of this article.

The non-state, religious, and elusive global nature of al Qaeda's terror network removed a considerable constraint on its use of unlimited violence, constituting a different species of wielder of organized violence in a system that is founded upon state-centric principles and institutions of violence. The differences in organizational structure, motives, and aims made al Qaeda's rationalism vary from that which GPs have known in the past. GP authority is hardly capable of disciplining such networks. In fact, the real infrastructure of mega-terror is not found in training bases in rogue states but is rather composed of individual operatives dispersed around the world, thus lacking a centralized and spatial coherence. The uncertainty of its spatiality, in addition to challenging the conventional notion of sovereignty, also challenges the psychological certainty of Great Powers.

Taking all this into account, we can more clearly understand why the Bush administration's National Security Strategy proclaimed that "[t]he allies of terror are the enemies of civilization" (NSS, 2002: iv). They are such because "terrorist groups are seeking to acquire WMD with the stated purpose of killing large numbers of our people and those of friends and allies – *without compunction and without warning*" (NSS-WMD, 2002: 1, emphasis added). In other words, these groups are outside GP authority due to their disregard of the laws of war. Moreover, the leakage of WMD to terrorist groups was perceived to blur the distinction between the powerful and the weak: "[our enemies] want the capability to blackmail us" (NSS, 2002: 10). The strategy went on to explain the fundamental difference between the intentions and capabilities of states and actors that accept the norms of the system and those that want to destroy it: "In the Cold War, weapons of mass destruction were considered weapons of last resort whose use risked the destruction of those who used them. Today, our enemies see weapons of mass destruction as weapons of choice ... Rogue states and terrorists do not seek to attack us using conventional means. They know such attacks would fail. Instead, they rely on acts of terror and, potentially, the use of weapons of mass destruction – weapons that can be easily concealed, delivered covertly, and used without warning" (NSS, 2002: 15). In other words, the threat environment has dramatically changed because the fundamental institutions that sanctioned American hegemony are at risk: traditional or conventional military superiority and deterrence were seen after 9/11 as subject to "blackmail" (NSS, 2002: 15). The strategy's use of the term "enemies of civilization" has familiar echoes from the suppression of maritime piracy (Ritchie, 1997), and indeed the authors of the NSS explicitly addressed the similarity between terror and piracy as an illegitimate form of violence. They pledge that the US will "make clear that all acts of terrorism are illegitimate so that terrorism will be viewed in the same light as slavery, piracy, or genocide: behavior that no respectable government can condone or support and all must oppose" (NSS, 2002: 6). Terrorism *à la* al Qaeda was thus seen as rebellion against the prevailing institutions and threatened the leader of the system by challenging the normative macrostructure that allowed it to effectively employ authority over less powerful actors.

III. Institutional Threats and Situational Conservatism

When GPs recognize that an institutional threat is on the rise, conservatism is invoked even among powers that had previously conflicting interests. This kind of conservatism is what Samuel Huntington in 1957 called situational conservatism. "The essence of [situational] conservatism is the passionate affirmation of the value of existing institutions" (Huntington, 1957: 455). Situational conservatism can be distinguished from what Martin Wight (1991: 8) terms "Revolutionism." Revolutionists "can be defined ... as those who believe so passionately in the moral unity of the society of states or international society, that they identify themselves with it, and therefore they both claim to speak in the name of this unity, and experience an overriding obligation to give effect to it, as the first aim of their international policies. For them, the whole of international society transcends its parts; they are cosmopolitan rather than 'internationalist' and their international theory and policy has a missionary character."

Situational conservatism is, on the other hand, closer to Wight's "Rationalist" tradition in at least two respects. First, Wight mentions that the key concept for rationalists is authority, which is "power justified by consonance with moral principles" (Wight, 1991: 107), an understanding of authority of which Great Powers in our view are cognizant. Second, Wight discusses the central role of the doctrine of the just war in Rationalist theory (1991: 217), which corresponds to our third observation noted in Section II about "when and how" institutions of violence can be used in international politics.[9]

Accordingly, a non-state threat to an institution that serves as the underlying constitution for the organization of the society of sovereign states would take priority over previous conflicts among the GPs. It would, in fact, become an important incentive for cooperation by invoking situational conservatism. If an actor's identity and authority are anchored in a certain system of organized violence, then threats to the system become a threat to that actor, even if it is not satisfied with the current allocation of power within the system. By being a member of an interstate society, a sovereign actor shares some fundamental common values and interests with its other members (Wendt, 2003: 512), the most fundamental one being the basic principle of allocating and employing organized violence. Al Qaeda's intense deviance from these principles invoked situational conservatism.

Thus, during the 2001/2 war in Afghanistan, Russia, China, the UK, Germany, and France, as well as other states and GPs, offered various degrees of assistance to the US. For instance, NATO, for the first time in its history, actually invoked its collective defense clause. Russia opened its airspace to American war planes, encouraged Uzbekistan – a former Soviet republic – to allow large-scale American deployment in its territory, offered help in intelligence gathering on al Qaeda and the Taliban, and assisted in search-and-rescue missions for Western soldiers. Russia also aided in other logistic aspects of the American war effort. China, for its part, did not object to the presence of American forces at its Central Asian back door, allowed an American aircraft carrier to harbor in Hong Kong, and also offered assistance in intelligence. Furthermore, China tolerated the fact that its ally Pakistan served as an American base for attacking the Taliban and al Qaeda (see Khan and Moore, 2001: A07).

This significant cooperation on the part of Russia and China stood in sharp contrast to these two GPs' previous disagreements and conflicts with the US during the 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1996, the Kosovo War in 1999, and the eastward enlargement of NATO). And while Russia and China may have supported the US campaign against al Qaeda in order to justify and legitimate their own campaigns against Muslim rebels and secessionists (Xinjiang province in China and Chechnia in Russia), we believe that there was more than this to these countries' alignment with the US in 2001/2. The fact that the global terror threat was precisely aimed at

the hegemonic power of the system is significant too. In effect, the terror threat to the US, the most powerful among the GPs, exposed the vulnerability of the other GPs as well. The lesser GPs probably understood that what happened to the single superpower might happen to them too. Therefore, al Qaeda and its ally the Taliban regime truly became "enemies of all mankind." Mega-terrorism created, even if momentarily, a sense of common fate among the GPs and underlined their common values, their roles as bearers of international authority, and their mutual interests.

We now conclude this article with some theoretical reflections, as well as comments on recent geopolitical developments, both of which help explicate the dilemmas which come with GP authority.

Conclusion: the Dilemmas of Great Power Authority

Our analysis bears upon two sites for contemporary debate – one theoretical and the other geopolitical. Engaging both of these, as we do here in this conclusion, helps reveal the dilemmas inherent in Great Power authority. As mentioned in the Introduction, the relationship between GP authority and transnational terrorism can be elucidated in terms familiar to the English School, which has seen the relationship between an international society of states and a world society of various state and non-state actors in both progressive (international developing toward a world society) and complementary (where states acquire more inclusive "norms" from non-state entities) fashions. Our analysis suggests a third possibility – the manner in which world society (which presumably includes transnational terrorist groups, for instance) can stimulate rather unsavory behaviors, institutionalized behaviors, on the part of international society's (IS) members. In his recent speech to the University of Cairo, US President Barack Obama stated as much: "Nine-eleven was an enormous trauma to our country. The fear and anger that it provoked was understandable, but in some cases it led us to act contrary to our traditions and our ideals."[10] Such reactions on the part of IS members serve to unravel the foundation of IS itself. In addition to the doctrine of preemption that the United States has adopted (discussed below), we also note the casualty of other international conventions, most vividly the convention against torture, where the United States has institutionalized coercive forms of interrogation in its conduct toward terror suspects. This implies, then, that the relationships which exist between international society and transnational actors can be both accommodative (see Clark, 2007) and adversarial. And while Obama stated that the US has taken "concrete actions to change course,"[11] the direction in which such orders will develop (regressive, progressive, or static) is still not entirely clear, for one further reason.

This reason can be explored by examining the tension between the self-determination of democratic members of IS and the Great Power responsibilities those members have toward the rules of that society in a time of transnational terror. This tension has been treated to some degree by English School theorists, mainly in the context of the United States' relationship with the International Criminal Court (see Ralph, 2005). To begin with, notice how then-US Senator and now Secretary of State Hillary Clinton summarized the import of being a GP quite succinctly with a vignette to an audience in 2007:

> I met a diplomat from an Arab country the other day – one of the countries that we are trying to get to help to manage the situation in Iraq and to deal with the very threatening presence in Iran. He said, "The problem is, Senator, that to be a great power you must be either feared, respected, or liked, and right now in too many places the United States is none of those." Think about that. That is chilling. That undercuts our capacity to do what we know we must in the world. It is a threatening and dangerous world.[12]

Clinton recognized here what damage the United States had done to its Great Power authority. Presumably, the institutionalization of torture, and its symbolic representation in the form of detention centers such as Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, are in part responsible for this loss of authority. Even former US President George W. Bush proclaimed on several occasions that he intended to close the facility, and current US President Barack Obama has repeated this intention. More recently, Obama has prevented the release of photos detailing interrogations at the facility, photographs which may have further undermined US Great Power authority. Yet the "two-level game" inherent in this intention is that large majorities of Americans have expressed opposition to the detention facility's closing.[13] As one account of a town hall meeting with US Senator Pat Roberts characterized it, attendees "said they thought world opinion had a hand in Obama's decision to close Gitmo and that the world's opinion shouldn't matter," an assessment with which the Senator agreed.[14] The point to take from this, in light of what we mentioned in our opening sections, is that the (democratic) legitimacy certain GPs obtain with their citizens can conflict with the authority they seek by being "custodians" of the international society.

Geopolitically, our analysis can be used to understand not only US actions in the War on Terror in Afghanistan, but also the opposition by other Great Powers to the US-led Iraq war of 2002/3. While situational conservatism in the international system translated into wide international support for the war in Afghanistan in 2001/2, situational conservatism was also responsible for the inability of the US to reach consensus with many other states and GPs regarding the Iraqi crisis in 2002/3. Somehow tragically, al Qaeda's threat to the international institutions of violence was matched by the US challenge to these institutions in the Iraqi war. In the eyes of many states and publics (recall the mass demonstrations worldwide before the war), the US itself deviated from the institutions of violence by waging an illegitimate preventive or aggressive war that sought regime change. While we recognize that there are several ways in which one can interpret the opposition of countries like France, Germany, and Russia to the war, our argument suggests that analysts might consider how situational conservatism was invoked by these opponents of the US. While the attacks of September 11 demonstrated the difficulty faced by GPs in deterring deviant actors such as al Qaeda and exacting costs from them for their deviance, the Iraqi war strained the institutions of violence due to the hegemon's own movement away from them.

Indeed, both the War on Terror in Afghanistan and the War on Iraq had an element of retribution and punishment in them. Punishment has a function of restoring authority. But it could also lead to an authority dilemma. In the first case (Afghanistan), punishment did not necessarily augment American and international security (consider, for example, the resilience of the Taliban in Afghanistan and, more dangerously, in nuclear Pakistan). In the second case (Iraq), it might have even exacerbated the threat by, among other things, creating another failed state in which al Qaeda operatives and other transnational Jihadists gain combative experience and further develop their identity. In effect, the strategy of preventive war represented punishment for perceived intentions rather than for actual or looming bellicose actions. "Rogue" states and terrorists "hate the United States and everything for which it stands," argued the NSS (NSS, 2002: 14). This hatred alone – the strategy reasoned – might translate into aggressive actions which, as 9/11 demonstrated, are difficult to predict and to deter (NSS-WMD, 2002: 2). The combination of the difficulty of authoritatively imposing definitions of power and resistance on rebellious actors – or in other words, of deterring them – with the existence of destructive capabilities and structural holes constituted an aggressive threat from the perspective of the US. Therefore, prevention became identical to preemption in this new threat environment, at least from an American point of view. But in "adapting" the concept of preemptive war after 9/11 (NSS, 2002: 15), the US, intentionally

or not, strained a constitutive principle of international order. And as Lang notes, the abrogation of authority by the United States in these actions has undermined more than this principle; it has undermined the US's own authority as a Great Power guardian of international society and helped to begin creating an "illiberal order," where the "aggressive pursuit of rules through enforcement mechanisms can lead to further violence and injustice" (Lang, 2008: 19). Perhaps such a recognition was part of the reason for President Obama's semi-apology for the Iraqi war (he defined it as a "war of choice").[15]

Furthermore, we might also consider, as others have (see Mendelsohn, 2005: 66), that bin Laden and al Qaeda may have intended to provoke the United States into over-reacting, the result of which would be the unraveling of not just US hegemony but eventually the legitimacy of international society itself. The Iranian, North Korean, and perhaps also Syrian attempts in recent years to acquire nuclear weapons could be better understood in light of this. And so, the authority dilemma that the US faced as a result of September 11 is that, on the one hand, "enemies of civilization" might attack the US under any circumstances, no matter what the US does or does not do. On the other hand, new and dangerous enemies might emerge in response to or as a result of illegitimate American practice. There are no easy solutions to this dilemma, if any at all. Still, in our view the US should strive to clearly distinguish itself from its enemies. If anything can be learned from bin Laden, it is the fact that the Great Powers are such not only as long as they possess superior military and economic capabilities but also when the other actors in world politics accept their authority, their legitimized power, at least passively. In this context, and especially in light of President Obama's campaign commitment to "crush" al Qaeda,[16] we wish to stress that, in our view, the US will be able to considerably diminish the threat of al Qaeda and rehabilitate its GP authority only when it accepts that the laws and norms of international violence must equally bind the powerful and the weak. Obama's declaration in Cairo (June 2009) that "America will defend itself, respectful of the sovereignty of nations and the rule of law," seems to acknowledge the great importance of legitimate and consistent conduct even for the most powerful.

Notes

1. http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/06/03/tiananmen.square.clinton/ (consulted June 17 2009).
2. Recall from the earlier discussion that while legitimacy and authority are their own concepts, they are also intrinsically interrelated. Authority provides an actor with the ability to legitimate, to speak about, their actions. Legitimacy helps reinforce authority.
3. On the special rights of the GPs, see Bull (1977: ch. 9) and Simpson (2004).
4. Anthony Lang's observation here is quite helpful regarding the United States' confusion on the two concepts, as the United States represents a "powerful individual agent who take[s] on the mantle of authority and, in so doing, makes decisions that lack legitimacy ... [thereby becoming] the embodiment of that agent that sees itself as having the means and will to govern and save others from themselves, but in the process overrid[ing] international law and rules" (Lang, 2008: 42).
5. In 2003, Libya agreed to compensate the families of the victims of the Pan Am flight, but it did not admit that it, as a state, had perpetrated the attack.
6. See, for example, an interview with Robert Oakley, a former State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism in the 1980s: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/target/interviews/oakley.html (consulted June 1 2009). See also "Interview with President François Mitterrand, 30 April 1986," *Survival* 28(5) (1986): 460.
7. While al Qaeda initially denied responsibility for the attacks, bin Laden has admitted that they planned the attacks on several occasions. In a tape made on 9 November 2001, and captured by coalition forces

in December of that same year, bin Laden admitted responsibility for the attacks: http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/12/13/ret.bin.laden.videotape/ (consulted November 16 2008). The first public admission of responsibility occurred in bin Laden's dramatic video address issued just days before the 2004 United States presidential election, on October 29 2004.

8. This paraphrases Mearsheimer's (2001) idiom of the "stopping power of water." On ontological security see Mitzen (2006) and Steele (2008).

9. Robert Jackson has titled this tradition one of "international responsibility," where the principle of sovereignty "means that state leaders are answerable not only to their citizens but also to each other" (Jackson, 2000: 172). Jackson, like Bull, posits that within such an order GPs bear the burden of guarding peace and security (2000: 173).

10. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6–04–09/ (consulted June 18 2009).

11. Ibid.

12. http://www.pjvoice.com/v25/25305clinton.aspx.

13. Several polls were taken on this issue in the spring of 2009, with anywhere from 60 to 65 percent of Americans opposed to the facility being shut down. See http://pollingreport.com/terror.htm (consulted June 18 2009).

14. "Guantanamo Threat Still Exists, Roberts Says," May 28 2009, *Lawrence Journal-World*, http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2009/may/28/guantanamo-threat-still-exists-roberts-says/ (consulted June 18 2009).

15. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6–04–09/.

16. "We will kill bin Laden; we will crush Al Qaeda. *That has to be our biggest national security priority.*" Transcript of second McCain/Obama debate. Available at: http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/07/presidential.debate.transcript/ (consulted June 1 2009). Emphasis added.

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