

Chapter 4: Cooperation and International Regimes

Relevance of hegemonic cooperation for the future is questionable (US no longer has capabilities or will to dominate international politics). Therefore, cooperation “after hegemony” is crucial. Keohane analyzes and defines two terms: “cooperation” and “international regimes” in order to clarify. While international policy coordination is highly beneficial in an interdependent world economy, cooperation in world politics is very difficult. Nevertheless, Keohane argues that cooperation is possible after hegemony, not only because shared interests can lead to the creation of regimes, but also because the conditions for maintenance of existing regimes are less demanding than those required for creating them.

Definitions

Harmony: actors’ pursuit of self-interested policies automatically facilitates the attainment of others’ goals (because individual self-interests converge). When harmony reigns, cooperation is unnecessary. Harmony is apolitical – communication, cooperation, and coordination are unnecessary.

Cooperation: actors adjust their behavior to actual/anticipated preferences of others through policy coordination. This occurs when the policies of one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating the realization of their own objectives, as the result of a process of policy coordination. Cooperation occurs within the context of international regimes and affects the beliefs, rules, and practices that form the context for future actions.

Therefore, harmony ≠ cooperation (no policy coordination necessary if all actors are pursuing identical policies because of harmonious preferences). Conversely, cooperation does not mean the absence of conflict – often, policy coordination takes place through negative inducements (threats and punishments, e.g., Axelrod’s tit-for-tat). Indeed, cooperation is only possible in situations where actors’ policies are actually or potentially in conflict. Thus, cooperation is a *reaction* to conflict. By defining cooperation as such, Keohane is appealing to realist concerns with power and conflict; he does not want to “relegate cooperation to the mythological world of relations among equals in power” (55).

International regimes: sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations. Principles define the members’ purposes; rules indicate members’ specific rights and obligations; norms bound legitimate and illegitimate behavior by members; decision-making procedures provide ways of implementing the regime’s principles and/or altering their rules. Regimes are “bounded” in scope by issue areas, since governments establish regimes to deal with specific problems or related groups of problems.

Sovereignty and “self-help” (sovereignty’s associated norm) determine that the principles and rules of international regimes are necessarily weaker than in domestic society; regimes are also fragile, since they risk coming into conflict with national sovereignty. Nevertheless, it is important not to view international regimes as “beyond the nation state” – at root, they are motivated by national self-interest and exist in a world in which sovereign “remains a constitutive principle” (63).

Chapter 5: Rational-Choice and Functional Explanations

Keohane uses game theory and collective action discussions to emphasize that rational individuals, who would all benefit from cooperation, may nevertheless be unable to do so. His argument is aimed at rejecting the fatalistic notion that discord is natural and inevitable because of competing national interests. He argues that states are “rational egoists” (as the Realists claim), but shows that “the characteristic pessimism of Realist does not necessarily follow” (i.e., discord is not inevitable). Ultimately, Keohane “seeks to demonstrate that Realist assumptions about world politics are consistent with the formation” of

international regimes that promote cooperation (67). By reexamining Realist in light of rational-choice theory, Keohane seeks to reconsider the validity of its claims.

Rational Choice Explanations

Keohane discusses the classic Prisoners' Dilemma to define collective action problems. He then shows that rational choice models have three key limitations:

- 1) they focus on players' *choices* but ignore prior constraints (such as power/dependence relationships)
- 2) they often confuse egoism (pursuit of self-interest) with *anomie* (i.e., actors are outside of society in a "state of nature with respect to one another"). Keohane argues that egoistic players can be linked by a common society, which leads them to act as if they share ethical standards (the Mafia Prisoners' Dilemma – each prisoner's belief in the "code of silence" prevents mutual defection).
- 3) they ignore *ethics* (more ethical actors may prefer being the "sucker" than defecting)

Nevertheless, Keohane argues that rational choice analysis is useful, but one needs to make some assumptions about values and prior contexts of power, expectations, and conventions that affect how interests are determined. Otherwise, "the logic alone is empirically empty" (75).

Thus, Keohane does see value in rational-choice explanations of cooperation. However, he qualifies his assertions by arguing that cooperation among the developed countries has been possible because it involves only a small number of governments. He suggests that "intensive interaction" among a few players helps to substitute for (or supplement) the actions of a hegemon, thereby enabling a gradual shift from a hegemonic to a post-hegemonic world. Keohane concludes by outlining several factors which facilitate the creation of international regimes:

- 1) a limited number of players (as mentioned above)
- 2) existing patterns of regimes – build mutual confidence for further cooperation
- 3) shared interests/issue density – regimes are more likely to arise when several issues are closely linked (i.e., "issue density" is high)

Functionalist Explanations

Keohane suggests that rational-choice explanations lead to a "functional argument" – the functions an institution/regime performs explain why it was created. This is a *post hoc* explanation of regimes: we observe international institutions and then rationalize their existence by examining the incentives facing actors. Thus, functionalist explanations of cooperation conclude that regimes exist because they could have reasonably been expected to increase the welfare of their creators (80). There are limits to this type of explanation (it does not show that institutions *had* to emerge, or that other potential institutions would have been inferior), but functionalist explanations nevertheless do provide reason to believe in a causal link between regime function and regime creation.

By analyzing the validity of rational choice and functionalist explanations of cooperation, Keohane lays the foundations for his own functional theory of international regimes in the later chapters.