

Legitimate authority in the international system



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Researchers and students of international relations are always faced with questions regarding if there is any legitimate authority in the international system. Other questions that these people are always faced with, is whether they can denote that the behavior of states is always motivated by factors such as power or even wealth. Furthermore, questions emerge on whether the interests of states are always the same, over a period of time and space. Mitchell (2012) denotes that this debate about the nature of authority in the international arena is always theoretical, focusing only on the contemporary international system. This paper critically examines the concept that there is no legitimate authority in the international system. In answering this question, the researcher will have to use a variety of theories, such as realism and liberalism. This paper takes the stand that the international system is anarchical in nature, and there is no legitimate authority.

This concept of legitimate authority refers to the justification of people to have real power over other people, as well as the decisions they make. Mitchell (2012) further claims that legitimate authority is always exercised by the government, and the government derives justification in the use of such power because the power is given by the laws of the country. Krehoff (2008) agrees on the fact that there is no legitimate authority in the international system. This is because the international system is characterized by the interaction of states, and each state has its own interests and objectives in regard to the interaction (Bromley, Clarke, Hinchliffe and Taylor, 2009). One of the methods in which social scientists use to explain the relations and power in the international system is through the use of liberalism theory (Goldstein, 2012). Liberalism is a political

concept that advocates for the freedom and rights of individuals. This theoretical framework recognizes the role of the state, as well as other actors in the international system in promoting democracy, freedom of expression, as well as other rights of individuals within the society (Baylis and Smith, 2001).

Karp (2009) observes that this theoretical framework encourages participation in the international system, and for the purposes of promoting peace and stability. On this basis, the international system is characterized by inter-governmental organizations, multi-national companies, and non-governmental organizations. These institutions operating in the international system are responsible for shaping the various policies of states (Bromley, Clarke, Hinchliffe and Taylor, 2009). For instance institutions such as the United Nations, is responsible for discussing various issues that threaten the World Peace and coming up with a resolution that each and every member of the organization needs to follow. For instance in 2011, the UN Security Council passed a resolution that there was a need of intervening in the Libyan civil war, for purposes of preventing president Gaddafi from killing his own people Goldstein, (2012).

Members of the Security Council, including the US, Britain, France, as well as other countries such as Canada, etc were able to provide equipments that could be used to enforce the decision by the UN Security council. Cornut (2010) denotes that this is an example of a legitimate authority, and this is because a legitimate authority is always justifiable by the rules guiding the operation of an institution. For example, the charter of the UN establishes the Security Council, with five permanent members who hold veto powers, <https://assignbuster.com/legitimate-authority-in-the-international-system/>

and other non-permanent members. The charter denotes that the decision of this council are always legitimate, and supported by the laws of the charter in which all UN members are signatories. However, Baylis and Smith (2001) disagrees with the notion that the UN Security Council is a legitimate authority.

Basu (2012) denotes that the UN Security council only serves the interests of the major powers holding the veto power. This is because the countries under consideration will always veto a policy developed that is against them.

Basu (2012) further explains that the main reason as to why the Security Council attacked the government of Gaddafi was because he had a bad historical relation with western countries such as the United States, Britain, as well as France. On this basis, attacking Libya, and removing the government of Gaddafi would only serve the interests of countries such as the United States, Britain, and France. It is important to understand that these countries hold a veto powers in the UN Security Council. To prove his point, Basu (2012) identifies the structural adjustments policies brought forth by the World Bank, and IMF, during the 1980s, and the 1990s. Basu (2012) explains that these policies forced third world countries to liberalize their economies, even when they were not ready for such liberalization.

Other demands initiated by World Bank, and IMF included the introduction of austerity measures. These measures forced the target governments to reduce spending on education, health, transport, security, and other important aspects of the economies of these countries. Cornut (2010) denotes that these austerity measures were responsible for the negative growth of these countries, as opposed to an increase in the growth of their

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economies. Goldstein, (2012) denotes that the World Bank, and the IMF are institutions of liberalism, and on this basis, they failed to promote equality of human rights, in regard to trade and economic stability. Instead, through their structural adjustment policies, IMF and World Bank are responsible for eroding the economies of these states. Furthermore, Goldstein, (2012) believes denotes that IMF and World Bank are controlled by its major donors, which include France, USA, Britain, as well as Japan. On this note, the policies developed by World Bank and IMF are aimed at protecting the interests of their major financiers.

Dominese (2010) further denotes that the affairs of World Bank and IMF are always conducted in great secrecy, and there is no transparency while developing their policies. One of the characteristics of a legitimate authority is that it has transparency in the manner in which they develop policies.

Calhoun (2002) believes that this transparency lacks in these global institutions. Dominese (2010) further asserts that a legitimate international institution will always seek to serve the interest of the international community, and not only a particular section of the international community. On this basis, institutions such as IMF and World Bank have failed to establish a legitimate international authority. Realism is a theoretical framework that supports the notion that a legitimate international authority does not exist (Goldstein, 2012). One of the principle arguments of realism is that the international system is anarchical in nature.

This is because states are the major actors in the international system, and on this basis, there is no actor that has the capability of regulating the affairs of the states. Krehoff (2008) further explains that under realism, states will

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only relate with other states, in pursuance of their interests, and not the interest of the global good. Dominese (2010) defines international anarchy as a concept whereby the international system does not have a leader, i. e. a sovereign worldwide government does not exist. On this basis, Dominese (2010) denotes that the international system does not have a hierarchical authority which has the capability of enforcing laws, and resolving disputes, just like states in the domestic politics. This observation by Dominese (2010) is correct, and this is because legal international institutions such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) only depends on the goodwill of signatory states to arrest and handover people indicted by the court. On this basis, Goldstein, (2012) denotes that without cooperation from member states, ICC won't be able to carry out its mandate.

Tight (2005) denotes that this lack of an hierarchical structure at the international system, is one of the main reasons as to why institutions formed by the principles of liberalism will always serve the interests of rich states of the world. Basu (2012) further denotes that the accumulation of power and the need for survival are the major factors that influence the behavior of states in the international system. On this note, states will carry out any activity aimed at meeting their objectives. This creates suspicion at the international stage, amongst the various states, and because of these suspicions that exists between various states; it is difficult to create an international legitimate authority. For instance, the League of Nations failed to be a legitimate authority because of suspicions between the various states that formed the League of Nations. Based on these arguments of

realism, Goldstein, (2012) explains that a legitimate international authority does not exist.

In conclusion, realism is the major theory that recognizes the fact that a legitimate international authority does not exist. This is because the major arguments contained under realism, is that the international system is anarchic in nature, and the relations that occurs at the international system, are always aimed at protecting the self interests of the state under consideration. Due to this nature of states in the international arena, there is a lot of suspicion regarding the activities of states, and this makes the international system to be anarchic in nature. Because of this anarchic nature in the international system, it is very difficult for a legitimate authority to exist. To create a legitimate authority therefore, it is important to create a single interest that states should pursue in the international arena. This is a concept that is very difficult, and impossible to achieve. There are two conflicting perspective on this concept of a legitimate international authority. This is because the principles of liberalism supports this notion that there is a legitimate authority and this is in form of the various institutions formed by the states, and other international bodies.

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