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Hollow Hegemony

Rethinking Global Politics, Power and Resistance

David Chandler

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I shouldn't be reviewing this book: I am not qualified to do so. What do I know about international relations *theory*, which is what this book is about? And, in any case, its subject matter is really outside *Lobster's* field. I asked for a copy after being sent a flyer from the publisher. It sounded interesting (I didn't realise it was about IR *theory* until too late to get someone more qualified); and it *is* interesting in a way, though it is very difficult even to convey what it is about; not least because of my complete unfamiliarity with the subject and its vocabulary. What I shall do is reproduce some of the many sections I marked while reading it. This will probably convey a sense of it better than any clumsy attempt to précis it. These quotations are something like the author's central theses.

'the dynamic behind the security-development nexus is based not so much on the desire of leading western states, such as the United States, to regulate and control peripheral non-western states, but rather the desire to use the international sphere as an arena for grand policy statements of mission and purpose – from the global war on terror to the desire to "make Poverty History" – while simultaneously disengaging from long-term commitments in these regions and passing responsibility to other actors, particularly NGOs and international institutions.' (p. 29)

'Rather than a framework of coherent intervention, we are witnessing a framework of *ad hoc* intervention mixed with the limiting of expectations, more mediated political engagement and the disavowal of external or international responsibilities'. (p. 31)

'The language of empowerment is used to mask the fact that western states and international institutions lack a

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clear policy agenda, or lack the confidence openly to advocate and impose specific sets of policies, preferring instead to shift policy responsibility onto non-western actors.’ (p. 42)

‘It would appear that whereas the Cold War era marked the confluence of clear values and distinct interests, reflected in instrumental policy-making, the post-Cold War period has seen the collapse of a value/interest framework, leading increasingly to ad hoc, non-instrumentalist policy-making. International policy-making in the post-Cold War era would therefore seem to be an idealised projection of the western self, rather than the instrumental projection of strategic interests.’ (p. 204)

In the final pages he suggests that since international relations theory has become basically a load of vacuous, global-oriented guff (my words, not his), it would make more sense to think about – gasp! – things domestic. Or something like that.

‘...the shift towards the global is a retreat from social engagement and political struggle. The freedom of action provided by escaping the frameworks of representation and the demands of territorial control is the freedom of disengagement.’ (p. 207)

If ‘frameworks of representation’ does mean politics and ‘the demands of territorial control’ does mean the nation state, as I think they do, then amen to that. The idea that we will get global agreements on climate change and subsidiary issues, leading to some kind of more just, co-operative world, strikes me as at least as silly as the belief in world revolution held by some of the left until recently (some of whom, I notice, are now ‘global’ international relations theorists).

Actual foreign policy events figure not all in these discussions and it seems almost vulgar to ask how international relations theory deals with events such as the creation of the

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Pentagon's Africa Command (AFRICOM)?¹⁰ If 'international policy-making in the post-Cold War era [is] an idealised projection of the western self', how does the Predator drone firing the Hellfire missile into a wedding party in Afghanistan fit into this? Nothing the author discusses seems to me to deal with the reality of the greatest and most destructive military force ever assembled being let loose on the world.

¹⁰ On AFRICOM see <www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=15788> This is by Rick Rozoff who is running a kind of one-man NATO-watch operation. Try his pieces at <www.globalresearch.ca> which can be searched for by his name there. Or look at some of the postings at <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato/messages>>.