

Introduction

Hierarchy and International Politics

In late 1991, the Georgian government was involved in multiple domestic conflicts. One outcome of these conflicts was the ouster of Georgia's first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia. In the region of Mingrelia, supporters of the former president then staged an uprising. In the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, ethnic minorities with Russian support defeated Georgian forces, preserving or reestablishing their dominance. Eduard Shevardnadze, recently installed in power by a coalition of warlords and militia leaders, was faced with a choice. In return for agreeing to Russian demands to allow Russian military forces to be stationed in Georgia, joining the Commonwealth of Independent States, and greater Russian influence and control over Georgia's government and sovereignty, Russia would aid him in defeating his Zviadist rivals and increase his chances of political survival. "Prostrate" before Russia, the bargain was struck. Russian military power helped defeat the Zviadist rebels, while continuing to prop up ethnic separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Shevardnadze continued to rule.

The choices made during this period – by Shevardnadze, the leaders of the breakaway republics in Georgia, and elite actors among other ethnic minorities – have shaped Georgia's state-building project, domestic politics, and foreign policy during the decades since independence. The decision made by some actors to support Russian involvement in Georgia and their willingness to cede autonomy has provided both opportunities for some and imposed constraints on others.

The most obvious effect of Russia's policy toward Georgia has been the continued survival of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as de facto states. The de facto independence of large parts of Georgian territory has seriously curtailed Georgian state-building efforts. During the 1990s, Russian involvement in the country affected the Georgian state's attempts to assert authority even in regions where violence did not break out with minority groups. In Javakheti, with its large Armenian population and Russian military installation, the central government long felt constrained from asserting its authority fully. Decisions to support or oppose Russia

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made by sets of elites and the populace in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as Georgia pursued independence, continue to have ramifications for Georgia today.

These events and subsequent dynamics in Georgia demonstrate two important lessons for understanding authority, control, and sovereignty in international politics. First, political survival can be a powerful impetus for actors to give up sovereignty. This is particularly true in environments such as Georgia where access to political power was essential for economic well-being as well. Second, international hierarchies are not only the product of formal governments bargaining away sovereign rights. Russia in part constructed its influence and control over Georgia by contracting with subnational groups, while simultaneously striking bargains with the central government. Combined, these two lessons demonstrate that domestic political interactions are an essential part of any explanation of hierarchy.

Great powers' attempts to exert control over smaller or weaker states have often been met with violent resistance. For example, the European great powers sent thousands of soldiers to China to defeat the Boxer Rebellion, while the Urabi uprising in Egypt led to an eventual invasion and establishment of a formal empire by Britain. In more contemporary cases, Georgian and Ukrainian opposition to Russian power have triggered violent confrontations between these countries and Russia, in 2008 and 2014, respectively. Perhaps equally consequential in determining the structure of global order, though generally receiving less attention, are instances when great power expansion and attempts to establish authority succeed with local support. This book explains when actors within a weaker state will support giving up sovereignty to a more powerful state and when they will resist. In other words, how do great powers establish authority and control in international politics?

The ability of great powers to find support and establish relationships with actors in less powerful states or polities is crucial for achieving their political goals. The United States invaded Afghanistan with the support of the Northern Alliance, a coalition of warlords opposed to the Taliban; Russia now governs Chechnya with the aid of local actor Ramzan Kadyrov and in the past and present has wielded influence over Georgia using local proxies.¹ However, how great powers establish these patron-client relationships and why they persist, despite potential for defection from both sides, is unclear. Specifically, the conditions that cause local actors to welcome such relationships, surrendering a substantial share of

¹ Kimberly Marten, *Warlords: Strong-Arm Brokers in Weak States* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

their autonomy, are poorly understood. Knowing that local actors are motivated by concerns for political survival and the desire to pursue or retain rent-seeking opportunities will improve our understanding of the constraints and opportunities available to powerful states seeking to expand and exert influence within the international system.

This book helps to explain how certain kinds of political order in the international system emerge or break down. In particular, it contributes to our understanding of hierarchy in international relations and global politics. Hierarchy is a form of authority relationship between states in which a dominant power controls aspects of a subordinate state's sovereignty. Historians and scholars of international relations are increasingly using the concepts of empire and hierarchy to describe the behavior of powerful states in contemporary as well as historical settings. Political units as diverse as the European Union and the United States have been described as empires.² Relationships from those between the United States and Latin America to New Zealand's with certain South Pacific islands have been classified as hierarchies.³ Hierarchy clearly plays a critical role in how we understand international relations.

Under certain conditions, the interaction between the international system and domestic politics creates incentives for actors to surrender their sovereignty, leading to the establishment of hierarchy. Actors in weaker states respond to both the incentives of their domestic political situations and the credibility of the threat from the dominant state when deciding to surrender sovereignty. Somewhat counterintuitively, I find that where subordinate actors extract the most economic benefit from political power through rent-seeking, they are most willing to surrender sovereign rights and political power to external actors.

The bulk of the evidence is drawn from Russia's relationship with the Soviet successor states. By focusing on Russia, I am able to illuminate some of the dynamics that have resulted in conflict between Russia and former Soviet Republics Ukraine and Georgia. To provide evidence of the argument's generalizability, additional support is mustered using two

² Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (Basic Books, 2004); Herfried Münkler, *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States* (Polity Press, 2007); Y. H. Ferguson, "Approaches to Defining 'Empire' and Characterizing United States Influence in the Contemporary World," *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2008).

³ Ahsan I. Butt, "Anarchy and Hierarchy in International Relations: Examining South America's War-Prone Decade, 1932–41," *International Organization* 67, no. 3 (2013); David A. Lake, "Legitimizing Power: The Domestic Politics of US International Hierarchy," *International Security* 38, no. 2 (2013); Jason C. Sharman, "International Hierarchies and Contemporary Imperial Governance: A Tale of Three Kingdoms," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 2 (2013).

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different sources. First, a set of qualitative cases studies explores European attempts to limit the sovereignty of China, the Ottoman Empire, and Egypt in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. China and the Ottoman Empire are cases where local support allowed a stable informal empire to be sustained, while in Egypt informal empire faced resistance, broke down, and was replaced with British colonialism. This set of cases demonstrates that the relationships hold even in very different international environments to that of the post-Soviet space. Second, a cross-national statistical analysis examines hierarchy worldwide since 1945, demonstrating these dynamics on a global scale.

Hierarchy and the International System

Hierarchy can be and is defined in a variety of ways in international relations.⁴ Hierarchy can be understood in a narrow sense as legitimate authority and the sharing of sovereign rights between states or more broadly as stratification in the international system, whether this be in terms of material power or social status. This work focuses on the narrow definition of hierarchy and the establishment of authority relationships between states where some states have the right to command and others an obligation to obey.⁵ These authority relations subordinate the sovereignty of one state to another, constituting hierarchy.⁶ “When political authority is exercised, the dominant state commands a subordinate state to alter its behavior, where command implies that the former has the right to order the latter to take certain actions.”⁷ When one state takes control over another’s sovereignty, an authority relationship is established. Hierarchy, in other words, can be understood as defining a situation in

⁴ Janice Bially Mattern and Ayşe Zarakol, “Hierarchies in World Politics,” *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (2016); Ayşe Zarakol, *Hierarchies in World Politics*, vol. 144 (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Paul K. MacDonald, “Embedded Authority: A Relational Network Approach to Hierarchy in World Politics,” *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017); Meghan McConaughy, Paul Musgrave, and Daniel H. Nexon, “Beyond Anarchy: Logics of Political Organization, Hierarchy, and International Structure,” *International Theory* 10, no. 2 (2018).

⁵ Some accounts offer a more generic definition of hierarchy based on status and power differentials; see Gerry Simpson, *Great Powers and Outlaw States: Unequal Sovereigns in the International Order* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); David C. Kang, “Hierarchy and Legitimacy in International Systems: The Tribute System in Early Modern East Asia,” *Security Studies* 19, no. 4 (2010). In contrast, in this work, I focus on dyadic authority relationships.

⁶ David Lake, “Beyond Anarchy: The Importance of Security Institutions,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001).

⁷ David A. Lake, “Escape from the State of Nature: Authority and Hierarchy in World Politics,” *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007).

which the sovereignty of one state is reduced by another in an institutionalized form.

At one extreme end of the anarchy-hierarchy continuum exist hierarchical arrangements such as formal empire or military occupations that can remove all or most of the sovereignty belonging to the subordinate state or polity.⁸ At the other end of this continuum is anarchy; each state has complete control over every issue area or sovereign right within its domain of authority.⁹ In between are a variety of different forms of hierarchy that reduce the sovereignty of the subordinate state across a range of issues or just one, leaving the subordinate state with varying degrees of authority over these issue areas.¹⁰ The level of hierarchy increases as the subordinate state loses more sovereign rights or loses greater degrees of control over a particular issue area.¹¹

Hierarchy can often shape the relationships between great powers. By establishing authority relationships, great powers introduce a form of governance into the international system.¹² Because such authority allows great powers to achieve many of their aims, they often engage in competition to assert control. For example, both Russia and the United States have competed for control and influence in Central Asia, on occasions seeking to outdo their rival to guarantee their position. Such contestation can exacerbate tensions between states.¹³

In addition, hierarchy, or at least its breakdown, can lead great powers to resort to coercion, violence, and war with smaller states.¹⁴ Where states

⁸ David M. Edelstein, "Occupational Hazards: Why Military Occupations Succeed or Fail," *International Security* 29, no. 1 (2004); Daniel H. Nexon and Thomas Wright, "What's at Stake in the American Empire Debate," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (2007).

⁹ That it has the right to decide over every issue area does not mean the state possesses the capacity to carry out its wishes. Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ David A. Lake, "Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations," *International Organization* 50 (1996); John M. Hobson and Jason C. Sharman, "The Enduring Place of Hierarchy in World Politics: Tracing the Social Logics of Hierarchy and Political Change," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 1 (2005).

¹¹ Arguably, the situation of anarchy is an ideal type that rarely, if ever, exists in the international system.

¹² Alexander Cooley and Hendrik Spruyt, *Contracting States: Sovereign Transfers in International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 2009); David A. Lake, "Rightful Rules: Authority, Order, and the Foundations of Global Governance," *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2010).

¹³ See, e.g., the destabilizing effects of competition between the United States and Russia for influence in Central Asia. Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Rajan Menon, "The New Great Game in Central Asia," *Survival* 45, no. 2 (2003).

¹⁴ Jesse Dillon Savage, "The Stability and Breakdown of Empire: European Informal Empire in China, the Ottoman Empire and Egypt," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 2 (2011); Alexander Lanoszka, "Beyond Consent and Coercion: Using

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can rely on legitimacy and authority, they are able to rule through peaceful means. In contrast, where their rule is rejected, great powers are often forced to resort to coercion to achieve their ends. In extreme cases this can result in armed conflict and military interventions. For example, the replacement of a local client in Ukraine resulted in Russia intervening militarily in Crimea in 2014 to maintain some control over important assets and authority in the region.

Hierarchy also affects political relationships between smaller states. In return for smaller states supporting their authority, great powers often provide public goods such as peace and order.¹⁵ The United States has been central to ensuring that the western hemisphere has remained virtually free of interstate conflict during the last 150 years. The one exception to this was in the 1930s when the United States, dealing with consequences of the depression and opting for isolationist international policies, withdrew from its hierarchical role in Latin America, resulting in increased levels of conflict in the region.¹⁶

Hierarchy, then, is known to have many important ramifications for the conduct of international politics. In this book, I focus my attention on hierarchy where the sovereign rights of one state are ceded to another; I examine when informal empire and moderate levels of hierarchy can be stabilized and persist and when the dominant state must opt for an alternative arrangement such as formal empire, a more extreme form of hierarchy, or accept anarchy. The reason for focusing on informal forms of hierarchy, or hierarchy that leaves in place a subordinate actor, is that such forms of hierarchy are the most viable in the current international system where strong norms and sanctions exist that limit the feasibility of territorial annexation, formal empire, and colonialism.

In practice, informal hierarchies can take many forms. Informal empire, where an authority relationship is established between two states but the subordinate state retains *de jure* sovereignty, is one common historical example.¹⁷ Under informal empire, imperial intermediaries possess greater autonomy than in formal colonial settings and the authority relationships between the core and periphery only concern a limited set of issues.¹⁸ Informal empire removes agency to a lesser extent than formal empire and does so without assuming direct territorial control. However,

Republican Political Theory to Understand International Hierarchies,” *International Theory* 5, no. 3 (2013).

¹⁵ Butt, “Anarchy and Hierarchy in International Relations.” ¹⁶ Butt.

¹⁷ Alexander Wendt and Daniel Friedheim, “Hierarchy under Anarchy: Informal Empire and the East Germany State,” in *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, ed. Thomas Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 245.

¹⁸ Daniel Nexon, “What’s This Then? ‘Romanes Eunt Domus’?,” *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2008): 306.

the dominant state still drastically reduces the sovereignty of the subordinate state.¹⁹

While many forms of informal hierarchy involve direct contracting with central state actors in the subordinate polity, this is not a necessary feature of informal hierarchy. Examining both historical and contemporary examples reveals that dominant actors often negotiated arrangements with subnational actors. These subnational actors because of their effective control over a region were able to render sovereignty to the dominant state. In extreme circumstances, this can mean the establishment of de facto states or the development of frozen conflicts such as those that have appeared in post-Soviet space in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and the Donbas. De facto states through their external patrons are often able to carve out space for themselves and achieve more autonomy than they would have within the original state, but in doing so they also transfer some sovereignty from their original state to their patron.

Hierarchies demonstrate a persistent and regularized relationship of control by one state over another, not merely high levels of influence. For example, great powers often relied on extraterritoriality to assert control over the legal sovereignty of subordinate states such as China, Siam, and the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ Such arrangements could persist for decades if not centuries. In addition, European powers often established institutions within the subordinate polities to control aspects of the state's revenue-raising capacity.²¹ For example, the Ottoman Administration of Public Debt, in effect a European agency within the Ottoman state, at one point in time controlled roughly 27 percent of Ottoman revenue.²² A similar relationship existed in China through the Chinese Maritime Customs and the Salt Administration.²³ Where such institutions significantly curtail the authority of the subordinate state to act as it ordinarily would, informal empire is present.

¹⁹ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Semi-colonialism and Informal Empire in Twentieth-Century China: Towards a Framework of Analysis* (Bibliothek der Universität Konstanz, 1986).

²⁰ Turan Kayaoglu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²¹ For discussion of such activities in the Ottoman Empire, see Donald Christy Blaisdell, *European Financial Control in the Ottoman Empire: A Study of the Establishment, Activities, and Significance of the Administration of the Ottoman Public Debt* (Columbia University Press, 1929). For examples of similar European actions in China through the Chinese Maritime Customs, see Hans Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (Columbia University Press, 2014).

²² M. Sukru Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2008); Blaisdell, *European Financial Control*.

²³ Albert Feuerwerker, *The Foreign Establishment in China in the Early Twentieth Century* (Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1976), 63.

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Hierarchical relationships involve the asymmetric surrender of sovereignty. That is, there is a state that clearly is in a dominant position. This means that international organizations or treaties that formally and informally establish symmetric responsibilities are not the object of study. While some international organizations formally or informally provide a privileged position for a dominant actor, status or power hierarchies are not the same as “governance” hierarchy or the surrender of sovereignty.²⁴ It is important to draw a distinction between states that are purely political clients and those who have established themselves as subordinate actors in a hierarchical relationship. While the former may defer in some areas to a patron, they have not given up their autonomy and may be more prone to shirking.²⁵ For example, there is something of a *social hierarchy* in NATO, with smaller states deferring to larger states on important matters.²⁶ Nonetheless, with dominant powers having ostensibly equal rights and more responsibilities, countries like the Baltic states joining NATO, were not accepting a hierarchical relationship.

Asymmetric institutional reductions of sovereignty are prevalent in the modern era, and many examples can be found in the post-Soviet context. Russia demands the right to police the borders of many states in the Eurasian region, is involved in governing their airspace, and stations military forces on their soil.²⁷ Russia also seeks to institutionalize a reduction of economic sovereignty through the imposition of a common economic space and a customs union. The former Soviet Republics provide a clear area of interest for those who want to understand the dynamics of hierarchy in the international system.

Theories of Hierarchy

The important role of hierarchy in structuring international politics raises the question of how and why hierarchies develop. Some explanations have attributed the development of these systems to material causes such as power disparities and political efficiencies among unitary state actors.²⁸ Others have focused on the role that beliefs and identities play in making hierarchical relationships seem

²⁴ McConaughey et al., “Beyond Anarchy.”

²⁵ I thank Reviewer B for pointing out this important distinction.

²⁶ Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁷ Alexander Cooley, “Imperial Wreckage: Property Rights, Sovereignty, and Security in the Post-Soviet Space,” *International Security* 25, no. 3 (2006): 102.

²⁸ See Jeffrey Frieden, “International Investment and Colonial Control: A New Interpretation,” *International Organization*, 48, no. 4 (1994); David Lake, “Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations,” *International Organization*, 50,

legitimate.²⁹ Recently, some attention has been focused on the effects of domestic political institutions.³⁰ The following section outlines the implications of these approaches, which highlight many of the conditions conducive to informal hierarchy.

Relational contracting offers a principled approach to analyzing actors' choices based on the expected costs of each potential course of action. In this way, the level of hierarchy between two states can be reduced to an equilibrium based on assessments of cost: "the expected costs of opportunism, which decline with relational hierarchy, and governance costs, which rise with relational hierarchy."³¹ That is, as the costs to the dominant state of defection by the subordinate rise, so too will the level of hierarchy, as the consequences of opportunism are high. And as the cost of controlling the subordinate state increase, hierarchy will decline. While opportunism and governance costs are undoubtedly important elements of any explanation, they will to a large extent be shaped by the preferences of actors in the subordinate state. The preferences of actors in the subordinate state will explain how much effort and resources the dominant state needs to expend on governance and also the probability of defection. In order to understand the types of hierarchy that have emerged in the international system, these subordinate actors' preferences must be considered in the context of the domestic institutional factors that enable and constrain their choices.

Stephen Krasner has shown that the principles of sovereignty can easily be violated by great powers as they use coercion or its threat to assume control over weaker states.³² Power is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for hierarchy. Power disparities can exist between states where no hierarchical relationship occurs. Emphasis on power disparities cannot explain why the Aztecs and Incas crumbled in the face of the advancing conquistadors while the smaller, less differentiated tribes of northern Mexico put up fierce resistance for two generations.³³ Similarly, Russia has possessed a consistent and massive power advantage in relation to Georgia, yet at times Georgian leaders have been prepared to resist Russian hierarchy while at others they have chosen to submit. Alternative

no. 1 (1996); Lake, "Beyond Anarchy"; Katja Weber, *Hierarchy Admits Anarchy: Transaction Costs and Institutional Choice* (SUNY Press, 2000).

²⁹ Sharman, "International Hierarchies."

³⁰ J. Gerring et al., "An Institutional Theory of Direct and Indirect Rule," *World Politics* 63, no. 3 (2011); Lake, "Legitimizing Power."

³¹ Lake, "Anarchy, Hierarchy," 2.

³² Stephen Krasner, *Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

³³ John Elliot, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Spain and Britain in the Americas 1492–1830* (Yale University Press, 2006), 61–62.

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explanations, not rooted in power disparities, must be found to explain this resistance.

Beliefs, historical connections, and culture have been used to explain external patronage and hierarchy.³⁴ According to these theories, it is legitimacy and an understanding of what is right which drive relationships of hierarchy as much as the material considerations facing each actor. A dominant state may choose to expand due to their beliefs and disposition.³⁵ However, focusing on the beliefs of the dominant state cannot explain their different treatment of culturally similar subordinate actors during the same period of time. For example, Britain treated Egypt dramatically differently to the Ottoman Empire in the 1880s. Moreover, historians Gallagher and Robinson have shown that Britain's shift to more colonial forms of hierarchy did not occur in the context of changing ideological beliefs.³⁶ Changes of identity are not necessary for changed practices.

The beliefs and perceptions of legitimacy held by the subordinate actor are also potential mechanisms that might explain the establishment of hierarchy.³⁷ If the subordinate state sees hierarchy as right, then they may be more inclined to accept external authority. Subordinate identities and beliefs, while important, are not sufficient to determine particular behaviors. Identities interact with the material and institutional contexts in which they are embedded. Nationalist identities can have the paradoxical effect of increasing support for hierarchy if the right domestic environment leads to increased conflict between groups within a polity.³⁸ In Georgia, the nationalism of the central government and the Abkhaz and Ossetians brought about a reduction in sovereignty. The desire of the Abkhaz and Ossetians to assert their own identities in the face of Georgian nationalism drove them into the arms of Russia. These actors were willing to support Russian incursions and assertions of power, resulting in them

³⁴ Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Wendt and Friedheim, "Hierarchy under Anarchy"; Hobson and Sharman, "Enduring Place of Hierarchy."

³⁵ Sharman, "International Hierarchies."

³⁶ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (1953); Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration," in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (Longman, 1972).

³⁷ Wendt and Friedheim, "Hierarchy under Anarchy"; Hobson and Sharman, "Enduring Place of Hierarchy."

³⁸ Lawrence demonstrates that nationalism does not even require demands for autonomy. Instead she shows that nationalist movements in the French Empire often demanded greater integration, and it was rejection of these initial demands that lead to the pursuit of greater autonomy. Adria Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism: Anti-colonial Protest in the French Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).