The Indispensable Power and the Diffusion of Authority.
The Impact of the United States on Emerging Patterns of Global Governance

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Abstract

Current debates in International Relations entail two different claims on the global structures evolving in the post-Cold War world. While one strand of literature suggests that U.S. supremacy has endured and that the scale and scope of U.S. power amounts to lasting American hegemony or even to a U.S. empire, others speak of “global governance” and hint at the waning capacities of single states to tackle international problems in a globalized world or the growing salience of non-state actors. Surprisingly, there has been little exchange between these two bodies of research, although they both address the question of what patterns of power and authority characterize the present structure of the international system. In this paper, we seek to fill this gap in three respects. First, we identify more clearly how both literatures arrive at opposing conclusions even though they start from the same empirical event, namely the end of the Cold War. Second, we examine how the two debates take note of each other, how they defy the other’s claims and where they see possibilities to accommodate the other’s claims. Third, we apply the central insights of each perspective to empirical examples that are commonly viewed through the lens of the other. Thus, we apply a “global governance lens” to the US war against Iraq, and an “empire lens” to the world information order. We conclude by speaking of a dual move from anarchy to both hierarchy and heterarchy, as a concentration of power and a dispersion of authority have taken place simultaneously.
Beyond Anarchy: Global Governance versus Empire

The most influential strands of thinking in International Relations rest on the idea that international politics is anarchic. In void of a world government or any other kind of central authority, states act in an environment with little functional differentiation. Different schools of thought in IR come to very different conclusions as to which consequences anarchy has for world politics. Structural realists see very limited possibilities for lasting cooperation in an anarchic world, where the distribution of power and the self-help imperative shape the interactions among states (Waltz 1979). In their point of view, there is hardly any pattern of authority in international politics but mainly raw power. Institutionalism posits that in a world marked by both anarchy and interdependence, states can overcome many of the obstacles to cooperation in areas of common interest (Keohane 1984). The English School distinguishes system and society and maintains that even in an anarchic system, patterns of rule among the formally equal states and thus an international society can emerge (Bull 1977). Finally, most constructivists also agree on the international system being anarchic, although they stress that anarchy is indeterminate, so we have to analyze what processes of interaction and, in consequence, what cultures have developed that shape international relations (Wendt 1999).

Despite these differences, all these schools of thought agree that the assumption of anarchy as a central structural feature of the international system provides a good starting point to think about international relations.

Since the end of the Cold War, a growing number of scholars in International Relations have begun to question that international politics can still be adequately understood by assuming it is marked by anarchy. There are two recent strands of literature that challenge the anarchy assumption from quite different directions: the literature on evolving patterns of global governance on the one hand, and the literature maintaining the United States has to some extent assumed an imperial position in world politics on the other hand. Both strands of literature advance claims about patterns of authority that call the assumption of anarchy into question. Sometimes, these claims are made explicitly, but sometimes they are only implicit in the arguments and yet profound. In the following, we will work out these claims in detail. In a nutshell, our argument unfolds in three steps:

First, we argue that the global governance literature and the empire literature use different lenses to observe the same object, namely world politics after the Cold War. As a result of these different lenses, the global governance literature identifies a diffusion of authority in world politics and thus a move from anarchy to heterarchy. The empire literature, in contrast, identifies a concentration of power and authority in the hands of the United States and thus a move from anarchy to hierarchy.

Second, we apply the global governance and empire perspectives in two ‘hard cases’ and thereby illustrate that it is indeed beneficial to use both lenses. Thus, even our analysis of the
U.S. war against Iraq – a war that is often seen as the strongest indication of the existence of a U.S.-led empire – may benefit from applying a global governance lens; and even our interpretations of the emerging world information order – an order that is most closely associated with ‘global governance’ and the dispersion of power and authority in world politics – can be further strengthened through applying an empire lens.

And third, we argue that world politics is in fact characterized by both, a concentration and a dispersion of power and authority. While military power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a single actor, authority in a broader sense is increasingly dispersed among a plethora of actors that populate the world of world politics. In short, it is not either global governance or empire, but rather concentration of power and diffusion of authority at the same time. If such a description is roughly correct, understanding the structures of world politics is only possible if we take the dual move from anarchy to heterarchy and hierarchy into account.

2 Global Governance: Approaching Heterarchy in World Politics?

The literature on global governance is fairly broad and includes analytical as well as programmatic writings (cf. Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006). For the purpose of this article, only the analytical strand of the global governance is of interest. In exploring this strand, we primarily focus on the writing of James Rosenau. The reasons for this selection are twofold. On the one hand, Rosenau’s work constitutes the clearest and most comprehensive expression of the ideas that drive the global governance debate. On the other hand, his work has left a strong imprint on other contributions to that debate.

2.1 Conceptualization of Authority

Rosenau defines authority as an actor’s capacity to induce voluntary compliance with its norms, rules and procedures (cf. Rosenau 2003: 273-314). Authority thus understood can be founded on hierarchical arrangements (command authority), on the delegated capacity to force compliance (bureaucratic authority), on expertise (epistemic authority), on moral standing (Rosenau 2006a: 117; see also Barnett and Finnemore 2004: ch. 2). Beyond these sources, Rosenau (1997: 41) stresses resource dependency as a basis for spheres of authority. As a result of changes in the demand and supply structures of the resources that are needed for effective governance – resources like political influence, legitimacy, money or knowledge – authority relations are increasingly organized in so-called policy networks (cf. Nölke 2004; see also Reinicke 1998).
2.2 Central Claims

In a nutshell, Rosenau’s writings on global governance revolve around the notion that world politics has undergone a profound transformation and that, as a consequence of that transformation, authority is nowadays widely dispersed in world politics. While the era before World War II was characterized by a balance of power induced by superpower rivalry, today’s world of world politics is less easily pigeonholed by reference to a single ordering principle, even though authors have tried to do so by calling it a polyarchy, a panarchy or – as Rosenau himself likes to call it – a system characterized by “fragemegrative” dynamics (Rosenau 2006a: 115). One reason why it is difficult to summarize the nature of contemporary global governance in a single phrase is that it is characterized by change in relation to all three “parameters of world politics” (Rosenau 1990: 10). Rosenau defines these parameters as follows:

The micro parameter consists of the orientations and skills by which citizens of states and members of nonstate organizations link themselves to the macro world of global politics. (...) The macro parameter (...) refers to the constraints embedded in the distribution of power among and within the collectivities of the global system. (...) The mixed parameter (...) focuses on the nature of the authority relations that prevail between individuals at the micro level and their macro collectivities. All three of these parameters are judged to be undergoing such a thoroughgoing transformation today as to bring about the first turbulence in world politics since comparable shifts culminated in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

For the purpose of this article, Rosenau’s macro parameter is most relevant. His core argument with regard to this parameter consists of three broad claims:

1. There has been a bifurcation of world politics into a “state-centric world” and a “multi-centric world”.

2. Given the nature of the “multi-centric world”, powerful states such as the U.S. may be able to dominate the “state-centric world”, but not the “multi-centric world”.

3. Instead, bifurcation results in a multiplication of spheres of authority.

The bifurcation of world politics. The first claim refers to Rosenau’s identification of two “worlds of world politics” – a system of states and their national governments (“state-centric world”) and “an equally powerful, though more decentralized” system in which other collective actors interact with each other across territorial boundaries (“multi-centric world”) (Rosenau 1990: 11). Even though they interact with each other, these two worlds are largely independent (ibid.; see also Rosenau 2006b: 41-43; 2006c: 181). For our analysis of world politics, the claim has a direct implication inasmuch as (Rosenau 2006a: 115)
states and governments should be posited not as first among equals, but simply as significant actors in a world marked by an increasing diffusion of authority and a corresponding diminution of hierarchy.

The structure of the multi-centric world. The second claim distinguishes the structure of the multi-centric world from the structure of the state-centric world (cf. Rosenau 1990: 243-296). In relation to the latter, Rosenau refers to Kenneth Waltz’s well-known conceptualization of structure as the composite of an ordering principle (i.e., anarchy), of the functional differentiation of the units that compose the international system (i.e., states as like units), and of the distribution of capabilities among the units (i.e., unipolarity, bipolarity or multipolarity).

The multi-centric world differs in relation to all three dimensions. First, the primary dilemma the actors are facing is an “autonomy dilemma” rather than a security dilemma. Thus, most of the collectivities whose activities constitute the multi-centric world need resources from other collectivities to pursue their own goals and thus guarantee their autonomy. At the same time the cooperation through which they acquire and exchange these resources poses a constant threat to this autonomy. The partial solution the multi-centric system offers for the autonomy dilemma is a norm of reciprocal acceptance (Rosenau 1990: 261):

In the multi-centric world, the main principle of the first structural dimension specified by Waltz – how the parts are ordered – is a mutual acceptance of the legitimacy of sovereignty-free actors. Thus equality comes to mark the structure of this world in the sense that its actors perceive each other as engaged in legitimate pursuits when they strive to procure external resources, preserve their internal integration, and thus maintain their autonomy. (…) The implicit legitimacy and equality of actors in the multi-centric world are the functional equivalent of sovereignty in the state-centric world.

Second, units pursue very different goals and functions: “All the units of the [state-centric world] have the same functions, whereas the functions of the [multi-centric world’s] units vary as widely as the interests of people” (Rosenau 1990: 265). As a result, different actors demand and supply very different resources and only share in common the very “necessity of maintaining mechanisms that procure external resources, resolve internal conflicts, frame policies, and otherwise attend to the needs and wants of their members or clientele” (Rosenau 1990: 265). In the maintenance of such mechanisms, the organizations that populate the multi-centric world may rely on a range of similar strategies and may, as a result, become more homogenous over time. But the fact that the units are functionally differentiated in the multi-centric world remains a key distinction from the state-centric world.

Third, the distribution of capabilities can only be analyzed in relation to specific spheres of activity, particular issue areas or particular resource types (Rosenau 1990: 269). Given the functional differentiation of units, a more general measure that determines the overall
distribution of capabilities in the multi-centric world would hardly make sense. In a way, the multi-centric world is thus radically multi-polar and effective domination by a single powerful actor is not only unlikely, but virtually precluded. To the extent that the multi-centric world is an equally relevant part of world politics as the state-centric world, concepts like hierarchy and hegemony are therefore largely misplaced in the analysis of world politics (Rosenau 1990: 269-270):

In such a decentralized system of actors with very different kinds of capabilities, there can be no hegemons nor functional equivalents of great powers, middle powers, or any other capability-assessed actors. (...) While the structure of the state-centric system can be efficiently portrayed in terms of superpowers, regional alliances, medium-sized states, and so on, a succinct structural account of the multi-centric world is virtually impossible.⁶

**Diffusion of authority.** In sum, the diffusion of authority in world politics largely results from the proliferation of “spheres of authority” (SOAs) in one particular world of world politics, namely the multi-centric world. Where this world becomes more relevant – that is, where “the state-centric world is no longer predominant” (Rosenau 1997: 64) – powerful states that may control the state-centric, but not the multi-centric world, lose some of their previously held powers. While Rosenau never argues that states have become or are becoming irrelevant, he does point to the erosion of state authority that results from “fragmegration” and the proliferation of SOAs (Rosenau 1997: 44). In short, world politics can no longer be described as anarchic – this term is correct only insofar as it points to the absence of central authority or hierarchy. Yet, beyond anarchy and hierarchy, there is a third option, namely heterarchy. According to global governance scholars, this third term provides a more adequate foundation for our attempts to describe and analyze contemporary world politics.

3 Empire: Elements of Hierarchy in International Relations?

Much of the literature on empire appears to be research on U.S. foreign policy only rather than research on evolving structures of international governance. This distinction is misleading, however. A closer look reveals that many authors who claim that the United States has, at least in some respect, become an imperial power, speak as much about global structures as they speak about the behavior of one specific state. Since the end of the Cold War the debate on the position of the U.S. in world politics has also been a debate about governance structures on a global scale. Unlike the global governance literature, most of the writings ascribing a hegemonic or even imperial role to the United States have firmly remained in the tradition of state-centric International Relations. The literature reasoning about the extent to which the U.S. has turned into an empire, which we shall henceforth refer to as the “empire literature”, is thus comparable to the global governance literature in that it asks, among other things, the same questions about global power structures and governance...
patterns after the end of the Cold War. The answers it offers to these questions are fundamentally different, though.

In light of the erosion of Soviet or Russian power after 1989/90, many observers saw the United States as the sole remaining superpower – a situation that created at least a “unipolar moment” (Krauthammer 1991) and was reflected in the expectation of lasting U.S. primacy in the Twenty-First Century (Nye 1990). Structural realists, to be sure, disagreed with the identification of the global structure as unipolar, or at least they expected that new powers would soon rise to balance the U.S. (Layne 1993; Waltz 1993). In the meantime, the continued economic and especially military primacy of the United States in the 1990s lent little empirical support to that position.

It was not before the United States responded to the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001, by launching a “war on terror” that the notion of “empire” began to figure prominently in the literature on the United States and global structures. The pertinent literature is rather diverse, ranging from historical comparisons of the United States with the Roman Empire to policy papers advocating or criticizing certain U.S. foreign policy decisions. Like with the global governance literature, we will restrict ourselves to analytical contributions, but unlike with the global governance literature, there is not one exemplary author we could focus on, so we will review the writings of authors such as Michael Cox, David Lake and Ronnie Lipschutz, but also moderate Realists like Stephen Walt and John Ikenberry. As diverse as the theoretical positions of these authors seem to be, they have much in common when it comes to global governance structures. They do see the United States in an exceptionally powerful position that facilitates hegemonic and even imperial policies. Still, we will see that there is some disagreement as to where the resistance to an imperial United States might come from.

3.1 Conceptualization of Authority and Power

The proponents of the empire thesis rarely use the term “authority”. Instead, they usually speak of “power”. Power is mostly seen in the sense of Max Weber or Robert Dahl, as the ability of an actor to make other actors do what they would not have done otherwise. This ability primarily rests on military and economic capabilities, which are always to be viewed in relation to the capabilities of other actors. Just like in Rosenau’s understanding of spheres of authority, resource dependency is a key element in structuring international relations (cf. Cox 2004: 602).

It must be stressed that power in this sense does not have to be coercive. To some extent, it rests on asymmetric economic interdependence that enables the U.S. to make other states comply with U.S. demands without having to threaten or even force these countries to do so. Lipschutz (2002) even employs the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, which alludes to a discursively based understanding of rule. Here, rule may be maintained mostly by defining
what is to be seen as normal, accompanied by surveillance and the occasional display of coercive power, whereas its actual exercise can remain the exception.

An explicit link between authority and power (and empire) is made by David Lake. He defines authority as rightful rule and views it as a special yet important form of power that was sometimes overlooked by International Relations scholars. “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” (Lake 2008: 282). In Lake’s point of view, this may even imply the right of the dominant state to enforce its command in case of non-compliance.

Taken together, it is clear that the understanding of the concept of power and authority prevalent in the empire literature, while not identical with the understanding of authority in the global governance literature, displays enough commonalities to allow for a comparison of central claims advanced in both strands of literature. “Authority” puts a slightly greater emphasis on the voluntary compliance of those who are exposed to it than the notion of “power”. Rosenau’s “authority” is non-coercive, whereas “power” as used by the proponents of the empire thesis includes both coercive and non-coercive relations, and even authority may comprise a notion of coercion in the understanding of the empire literature. For most of the empire literature, more rooted in mainstream International Relations than the global governance literature\(^7\), there is no bifurcation in world politics and thus only a state-centric world and no multi-centric world. From that perspective, it makes more sense to speak of power rather than of authority. Nevertheless, both concepts overlap substantially, so we can juxtapose and compare the claims these two strands of literature make on authority and power in world politics since the end of the Cold War.

### 3.2 Central Claims

The starting point for the empire literature is the observation of a shift in the distribution of power after the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the sudden economic problems of Japan greatly weakened both the biggest military and ideological opponent and the strongest economic competitor of the United States. These developments made another American century possible (Cox 2005: 17). In contrast to the expectation of U.S. decline that dominated much of the debates in the late 1980s (Kennedy 1987), many authors agree that since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been in a position of unrivalled primacy. This primacy is rooted in both military and economic strength. For instance, Michael Cox (2004: 602) notes on U.S. economic power:

\[\text{[B]y mere virtue of its ability to regulate the sources and supply routes of the vital energy and raw material needs of even its most successful economic competitors, the US quite literally holds the fate of the world in its hands. This not only makes}\]

\[\text{\ldots}\]
the world dependent on the United States but means the US really is the key state upon which the fate of the other states depends.

Similarly, Stephen Walt speaks of a “vast concentration of power in American hands” (Walt 2005: 17), and Ronnie Lipschutz notes that the United States does not have to rely on multilateral policies anymore, as it is “so much more powerful than anyone else” (Lipschutz 2002: 226).

Also, this literature apparently views states still as the primary loci of power in world politics. It pays little attention to non-state actors. Lipschutz admittedly stresses that in the 1990s, order in a globalizing world was mainly maintained by self-regulation, where private actors as well as international institutions play an important role (Lipschutz 2002: 220-221). He also points out, however, that the Bush administration, opting for more direct control, was able to change such a system of governance and introduce a form of rule that relied more on the display and use of military force. Implicit in his argument is the position that the most powerful state shapes global governance structures more than being constrained by them.

The exceptionally strong power position of the United States made an imperial turn possible, but it took the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001 to actually bring about such a turn (Cox 2004: 589). Lipschutz (2002: 223) puts it this way:

Imperium was immanent in neo-liberal globalization, but its manifestation was not an inevitable corollary. The structural preconditions for Imperium have been in place for some time (...). A social and cognitive crisis was required to instantiate these immanent structures, and that was provided by the attacks on New York and Washington.

But what constitutes an empire? The terms “empire” and “imperial” are defined and used differently in the literature (cf. Ferguson 2008; Ferguson/Mansbach 2008). The main question is whether imperial orders are more extreme forms of unipolar or hegemonic orders or whether they are categorically different from such orders. Alexander Motyl defines empires as “structurally centralized political systems within which core states and elites dominate peripheral societies” (Motyl 1999: 126). An empire thus establishes and operates under a different structural logic than both a territorial state and a group of formally equal states. Similarly, Herfried Münkler distinguishes empires from hegemonic structures: hegemony is the dominance of one state within a group of formally equal states, whereas empire dissolves such equality and reduces the weaker states to satellites (Münkler 2005: 16-21). Daniel Nexon and Thomas Wright (2007) develop this idea further by distinguishing four ideal types of political organization, two of which are hegemonic order and imperial order (and the other two being unipolar anarchy and constitutional order). From their point of view, empires are not just characterized by a strong asymmetry between the core power and the peripheral minor powers, but also by a lack of exchange between the different minor powers. The empire governs through ‘Divide and Rule’, and there is no opposition to the asymmetric exchanges
between the core and the peripheral units. Due to the lack of political and economic relations between the different peripheral units, balancing against the core power is nearly impossible. The central argument is thus that an imperial order not only rests on an extremely unequal distribution of capabilities in an otherwise anarchic system, but that the structuring principle of anarchy has largely been replaced by hierarchy. Empire in this understanding is a relational concept with a structural element that goes beyond the mere distribution of capabilities.

If we take this understanding of empire and apply it to the case of the United States since the end of the Cold War, it is obvious that there cannot be much of an empire here. To assume that in a globalizing world, weaker states and regions would have little exchange among each other and mostly communicate and trade with the United States, hardly makes sense. It comes as no surprise that those participants in the empire debate who propagate such a more demanding and more structural understanding of “empire”, have usually dismissed the thesis of the U.S. having adopted an imperial role (Ferguson 2008; Nexon 2008; Nexon/Wight 2007).

David Lake proposes a slightly different understanding. He takes empire to be an authority relationship of dominance and subordination that is accepted by both the dominant state as well as the subordinate polity. This relationship is very unequal so that it is better characterized by the concept of hierarchy than by the concept of anarchy. Hierarchical relationships among states in the international system may exist both in the economic as well as in the security realm. Lake suggests that we should speak of an empire only if both security and economic relations between two polities display a sufficient level of hierarchy (Lake 2008: 282-284). It follows from this position that it makes limited sense to only ask if the United States is an empire. Some of its relations may be so hierarchical that the use of the term “empire” is warranted, whereas others may be less hierarchical. The difference between anarchy and hierarchy is a difference in degrees and not in kinds. Without openly contradicting authors who view empire to be categorically different from non-imperial orders, Lake nevertheless shows how empire can fruitfully be understood as a more extreme form of an unequal relationship. At the same time, he concurs with scholars like Daniel Nexon in empire being a relational concept. It is authority relationships that constitute empire and not the simple (unequal) distribution of capabilities.

Since empire is a relational and to some extent structural concept, it is important to distinguish imperial orders (or the degree to which global order has imperial features) from imperial policies a single state like the United States may pursue. None of the authors reviewed here embraces structural determinism. The U.S. quest for empire was not inevitable from this perspective. It has been made possible by the concentration of power in the hands of the United States after the end of the Cold War. At first, though, in the Clinton era, the United States continued its grand strategy that included the building and maintenance of international institutions and sought to advance economic globalization without too much overt use of
coercion. While there was a growing tendency toward unilateralism already in the 1990s, the imperial turn only fully materialized after the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001. Thus, imperial foreign policy should not be conflated with empire as a relational and structural feature of world politics.

Nevertheless, if the United States has in fact made use of its unrivalled power to organize many of its relationships in a more imperial fashion, this obviously would have important repercussions on a structural level, too. The proponents of the empire thesis are not in full accordance as to how structural the U.S. imperial turn has become and how sustainable it will likely be. Two lines of thought can be distinguished here.

The first group consists of moderate realists who have identified (and criticized) U.S. imperial ambitions. These authors are rather sceptical that such policies could be sustained in the long run, since structural impediments and counter-balancing efforts by other states would prevent a lasting change of global structures toward hierarchy (Ikenberry 2002; see also Walt 2005). From this perspective, it is not likely that there will be a transformation of world politics. The challenge to U.S. empire will come from the inter-state system, so that the analysis can remain within the states-under-anarchy proposition that has dominated mainstream IR thinking for decades.

The second group agrees that viewing today’s United States as an empire is an unwarranted oversimplification, but they see element of hierarchical rule penetrating international politics. David Lake, for instance, has long since called for paying greater attention to hierarchical relationships. Even if the U.S. is not “an empire” today and not even an informal empire in some of its relations with other states, it still shapes world politics in a way towards more hierarchy at least in some respects. Daniel Nexon even openly questions the usefulness of the states-under-anarchy proposition. He speaks of the “micropolitics of international hierarchy” (Nexon 2008: 305-307, not only with regard to the United States, but also with regard to some of the relationships including states like Russia and China.

In consequence, from the perspective of the literature reviewed here, world politics has become more complex, and the anarchy assumption has become less useful to explain and understand world politics. In this respect, the literature is in accordance with the global governance literature. The important difference is, however, that scholars reasoning about the concept of “empire” see, at least in some respects, a concentration and not a diffusion of authority. Consequently, world politics is marked by a move from anarchy to hierarchy rather than by a move from anarchy to heterarchy.

4 Empire v Global Governance: Monologues or Dialogue?

As we have seen, both bodies of literature at least partially address the same problem, namely the changing contours of global power and authority structures after the Cold War. In the
following section, we examine how the two debates interact. In doing so, we focus on how global governance scholars respond to the challenge from the empire literature (section 4.1) and vice versa (section 4.2), and how authors that are less easily assigned to one of the camps have dealt with the competing claims of the two literatures (section 4.3).

4.1 Illusions of Empire: James Rosenau’s Engagement with the Empire Literature

James Rosenau directly engages with the empire argument in an article entitled *Illusions of Power and Empire* (Rosenau 2005). In line with his views we have already discussed in section 2, the central argument of his article is that as a result of the “fragmegration” of world politics, there can be no empire. In short, he maintains that empire may have been a useful category to describe, understand and explain political behavior in earlier epochs. Yet its relevance is now “negligible” because “processes of disaggregating authority are likely to prevent imperial reach from occurring” (ibid.: 75).⁹

Empires, he argues, have become highly improbable as a result of the several factors, two of which are particularly central. First, the fast and revolutionary evolution of *microelectronic technologies* has facilitated the growth and proliferation of social networks and the diminution of hierarchy. In the view of Rosenau, “the depletion of [channels of command] and the continuous proliferation of networks militates against the rise of future empires” (ibid.: 78). And second, the *skill revolution* has led to informed and more active citizens that are less easily controlled by central governments or any other collective actors.¹⁰ The result is enhanced engagement in collective action “from below” and an *organizational explosion* that lends further strength to heterarchical rather than hierarchical structures. These trends – and the resulting bifurcation of the global system – make it “difficult for an aspiring empire to consolidate its authority” and “further [lessen] the likelihood that an empire can arise as the dominant actor on the global stage” (ibid.: 79 and 80).¹¹ In sum, Rosenau (ibid.: 81-82) argues that

People are too skillful and wise, organizations are too plentiful, and global structures are too disaggregated for power to be concentrated in the way that empires require. (…) Taken together, the several sources of fragmegration can readily be interpreted as the foundations of a solid, even impenetrable, barrier to the emergence or maintenance of political structures expressive of empires. In an increasingly disaggregated world, the possibility of power being concentrated to the extent required by the imperial form seems highly unlikely.

Yet if evidence clearly points to “fragmegration” rather than “empire”, the question remains why there is such a strong belief that the modern world is dominated by a US-led Empire. Rosenau provides two answers to this question. First, he argues, analysts lay their observations on the premise that world politics is hierarchical and disregard that hierarchy has been displaced by a “new global system rooted in the disaggregation of
authority, the weakening of states, and a distribution of power in which neither a single
country nor a coalition of them prevails” (ibid.: 82). Second, analysts misconceive power
as possessional rather than relational. As a result of this misconception, many observers
are blinded by the “unparalleled military capabilities possessed by the United States to
the point where they generalize beyond those capabilities and ascribe relational
consequences to them” without realizing that the actual power depends on how the
targets respond to these capabilities (ibid.: 84). For Rosenau, the U.S. scores high on
possessional, but not necessarily on relational aspects of power. When analysts overlook
the latter, they exaggerate the overall power of the U.S. in world politics and use the
empire lens to simplify otherwise complex sets of phenomena (ibid.: 84). Only through
looking at the relational side of power and authority, we are able to see the fundamentals
of world political change. As interdependence theory has argued before, physical coercion
and its threat still constitute important political instruments. Yet their applicability has
been diminished as a result of the dynamics Rosenau puts at the centre of his own
account of world politics after 1990 (Rosenau 1997: 64):

Where raw elements of power – armies, nuclear weapons, oil deposits, etc. – were
once the major terms of the equation, now their values have declined relative to
such complex terms as societal cohesion, the capacity to draft soldiers,
decisiveness in policy-making, and the many other components of a country’s
ability to surmount authority crises and avoid paralyzing political stalemates.

The reluctance of the American people to play an active role in the processes of global
governance is therefore as much an impediment to imperial politics as is the reluctance of the
targets of imperial politics to simply obey the commands from the world’s only superpower
and the proliferation of spheres of authority in the multi-centric world (Rosenau 2006c: 157).
Rosenau (1997: 65) names only one issue area, nuclear proliferation, in which “the outlines of
hierarchy are unequivocal”. Other areas like environmental, health, monetary or migration
politics, the combat of drug trafficking, terrorism or crime, or the governance of human rights
and humanitarian emergencies are characterized by the “crazy-quilt” nature of contemporary

4.2 Does the Empire Strike Back? Responses to Global Governance Talk

Overall, the literature supporting the notion of a concentration of power in the hands of the
United States takes scant notice of the opposing claim to be found in the global governance
literature. Most of the authors working on empire take a distinctively state-centered approach.
Moderate realists like Stephen Walt and John Ikenberry, who see imperial tendencies in U.S.
foreign policy but are doubtful that an imperial role could be sustained in the longer run, think
that other nation-states or alliances of states will be the counter forces. In their point of view,
apparently it is the logic of anarchy rather than the heterarchy of some multi-centric world that prevents a hierarchical order in world politics. Some authors admit that globalization puts additional strains on a single state’s capacity to control international relations (Cox 2004: 602), but the notion of a fundamental change in global structures or of a diffusion of authority is rarely, if ever, mentioned, let alone discussed in this body of literature.

The only contribution that comes to mind when thinking about how proponents of U.S. preponderance argue with the notion of global governance is an article by John Bolton entitled “Should We Take Global Governance Seriously?” (Bolton 2000). Bolton, however, takes global governance not as an analytical but as a normative concept. To his mind, it is the buzz word of a rather elitist group of “Globalists” that quarrel with another group he associates himself with and calls “Americanists” about the right course of U.S. global policies. The Globalists opt for moving decision-making power from states to international institutions and NGO, thereby infringing on national sovereignty and eschewing democratic legitimacy, whereas the Americanists, despised by globalist elites from academia and the media but in accordance with the will of ordinary American citizens, oppose such proposals. Bolton answers the question of whether global governance should be taken seriously affirmatively, since Globalists had been networking and advancing their agenda quite effectively, gaining much support internationally, such as from the United Nations or from the European Union. He calls for resisting such “kind of worldwide cartelization of governments and interest groups” (Bolton 2000: 221). In effect, he perceives “global governance” solely as the campaign slogan of a transnational lobby group and completely ignores any analytical aspect associated with the concept. For this reason, his contribution is of little relevance for our discussion on global authority patterns.

Consequently, it is fair to say that while the global governance literature takes on and discusses the notion of empire and a concentration of power and authority, the same cannot be said vice-versa.

4.3 A Bit of Everything: World Politics as a Mix of Anarchy, Hierarchy and Heterarchy

Finally, some contributions cover a middle ground between hierarchical and heterarchical conceptions of world politics post-1990. In a first contribution, Michael Zürn argues that, although the global governance and empire literatures diverge on many aspects of their interpretations of world politics after 1990, both can invoke real-world developments that lend support to their perspectives. What is lacking, however, is a conceptual perspective that is capable of integration key insights from both camps. Zürn’s own effort at developing such a conceptual perspective builds on the notion of an institutionalized inequality. While it is true that international norms increasingly shape, enable and constrain the behavior of states, Zürn argues, it is equally true that states’ contribution to the development of these norms varies
greatly and that the norms themselves do not apply to all states in the same manner. In the end, the legalization of world politics – which, for Zürn, is the most central aspect of ‘global governance’ – thus does not lead to an international rule of law properly understood, but rather to a “legally stratified multi-level system”.¹²

This conception of a legally stratified multi-level system combines insights from both the global governance and the empire literature. On the one hand, it acknowledges the institutionalization and legalization of world politics. On the other hand, it acknowledges the highly unequal power of those who create and are governed by international norms and the particular role of U.S. power as it is evident in the international nuclear order, in international negotiations to the International Criminal Court (ICC), or in the decision-making rules of a law-making body such as the UN Security Council or of international organisations such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in which “different rights are formally ascribed to states” (ibid.: 694).¹³

Andrew Hurrell provides a second position that seeks the middle ground between the empire and global governance literatures. His monograph *On Global Order* includes a chapter on “complex governance beyond the state” (Hurrell 2007: 95-117) and a chapter on the empire perspective (ibid.: 262-286). In the first of these chapters, Hurrell provides a fairly standard narrative of global governance as the sum of inter-state governance, civil society governance and market governance. When it comes to discussing the role of power in “complex governance beyond the state”, Hurrell’s position is only thinly elaborated, but nevertheless shows how hierarchy might play a role within an otherwise heterarchical setting (Hurrell 2007: 112):

There is very little reason for believing that all states are able to operate effectively within the sorts of networks discussed in this chapter. The extent of the relevant expertise and resources possessed by the United States increases the likelihood that its norms, values, and preferences will win out.

His general position in the second of the two chapters is that the position of the U.S. is unprecedented in terms of military and economic power, but that it is often incapable of using its overwhelming power as a result of changes in the structures or foundations of the international system. In line with some of the empire literature and with Michael Zürn’s interpretation, Hurrell (ibid.: 269) acknowledges the role of U.S. power in contemporary world politics, but sees it as operating within rather outside of the boundaries of international institutions:

A great deal of US power is exercised through the changing legal and normative structure of international society – through US influence on core norms (e.g. those relating to the use of force or to the changing character of sovereignty); through US influence on regimes and institutions that it often chooses not to join; through its capacity to influence choices between market and political modes of
governance; and through its cultivation of alternative modes of governance (e.g. the expansion of regulatory networks, or the externalization of its own domestic law).

Moreover, Hurrell – this time in line with Rosenau – distinguishes between coercive power on the one hand and authority on the other (ibid.: 269):

Viewing power in purely coercive and material terms rests on a very narrow and essentially unhelpful understanding of power. To understand power in international relations, we must see it as a social relationship and place it side by side with other quintessentially social concepts such as prestige, authority, and legitimacy. A great deal of the struggle for political power is the quest for authoritative and legitimate control that avoids costly and dangerous reliance on brute force and coercion.

In contrast to the U.S., other actors in world politics may thus not have the capacity to coerce other actors to follow a particular course of action, but they may have the authority to devise norms and rules that guide other actors’ behavior or be able to conditionally offer resources required by other actors and hence be able to shape the latters’ conduct. In turn, the coercive power of the U.S. faces limitations where its authority is questioned and where the norms of international society demand a course of action that differs from U.S. foreign policy preferences (ibid.: 263).

In sum, these mediating positions point to the possibility that we may not so much be facing an either-or question, but instead be witnessing moves towards hierarchy (or empire) and heterarchy (global governance) at the same time. To further explore this possibility, the following section applies both lenses to ‘hard cases’: It looks at the U.S. war against Iraq through a global governance lens, and at the Internet regulation through an empire lens. As we will see, both illustrations lend support to the assumption of a simultaneous shift from anarchy to hierarchy and heterarchy.

5 Seeing the World through Each Others’ Lenses: The US War against Iraq and the World Information Order

5.1 Global Security Governance? The U.S. War on Terror seen Through a Global Governance Lens

With the attacks of 9/11, the debate about the American empire gained momentum. Not only did the U.S. have the capacities to act in a decisive way, but there was also the need to respond to the imminent terrorist threat (Cox 2004: 589). The combination of American unipolar power and terrorism led, in the eyes of many observers, to an ‘imperial turn’ in American foreign policy that culminated in the Iraq intervention in 2003. Central to the neo-
The U.S. intervention in Iraq is often seen as the prime example supporting the notion of an imperial turn in U.S. policy (see for instance Cox 2004; Kagan 2004; Leaman 2004; Patnam 2006). Iraq was invaded without the approval of the UN facing a huge international opposition. This prompts Lipschutz to depict the U.S. intervention as a “coup against the UN Republic” (Lipschutz 2002: 11). To conduct a controversial intervention that was neither authorized by the UN Security Council nor at least legitimized by another institution such as NATO seemed to give good reason for the notion of an American empire.

These findings leave the impression that the thesis of diffusion of authority in the international system can hardly brought in accordance with U.S. policies and patterns of interaction in this case. But looking at the Iraq case through a global governance lens might bring unattended insights. This refers (1) to the origins of the conflict and (2) to the interaction of the U.S. with other actors, both internationally and internally. Admittedly, such an analysis will not turn the Iraq War into a model case of global governance, but it will show that a global governance lens helps to understand some aspects of this case.

(1) With regard to the origins of the conflict that resulted in the U.S. “War on Terror” and enabled the U.S. to launch the Iraq War, proponents of a global governance perspective point out that the threat of Islamic terrorism emanates not from the state-centric world but from the multi-centric world (Crenshaw/Cusimano Love 2007). While Al Qaida was backed by a state, the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, it is a terrorist network that is in essence both non-state and transnational. Thus, the conflict underlying this case cannot be grasped from a state-centric view. Ironically, that is, in some sense, what the Bush administration attempted to do. At first, it primarily attacked Al Qaida’s state base in Afghanistan, and after the toppling of the Taliban regime, soon turned much of its attention from Al Qaida to Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Thus, under the rubric of the “War on Terror”, the Bush administration replaced a foe from the multi-centric world by one that could be dealt with like a conventional threat from the state-centric world. Obviously, this does not attest to the Bush administration perceiving the matter from a global governance perspective – quite the contrary, in fact. If the distinction between a state-centric and a multi-centric world is meaningful, however, such an analysis would point at some basic inadequacies of U.S. policies, at least with respect to combating Islamic terrorism.

(2) But a global governance perspective also sheds light on some aspects of U.S. interaction with other actors. From this perspective, the case shows that the U.S. only has a preponderance of coercive power but limited authority. This fact has shaped and constrained U.S. policy to a greater extent than is sometimes admitted. There is quite some functional
differentiation between the U.S. and other actors, be it states, international institutions or non-state actors. The U.S. did seek the support and approval of these actors, even if it finally intervened in Iraq without much of it. None of these factors evidently kept the Bush administration from going to war, but they significantly affected both the political costs of doing so and the way the U.S. has acted in this conflict.

Instead of portraying the global system as anarchic and states as identical in their functions, global governance assumes a diffusion of authority which generates a form of functional differentiation on the international level. Waning capacities of single states means on the one hand that non-state actors and international institutions take charge of some issues. On the other hand, functional differentiation among states means that different states deal with specific problems. In the Iraq case, this view points at how participating countries share arising tasks. Participant countries contributed to the invasion according to their functional capability (Krahmann 2005). While the U.S. certainly led and carried out the greatest share of the operation, it did not have the capability to do it all alone. Other countries took responsibilities for minor affairs: the U.S., the UK, Australia and Poland sent troops in the major combat phase. The military contribution might have been quite limited, but the participation of these countries was important for political reasons, as it allowed the U.S. to speak of a coalition that was backing its course. Further countries gave humanitarian assistance or provided training possibilities in the following phase. But especially the aftermath of the Iraq invasion created competence needs. In a multinational effort to rebuild Iraq, also countries that were not supporting the war helped reconstructing the country. Germany for example committed funding, personnel, and facilities for the training of Iraqi security forces (Blanchard/Dale 2007: 3-10). In short, while the US was rather focusing on enforcement action, other countries, especially European ones, were focusing on peacekeeping or state-building actions. The acknowledgment of the distinctness of countries lets us understand variation in the arrangement of duties.

Another issue that is brought up by proponents of global governance is the rising role of international institutions. Albeit it is often argued that international organizations were not a decisive factor in the Iraq case, they did have an influence. Opposing states sought to confine U.S. power using intergovernmental institutions – namely the UN Security Council, the EU and NATO. France and Germany counterbalanced U.S. supremacy by blocking NATO’s involvement in the war and by using the EU as a “forum for mobilizing the anti-war coalition” (Paul 2005: 67). But the most important international organization is the UN, since it is the international mechanism for the governance of war and peace. The use of force without a UN mandate seems to prove the insignificance of this institution. But a closer look reveals that it did play a role.

In his speeches, President George W. Bush did use unilateralist rhetoric, implying that the US was not depending on UN approval, but that the UN had a last possibility to prove its
relevance (Bush, February 9th, 2003). But in the management of the Iraq affair, Bush was actually very much directed at the United Nations (Johnstone 2004: 834). One of the proclaimed reasons for intervening in Iraq was its non-compliance with previous UN resolutions. To ensure the disarmament of Iraq, Bush initially did seek approval by the Security Council: During the diplomatic battle in autumn and winter 2002/03 the United Nations were the “principal forum for crisis management and, at the same time, a political and legal constraint imposing itself on the Americans” (Tardy 2007: 65). These attempts attest to a central role of the Security Council and “the acknowledgement by the United States of the powers invested in it” (Tardy 2007: 65).

When it became clear that the second resolution would not pass the Security Council, Bush decided to go to war without UN approval. The disregard of the institution seems to testify to a new impediment of the United Nations and evinces “the intrinsic limits of the UN as a constraint on states and as a legitimizing body” (Tardy 2007: 65). But it can also be argued that the UN “has even gained in regard and influence” (Habermas 2003: 708): Its refusal to legitimize the armed action imposed by the US and regarded as not justifiable might strengthen the position of the UN. The years after the intervention seem to substantiate the importance of the international institution: the U.S. has asked for several resolutions incorporating the United Nations in the reconstruction of Iraq (Johnstone 2004: 835-836). In short, the U.S. action was influenced by international organizations, even though it was conducted rather unilaterally.

Another important aspect of proponents of global governance is the role of non-state actors. If we look at the Iraq invasion from that point of view, we see the largest anti-war movement and new founded anti-war organizations. According to estimates, between 3 January and 12 April, 2003, about 36 million people took part in world wide protest against the Iraq war (Callinicos 2005). We hear notions of “two superpowers: the United States and the world public opinion” (Tyler 2003). But the U.S. administration did not respond to global public criticism even though a closer provision for the European public for that matter could have triggered broader support for the intervention (Jäger 2008: 30). For the U.S., the domestic public was then the most important basing point for the decision of the U.S. administration to go to war. Support in the polls allowed Bush to ignore large public protests against his policy (Foyle 2004: 289-290). The events of 11 September, 2001 bred an atmosphere in which the American public was very responsive for the governmental arguments favouring an intervention (Jäger 2008: 21-22). This analysis shows that there was a global movement against the war, which did strengthen the decision of some governments such as Canada to oppose the war. It did not affect the U.S. decision, since the administration rather relied on national support. But it is very plausible to contend that it did affect the costs of going to war.

Finally, the U.S. not only sought and to some extend relied on the support of other states, international institutions and non-state actors. It also at least partially handled the war
internally in a way that comes as no surprise from a global governance lens. The Bush administration has heavily relied on private security firms, such as Blackwater and others. While this was probably done in order to eschew democratic control of how the war and the occupation of Iraq have been carried out, it still means that the number one military power in the world outsourced some key elements of state policy to private actors.

In conclusion, analyzing the Iraq case through a Global Governance lens means to acknowledge various different actors in world politics. The analysis clearly shows that neither international institutions nor the public opinion was able to change the American decision. But this does not mean that these instances should be neglected. Patterns of authority are much more complex in the Iraq case than is often acknowledged, and it seems that while the Bush administration would certainly have been the last to acknowledge these complexities, it did pay some attention to them – albeit possibly less than it should have.

5.2 An Imperial World Information Order?

Internet governance is probably the issue area that is most often and most strongly associated with a global governance perspective (see e.g. Baird 2002; Bendrath et al. 2008; Dany 2008; Hollitscher 1999; Klein 2002). In contrast to war and peace, world trade or environmental issues, the Internet is not regulated by an intergovernmental agency, but – at least partially – by a private organization called the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in which governments have merely consultative status. Moreover, standards for assigning domain names, regulating privacy and governing e-commerce are developed by a host of public and private organizations, including the Internet Society (ISOC), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and many others. And finally, the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) that was set-up by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2004 (and has subsequently been replaced by the Internet Government Forum, IGF\textsuperscript{15}) reiterates the multi-stakeholder nature of Internet governance when it defines the latter as (WGIG 2005: §10)

\begin{quote}
the development and application by Governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.
\end{quote}

So what, if anything, would we see when we look at Internet regulation through an imperial lens? Here, three things come to mind: (1) the historical role of the U.S. in developing the Internet and its governance; (2) U.S. control over the technical infrastructure of the Internet; and (3) the successful obstruction of the U.S. of any move towards a more intergovernmental regulation of the Internet.
The historical role of the U.S. in developing Internet governance. As to the first of these arguments, the historical role of the U.S. in developing the Internet and its governance is certainly exceptional. When the Internet was still a small research network in the early 1970s, the Internet names system consisted of one only file, namely the “hosts.txt” file. In response to the growth of the web, Jon Postel, a researcher at the University of Southern California’s Information Science Institute (ISI), further developed the file in the context of a research project at the. The outcome of his project were the so-called domain name system (DNS) that still serves as the basis for the Internet as we know it, and the first top-level domains “.com”, “.net” and “.edu” (Goldsmith/Wu 2006: 33). Since the mid-1980s, the domain name system was fully operational, and 1988 the ISI established a first legal contract with the US government. The contract assigned responsibility for assigned domain names and numbers to the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) – which in the beginning consisted of only one person, namely Jon Postel – and left the responsibility for the domain name system with the ISI.

In the early 1990s, the U.S. government re-issued an invitation to tender, and a private firm called Network Solutions Inc. (NSI) became the registrar for the top-level domains “.org”, “.net”, and “.com” and the administrating agent for the root system (ibid.). For the first time, a profit-oriented firm thus administered relevant areas of the Internet, although it continued to do so under the auspices of the U.S. government. On the other hand, control over the assignment of country-code top-level domains – that is, endings like “.it” for Italy, “.uk” for the United Kingdom, or “dk” for Denmark – rested with the IANA. The rules for the assignment of these domains were initially laid down in a so-called Request for Comments (RFC) by the IANA.16

In relation to the history of Internet governance, an imperialist reading could thus point to the exceptional role of the U.S. government in the development of both the technical architecture and the regulatory infrastructure of the Internet. Once scientists had, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Defense, established the basic conditions for a network to which computers could be connected independently, the U.S. government quickly supported and supervised the further development of the technology. Through contracts with NSI, the ISI and the IANA, it ensured a legal basis for its oversight and established an essentially U.S.-driven regime for world-wide Internet governance that some have poignantly termed “global self-regulation in the context of American administrative law” (Leib 2002: 262).

U.S. control over the technical infrastructure of the Internet. A second argument from an imperial perspective could point to the legal and factual control that the U.S. government still exercises over the technical infrastructure of the Internet. Thus, even though the U.S. government is not formally represented in the board of ICANN, it has –in contrast to all other governments – four legal contracts with that organization. A first contract regulates the relation of ICANN to the U.S. government and clarifies that the U.S. government claims
political authority over ICANN as long as the conditions for a truly independent structure are not yet in place. The other three contracts regulate a joint research project that seeks to improve the technical infrastructure of the Internet; a so-called purchase order in which the functions of the IANA are delegated to ICANN; and an agreement over trademark rights. Finally, a fifth contract regulates the relation between VeriSign Inc. – the company that administers the “A Root Server” and the registries .com and .net – and ICANN.

Theoretically, the U.S. government thus has the power to control the Internet. In contrast to any other state, it can turn off or modify the “A Root Server” or block individual top-level domains. If the U.S. government, for instance, decided that websites hosted on the country-code top-level domain „.ir“ for Iran should no longer be reached, they could remove them from the A Root Server. Practically, such a decision would however face severe limitations. First, since the A Root Server is mirrored on twelve other servers that are not all under the control of the U.S. government, the ‘ban’ would only affect those websites created after the decision to remove “.ir” from the A Root Server. Second, other states could establish an alternative technical infrastructure relatively easily. And third, any such decision would have to be based on raw power rather than authority and would thus be likely to incur significant costs.

So far, the U.S. has nevertheless been able to fend off the development of an independent Internet architecture. The biggest threat to U.S. control thus far came from the inventor of the domain name system, Jon Postel, who in 1998 linked eight of the twelve root servers to his own server and thereby established something akin to a “second Internet” outside of U.S. control. As John Magaziner, at that time in charge of Internet governance on behalf of the Clinton administration, recalls, it was however fairly easy to stop this attempt on the basis of the legal contracts that had already been established. Postel, who had called his attempt to establish an independent Internet “a test”, was reminded that he did not have the legal right to conduct such a test without the approval of the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA’s), the research and development office for the U.S. Department of Defense. When both Postel and his employer, the University of San Francisco, were threatened with liability claims, Postel stopped his “test” immediately (Goldsmith/Wu 2006: 43-46).

U.S. obstruction for a stronger role of the United Nations. Third, an imperial perspective on Internet governance could point to the obstruction of the U.S. of any move towards a more intergovernmental regulation of the Internet. In the context of the negotiations at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva and Tunis, the U.S. managed to secure that the status quo of Internet governance was not altered. The U.S. government sought to keep ICANN free from any governmental control – except its own control that it had established in the course of the development of the Internet – and obstructed any delegation of elements of Internet governance to the UN or other intergovernmental agencies.
As these attempts were largely successful – the multilateral Internet Governance Forum (IGF) set up in 2005 seems to have remained more of a talk shop and less of a governance forum thus far – Internet governance does not necessarily pose a challenge for the empire literature. Rather than seeing Internet governance as a crazy-quilt in which a plethora of formal and informal organizations from the “multi-centric world” have established their own little spheres of authority on issues such as domain names, technical standards, e-commerce, privacy and other aspects of Internet regulation, empire scholars could very much claim that the U.S. has thus far managed to secure an exceptional role in the world information order that mirrors its role on world politics at large. Internet governance, on this reading, would neither be as anarchic as conventional IR theorists might wish to hold, nor as heterarchic as the global governance literature might all too frequently suggests. Instead, Internet governance, just like the governance of most other substantive areas of world politics, displays characteristics of a hierarchic order that is dominated by the U.S. as the most powerful actor in the world political system. At the very least, the empire lens thus helps us to identify those elements in the governance of the World Wide Web and its technology that are closely associated with the notion of hierarchy.

6 From Anarchy to Hierarchy and Heterarchy: Conclusions

Since the end of the Cold War, IR scholarship has increasingly challenged the notion that anarchy is the foundation of all international politics. The global governance literature and the empire literature have been at the forefront of these challenges. While the former identifies a move from anarchy to heterarchy, the latter argues that anarchy is giving way to hierarchy. In the context of this debate, we have essentially made three arguments in this article.

First, the global governance literature and the empire literature are indeed observing the same object, namely world politics after the Cold War, but they do so through different lenses. This is admittedly a fairly trivial statement, but it is nevertheless a fact that is often overlooked. And it is the acknowledgement that both literatures share a common ground that allows us to exploit their full benefits. Our illustrative applications of the global governance and empire perspectives thus illustrate – and this is our second point – that we may benefit from applying both lenses to individual cases. Thus, even though our analysis of the emerging world information order will be incomplete without taking the “diffusion of authority” into account, our illustration shows that our understanding of this order can be significantly strengthened through applying an empire lens. And even though we will hardly be able to understand the U.S. war against Iraq on the basis of a “global governance lens” alone, our illustration demonstrates that using this lens can help us to gain a better understanding of that war. The reason why both lenses are helpful – and this is our third point – is that shifts to hierarchy and heterarchy seem to be happening simultaneously. While one lens is better at capturing hierarchy, the other is better at capturing heterarchy. To the extent that both shifts exist – and
our illustrations lend some plausibility to this assumption – it will be most useful to use both lenses.

The acknowledgement that we are witnessing simultaneous shifts from anarchy to both hierarchy and heterarchy has implications for our research agenda in IR. First, it points to the need for better and more systematic mapping of the relative weights of anarchy, heterarchy and hierarchy in different areas of world politics. And second, it points to the need to account for the variation that we will most likely find as a result of this mapping exercise. And finally, acknowledging the co-existence of hierarchy and heterarchy as a core element of contemporary world politics has also practical and normative implications inasmuch as most of our disciplinary thinking and the policy advice that is frequently based on such thinking is founded on the notion of an anarchic world of world politics alone. Gaining a better understanding of the normative and analytical implications of a more complex world of world politics in which anarchy, hierarchy and heterarchy intersect is therefore not exclusively an intellectually rewarding task. It is also a necessary task if we wish to contribute to the development of adequate practical knowledge that is needed to solve existing policy problems.

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Following common usage, we shall refer to the academic discipline of IR by using the capitalized “International Relations”, whereas “international relations” refers to its object of study.

This is not to claim that the anarchy assumption was never called into question before. IR scholars working in a Marxist tradition have always pointed to patterns of rule in world politics, and feminists’ critique of mainstream IR’s neglect of the structuring and ruling effects of gender can also be seen as disagreement with the anarchy assumption. For an explicit mainstream critique of the anarchy assumption, see Milner 1993.

See e.g. Rosenau (1997: 33): “Among the new arrangements, perhaps none is more crucial than the advent of networks as organizational forms no less central to the conduct of world affairs than are hierarchical structures.”

In Rosenau’s own terms, fragmegration refers to “interactions of globalizing and localizing forces, of tendencies toward integration and fragmentation that are so simultaneous and interactive as to collapse into an erratic but singular process”; cf. Rosenau (2006a: 115-116).

See also Rosenau (1997: 41): “The hierarchy that derives from the military power over which states have a monopoly and through which they exercise their sovereignty in the last resort ca no longer, given the disaggregation of [spheres of authority], be translated into leverage over credit agencies or, for that matter, a host of [spheres of authority] operating throughout the world.”

Lake stresses that international relations can be disaggregated in various ways, but that the distinction of the issue areas of security and economics is most common (Lake 2008: 283).

Rosenau’s Turbulence in World Politics from 1990 already contains a similar statement in a section entitled The Decline of Hegemons: “Whatever one’s position in the debate over whether the United States has declined as the state-centric world’s hegemonic leader, it is clear that the emergence of the multi-centric world

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has sharply reduced the possibility that any single collectivity can dominate global politics. Earlier decades and centuries may have been commanded by hegemons which set the rules whereby global resources and statuses were allocated, but today’s bifurcated structure, and especially the high degree of interdependence between the state- and multi-centric worlds, is simply too decentralized to be ruled by a single actor.”

10 See for instance Rosenau (2005: 82): “If consumers are boss virtually everywhere, so are citizens in most countries as the skill revolution deepens their grasp of what kind of polity they want and do not want, a process that further inhibits the evolution or maintenance of empire if it is the case that empires require docile citizens.”

11 Moreover, Rosenau (ibid.: 80) argues that the “mobility upheaval has facilitated disaggregative processes and hindered efforts at far-flung control by would-be empires.” On bifurcation as an impediment to empire, see already Rosenau (1990: 97): “The ensuing analysis (…) counters the ‘continued-U.S.-dominance’ tendency by arguing that, while the structures of the state-centric world permit the emergence of hegemonic leadership, the multi-centric world is too decentralized to support the hierarchy through which hegemons predominate.”

12 Note that Zürn’s reading of the global governance literature differs from Rosenau’s conception. While Rosenau takes the bifurcation of world politics as the starting point for his theoretical reasoning and as the core difference between his own account and the empire literature, Zürn maintains that “both camps still consider state or imperial actors as central and only marginally take the strengthening of non-state actors into account” (ibid.: 682-683, our translation).

13 Depending on whether the distribution of power is unipolar or multipolar and on whether power or norms are the primary medium through which governance occurs, he distinguishes between four international orders: a balance of power (multipolar, weak norms); a constitutional order beyond the state (multipolar, strong norms); an imperial order (unipolar, weak norms); and a legally stratified multi-level system (unipolar, strong norms). He interprets the current unipolar order not as an empire, but as a legally stratified order for three reasons. First, direct administration of other territories is not a goal of U.S. foreign policy. Second, U.S. power cannot act independently of international legal norms. And third, the political justification for U.S. intervention abroad does not exclusively – and maybe not even primarily – emerge from the self-understanding of the intervening state, but instead draws on world society norms or world political norms such as fundamental human rights, the prevalence of democratic order or the prevention of genocide (ibid.: 689-693). In short, Zürn sees U.S. power as strong, but as non-expansive and at least partially constrained by international norms.

14 A similar position is taken by Elke Krahmann (2005) in her analysis of global security governance.

15 The IGF was founded at the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis in 2005. §72 of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society defines the mandate and calls upon the IGF to “discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet”; §73 lays down the structure of the IGF and states that “the Internet Governance Forum, in its working and function, will be multilateral, multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent”; cf. WSIS (2005).

16 The Requests for Comments are written by small group of people within the Internet Society (ISOC). While they were originally meant to be what their name suggests, they quickly developed into factual standards; see http://www.rfc-editor.org/RFCeditor.html (last accessed 18 January 2009) for an overview.

17 In contrast, the U.S. has hardly any influence on the assignment of country-code top-level domains (ccTLDs) since ICANN and the IANA assign them according to a standard developed by the ISO.
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