

The Role of Violence in the Geopolitical System: A Wallersteinian Perspective

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The dominant interpretation of the contemporary geopolitical landscape posits that a series of disruptive events is fundamentally reshaping the international system, thereby fracturing a long-standing equilibrium.

Moreover, the notion that this sequence of events has dismantled a rules-based international order reflects, in my view, a distinctly Eurocentric — or, more accurately, Atlantic-centric — perspective. According to this narrative, the Liberal International Order, established in the aftermath of the Second World War and subsequently consolidated into a Rule-based World Order following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, constituted an unprecedented historical departure: a system no longer grounded in the law of the strongest, but rather in universally recognized norms and principles, binding even upon the hegemonic power that upheld them.

This interpretation accordingly attributes the erosion of the order to the ostensibly treacherous actions of leaders such as Putin, Netanyahu, and Trump.

An alternative reading, however, may be advanced by drawing upon the theoretical contributions of two pivotal figures in contemporary geopolitical thought: Saul Cohen and Immanuel Wallerstein.

Cohen's framework underscores that the concept of a "world order" inherently suggests a top-down, static architecture. In opposition to this, he advocates for the notion of a "dynamic global equilibrium," one that evolves continuously through the acknowledgment of shifting power weights and emergent stimuli. From this standpoint,

a fixed world order is illusory; the international system is characterized by perpetual transformation.

This perspective is complemented by Immanuel Wallerstein's World-Systems Theory, which conceptualizes the global order as a hierarchical structure comprising core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral zones. These categories are sustained through systemic relations of resource and labor exploitation, generating enduring patterns of dependence and subordination.

Interpreted through this lens, the so-called Rules-based World Order did not represent "the longest period of peace in history," as is frequently asserted. Rather, it constituted the longest period of peace for the core regions — principally the Western bloc — while peripheral zones experienced persistent instability and conflict.

In this reading, the latter half of the twentieth century emerges as an era in which core areas preserved their internal equilibrium and domestic peace, frequently by externalizing chaos and violence to the periphery.

Within this framework, violence assumes a functional role in containing latent internal contradictions within the core system (as analyzed by Wang Huning). Hegemonic actors project this violence outward, beyond their borders, thereby maintaining internal stability at the expense of the global periphery.

The profound transformations currently underway in the global order may thus be understood as the progressive failure of this long-dominant model. As certain peripheral and semi-peripheral actors rapidly ascend in power and influence, they increasingly challenge the core-centered system predicated upon the externalization of violence. Consequently, the future international system will necessitate a reconfiguration of relations grounded in a more dynamic, Cohenian conception of global equilibrium.