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GIGA Research Programme:
Violence, Power and Security

Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership: Developing a Research Framework for the Study of Regional Powers

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N° 79 **June 2008**

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GIGA research unit responsible for this issue:
Research Programme: "Violence, Power and Security"

Editor of the GIGA Working Paper Series: Martin Beck <beck@giga-hamburg.de>
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GIGA WP 79/2008

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Abstract

Regional powers are often conceived of as "regional leading powers," states which adopt a cooperative and benevolent attitude in their international relations with their neighbors. The paper argues that regional powers can follow a much wider range of foreign policy strategies in their region. Three ideal-typical regional strategies are identified: empire, hegemony, and leadership. The paper is devoted to a theory-led distinction and clarification of these three terms, which are often used interchangeably in the field of international relations. According to the goals pursued, to the means employed, and to other discriminating features such as the degree of legitimation and the type of self-representation by the dominant state, the paper outlines the essential traits of imperial, hegemonic, and leading strategies and identifies subtypes for better classifying hegemony and leadership.

Keywords: regional powers, empire, hegemony, leadership, strategy

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Zusammenfassung

Imperium, Hegemonie und Leadership:
Entwurf eines Forschungsrahmens zur Untersuchung von Regionalmächten

Regionalmächte werden oft als „regionale Führungsmächte“ aufgefasst, als Staaten, die sich ihren Nachbarn gegenüber kooperativ und wohlwollend verhalten. Dieses Working Paper geht davon aus, dass Regionalmächte durchaus eine breitere Palette außenpolitischer Strategien in ihrer Region verfolgen können. Dabei werden drei idealtypische regionale Strategien identifiziert: eine imperiale, eine hegemoniale und eine führende. Im Mittelpunkt dieses Beitrages steht eine theoriegeleitete Trennung und Klärung dieser drei Termini, die in der Disziplin der Internationalen Beziehungen oft verwechselt und synonym verwendet werden. Die Hauptmerkmale imperialer, hegemonialer und führender Strategien werden unter Berücksichtigung der verfolgten Ziele, der eingesetzten Mittel und anderer Unterscheidungsfaktoren wie des Legitimierungsgrades und der Selbstdarstellung des dominierenden Staates herausgearbeitet. Eine Präzisierung durch Subtypen erlaubt eine bessere Klassifizierung von Hegemonie und Leadership.

Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership: Developing a Research Framework for the Study of Regional Powers

Sandra Destradi

Article Outline

1 Introduction

In view of the increasing international "weight" of countries such as India, China, Brazil, and South Africa, several efforts have been made in recent years to categorize these countries and develop a conceptual framework which allows us to understand their behavior and role in regional and global politics.

While their denomination as "regional (great) powers" is relatively uncontested,[1] the salient features and the constitutive character of regional powers are still highly debated issues (Østerud 1992: 1-3; Nolte 2006: 23). However, many authors seem to agree that regional powers assume a leading, integrating role in their region, something between leadership and "cooperative hegemony," as conceptualized by Pedersen (2002), or a sort of representative function for their region in international institutions.[2] This assumption, which rests mainly on conclusions drawn by single-country studies (especially about Brazil in Latin America), lacks wider empirical evidence. Even though Pedersen (2002: 682) assumes that

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[1] See, for example, Neumann (1992); Østerud (1992); Hurrell (1992); De Silva (1995); Fuller/ Arquilla (1996); Wagner (1998); Buzan/ Waever (2003: 24); Soares de Lima/ Hirst (2006); Hurrell (2007: 141).

[2] See Gratius (2004); Schirm (2005: 110-112); Decker/ Mildner (2005: 19-20); Nolte (2006: 8, 28-31, 39-41); Flemes (2007: 11).

regional great powers might follow different strategies (unilateral hegemony, cooperative hegemony, empire, and concert), only recently has the existence of a broader spectrum of regional powers' courses of action been highlighted, thus admitting the possibility of the existence of differentiated forms of behavior for regional powers and of various forms of regional leadership (Erdmann 2007: 5), as well as developing the study of regional hegemons (Prys 2008).[3] As Hurrell (2007: 140f) puts it,

> What of regions centred on powerful states? Such a situation may arise because the regional state is so overwhelmingly dominant that it can enforce its will, or because it succeeds in creating consensual hegemony within a region—maybe by providing economic benefits, or by underpinning regional security, or by claiming to embody a particular view of the world or set of values. Or it might arise when its regional position is actively supported by those outside the region.

What I am doing is arguing that regional powers—like all states which are dominant in terms of material capabilities within a group of states to which they belong—can adopt different strategies in regional politics.[4] The aim of this study is not to develop a definition of regional powers, nor is it to discuss which states can be identified as regional powers and which can not. I will therefore take a "minimal" understanding of regional powers as given, assuming that a state which is dominant in terms of material power resources in comparison to its regional neighbors can be labeled as a "regional power." What I am interested in is carrying forward the debate about the strategies and courses of action of regional powers by developing analytical tools to answer the question, "What kind of regional strategy is being followed?" This apparently simple task, however, requires a further "step back"—or, in other words, it requires that we "start from the beginning." A large part of the debate on regional powers is, in fact, based on the use of terms—hegemony, empire, leadership—which are highly contested in international relations (IR) theory and are often used as synonyms. If we assume that regional powers exert some kind of influence on their region (one of the few points which seems to be uncontested in the literature: e.g., Østerud 1992: 12; Schirm 2005: 110-111; Nolte 2006: 28), the possible strategies they can follow can be seen as a continuum reaching from an aggressive, intimidating strategy, which I will call "imperial," to a cooperative, collective gains-seeking one, which I will call "leading." Between these two poles we find a "hegemonic" strategy that needs to be further specified in terms of its essential features.

The first, indispensable step in the study of regional powers' strategies lies therefore in a conceptual clarification of the terms "empire," "hegemony," and "leadership." Even though

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[3] Another approach, deriving from the German Development Institute, defines "anchor countries" as states that have a particular economic and political influence in their regional context. This influence can be either positive, a sort of "locomotive function," or negative, spreading stagnation and crises (Stamm 2004: 7).

[4] In using the term "strategy," I refer to the integration of political, economic and military aims for the preservation and realization of states' long-term interests, that is, what is commonly named "grand strategy" in order to distinguish it from the purely military art of using battles to win a war (Kennedy 1991: 1-5; for a "classical" but more restrictive view of grand strategy see Liddell Hart [2]1991: 321-322).

debates concerning definitions are often contemptuously rejected by IR theorists as irrelevant terminological issues, I am convinced that a theory-based distinction and clarification represents the essential starting point for this (and every) research program.
This paper is therefore devoted to this "first step" of the research program outlined above: a conceptual determination and distinction between empire, hegemony and leadership, and the development of a heuristic instrument for the analysis of regional powers' strategies. Only on the basis of a clear distinction between possible strategies will further steps in the research program—the operationalization of the categories developed in this paper and the identification of adequate methodological tools for empirical research—be possible.

2 Contested Concepts: Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership

Since the 1970s, but especially since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the US as the "only superpower," increasing attention has been paid by IR theorists to the strategies pursued by the United States as the most powerful actor in the international system. Washington's course of action is seen by some authors as a hegemony, be it benevolent, coercive, or exploitative (Snidal 1985: 614), and by others as benevolent leadership, while a whole debate has emerged in the last few years about the US as an imperial power or as a privileged actor in a new global imperial order determined by globalization (Hardt/Negri 2000).
The following conceptual clarification will be based mainly on this "global level of analysis" literature. Even though claims have been made that traditional accounts of hegemony, for instance, must be reconceptualized in order to fit the conditions of a regional environment (Prys 2008: 6-8), I argue that there is no *essential* difference in the dominant states' strategies at the global and the regional levels. Regional powers, it is true, have to "mediate" between the pressures or constraints coming from great powers and their own aspirations and goals for regional order, as well as the actions and reactions of their regional neighbors (ibid.; Nolte 2006: 28; Lemke 2002 as a representative of the power transition theory). However, I argue that the influence of "external" great powers represents only *one* of many factors influencing the strategy of a regional power, together with other factors such as domestic pressures, "balancing" by regional neighbors, etc. This influence could limit the strategic options available to regional powers, thereby rendering some strategies more difficult to adopt.[5] The essential traits of these strategic orientations, however, do not change, regardless of whether we analyze a regional or a global power; that is, the very nature of imperial, hegemonic, or leadership strategies remains the same.

[5] Some authors have taken this consideration to an extreme, arguing that in the post-Cold War international order regional powers can only follow cooperative strategies (Nolte 2006: 8). I am convinced that a wider range of strategies has to be taken into account in order to develop an analytical framework which does not exclude some strategies *a priori* and, consequently, does not bias empirical analysis.

2.1 Empire

A state which is clearly dominant in terms of material power resources has the option of creating security for itself in an environment perceived as anarchical (according to the realist perspective) through the unilateral pursuit of its own national interest, sustained by coercion and, if necessary, the use of military power. In this study, I will call this kind of state strategy "imperial."

Some authors (Wallerstein 1984: 38; Lake 1993: 469)—and here the terminological confusion becomes evident—have defined states acting in this way as hegemons: "hegemony is necessarily coercive and based on the exercise of power; the hegemon must effectively change the policies of other states to satisfy its own goals" (ibid.). This use of the term hegemony, however, contrasts sharply with the widespread conceptions of hegemony as benevolent leadership or provision of public goods.

Besides these terminological problems, the lack of any kind of juridical or political science-based specification has given the meaning of the term "empire" a diffuse character, leading to different normative interpretations and abuses in its usage (Münkler 2005b: 44). In the current debate about the "empire USA" the term has become a synonym for the US-dominated world order. This order is propagated by its advocates as clearly power-based, militarily sustained, but "benevolent" (Kagan 1998) unilateralism; it is identified by its opponents as a greedy system of subordination based on militarism (e.g., Johnson 2000, 2004; Mann 2003) and global dominance (e.g., Chomsky 2003). If we leave aside the concrete reference to US policy, what emerges from this debate is, on the one hand, the controversial nature of the term empire (Doyle 1986: 30; Take 2005: 116) and, on the other hand, the fact that both advocates and opponents of the "empire USA" associate this term with unilateralism and the use of military power.

In the contemporary nation-state based international system, the notion of empire is freed from the association with territorial annexations and, instead, replaced by the idea of "informal empire." Empires can therefore be defined as "relationships of political control imposed by some political societies over the effective sovereignty of other political societies" (Doyle 1986: 19) or, more precisely, as "structures of transnational political authority that combine an egalitarian principle of de jure sovereignty with a hierarchical principle of de facto control" (Wendt/Friedheim 1995: 695).

If empires or imperial relations imply a "substantial" limitation to the sovereignty of subject states (Lake 1997: 34-35), the degree to which sovereignty is limited—in a world where it already constitutes no more than a "cognitive script characterized by organized hypocrisy" (Krasner 2001: 19)—cannot be definitively fixed in order to distinguish imperial behavior from other forms of hierarchical interaction, such as hegemony.[6] Nor can the degree of pre-

[6] Lake (1997: 33-36), who suggests that the distinction between empire and other hierarchical relationships between polities should not be based on the analysis of the instruments of control but rather on the degree of

dominance in capabilities be used as an index allowing an unequivocal demarcation between states which will act as empires or as hegemons (Rapkin 2005: 393). The discriminating element is instead represented by the *means* employed in the exercise of power (Take 2005: 117), namely, in the case of empire, *coercion* and *imposition* (Krasner 2001: 18). Coercion implies "making credible threats to which the target might or might not acquiesce, or engaging in unilateral moves which undermine the bargaining position of the weaker state" (ibid.). Imposition means that "the target is so weak that it has no option but to comply with the preferences of the stronger" (ibid.). Since these two concepts, however, are also somehow elusive, the final distinctive feature of imperial behavior is represented by military intervention or its threat:

> The depth and objects of centralized control vary. Within a given issue-area control can range from proscribing a particular policy while still permitting significant local autonomy, to prescribing one, in effect vetoing all others [...]. It is difficult to define how much centralization is required for informal empire, but this is less important than the expectation of intervention when rules are violated. (Wendt/Friedheim 1995: 697)[7]

All powers adopting an imperial strategy are forced to resort to the threat of military intervention if subordinate states do not comply with their will, since otherwise they risk losing their dominant position (Münkler 2005a: 30). As outlined by Knorr (1975: 10) in his remarkable contribution on different forms of power, this threat may be "substantive," which means specific and precise (for example, an ultimatum), or "inferential," that is, more vague and implicit: "For example, to put some pressure on B, who presumably knows what A wants, A may make vague domestic statements about increasing military expenditure."

Analyzing an assumed change of US policy from hegemony to empire, Rapkin (2005: 398-400) adds two further elements typical of imperial strategy: a preference for unilateral problem solving and actions, and a sense of exemptionalism implying the imposition of one's own rules on others and, at the same time, the rejection of rules contrasting with one's interests (an oft-cited example is the US response to the Kyoto Protocol). As a consequence, we can affirm that imperial rule is always illegitimate, if we conceive of legitimacy according to Habermas (1973: 136-140, 144): in a hierarchical interstate relationship the dominant position of the stronger state is legitimated if the weaker states share its values and goals, that is, if a "consensual normative order that binds ruler and ruled" (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990b: 289) is established.

This decisive distinguishing factor of empire—the threat or use of military power—implies, on the one hand, that imperial strategy is mostly associated with a highly aggressive, in-

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control itself, is not able to deliver a clear demarcation or definition of the "substantial rights of residual control" (ibid.: 34) necessary to establish informal empire.

[7] Ikenberry (2001: 196) proposes a similar understanding of what he calls "highly imperial hegemonic order" (one more example of terminological ambiguity), which is based on the exercise of "coercive domination" that the subordinate states cannot counter through a strategy of balancing.

timidating policy style and rhetoric (Rapkin 2005: 396); on the other hand, its illegitimate character and the lack of consensus in imperial domination implies that empire is always accompanied by a great dissatisfaction in subordinate states, which can lead to different forms of resistance (Münkler 2005a: 149, 189-200; Rapkin 2005: 396; Doyle 1986: 40) or simply to inescapable subjugation if subordinate states are too weak to resist.

2.2 Hegemony

While the identification of the essential features of empire is relatively simple, since a sort of basic consensus seems to exist in the corresponding IR literature, the meaning of "hegemony" is much more difficult to grasp. This can be traced back to several reasons: firstly, hegemony is often used as a synonym for both leadership (e.g., Kindleberger 1983; Rapkin 2005) and empire (e.g., Wallerstein 1984: 38; Lake 1993: 469); secondly, it is employed by authors belonging to extremely different schools of thought with sometimes radically diverging research interests; thirdly, like "empire," "hegemony" has become a normatively loaded term, especially in the context of the US debate and the alleged transition of the US from a cooperative and benevolent hegemony to an egoistic and greedy empire (e.g., Rapkin 1990b: 3-4 and 2005; Münkler 2005a: 11-16). Because of this greater complexity, the discussion of hegemony will require more attention and "space" in this study than that of empire, and will lead to a further classification of and formation of subtypes of hegemonic strategies.

Hegemony, I argue in this study, is a form of power exercised through strategies which are more subtle than those employed by states behaving as imperial powers. The *means* through which power is exercised—and here the distinction between hegemony and empire becomes evident—can vary from the exertion of pressure to the provision of material incentives, up to the discursive propagation of the hegemon's norms and values. The *end* of hegemonic behavior—and this, as we shall see, is the point that marks the difference between hegemony and leadership—is always primarily the realization of the hegemon's own goals.

One of the most significant contributions on the issue of hegemony comes from Antonio Gramsci (1975), who analyzed this concept with reference to the realm of social relations in his *Prison Notebooks*. A social class, he argues, acts hegemonically if it tries to establish a new order by formulating a universal ideology which brings the interests of subordinate classes in line with its own interests—or presents and affirms its own interests as general interests for the whole society. Hegemony implies the ability of the hegemon to let subordinates believe that power rests upon the consensus of the majority (ibid.: 1638). In this process, ideational and material power resources are always operating together and influencing each other. According to Gramsci, hegemony is and remains a form of dominance, even though it abstains from the use of force. To represent power, Gramsci (ibid.: 1576) takes over Machiavelli's metaphor of the centaur: like the centaur, which is half human and half animal, power is always twofold, encompassing the use of force and coercion on the one hand, and consen-

sus and hegemony on the other. "To the extent that the consensual aspect of power is in the forefront, hegemony prevails. Coercion is always latent but is only applied in marginal, deviant cases. Hegemony is enough to ensure the conformity of behaviour in most people most of the time" (Cox 1983: 164).

Another "classical" approach, which is even more neglected than the Gramscian one by IR theory, is Heinrich Triepel's (1938). Triepel considers hegemony as a form of power situated at an intermediate level on a continuum reaching from mere influence to domination (ibid.:140). As opposed to domination, hegemony does not resort to the use of coercion; instead, it is a tamed form of power, characterized by a high degree of self-restraint on the part of the hegemon (ibid.: 39-40; 148-149).[8] Triepel considers hegemony to be a particular kind of leadership, but he underlines that in international relations followership to a hegemon will not be based on "joyful devotion," as in the field of social relations, but rather on the cost-benefit calculations of the weaker states, as well as on their recognition of their own weakness (ibid.: 144).

The contributions by Gramsci and Triepel embody, I believe, the salient aspects later discussed in different strands of the IR debate on hegemony. These essentially revolve around two interrelated points: around the very "nature" of hegemony, which is supposed to be either benevolent or coercive (or, in other words, altruistic or egoistic), and around the means employed to exercise hegemony, which are considered to be either material power resources (sanctions, rewards, incentives) or "ideational" factors (persuasion to accept norms and values).

2.2.1 Benevolent vs. Coercive Hegemony[9]

The origins of this debate lie in the theory of hegemonic stability, originally formulated by Charles Kindleberger (1973) in the context of a perceived decline in US influence on world affairs. Kindleberger argues that only a clearly preponderant state in terms of material capabilities can stabilize the world economy. Moving from an initially egoistic imperative, the creation of a stable environment for its own development, the hegemon invests its resources to stabilize the system. These stabilization efforts correspond to the provision of public goods to the other states, which will act as free riders and take advantage of the stability cre-

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[8] The idea of self-restraint with reference to hegemony has been adopted by several authors: Hurrell (2005:173) especially underlines the role of institutions in signaling strategic restraint; Cronin (2001: 105) analyzes the difficult situation of hegemonic states in managing a role conflict between their nature as great powers (and the corresponding inclination towards unilateral action) and as "responsible" hegemons constrained by the rules they have established ("paradox of hegemony").

[9] "Benevolent" and "coercive" or "altruistic" and "egoistic" are normative terms. However, since they have marked a broad debate, I will adopt them: "If it is impossible […] to purge concepts of their contested appraisive dimension, it is crucial that this dimension be explicitly acknowledged rather than swept under the illusory carpet of objective neutrality" (Rapkin 1990b: 4). But what is really of interest for this study is the question of "whose goals are pursued by the hegemon, its own ones or those of a group of states?" The answer to this question, as we shall see, marks the difference between hegemony and leadership.

ated by the hegemon without sharing the costs (Snidal 1985: 581).[10] This kind of behavior, which leads to advantages for all the states in the system, is considered to be "benevolent" by one strand in the theory of hegemonic stability. The supposedly benevolent nature of hegemony and its interpretation as not only a desirable but also an ideal condition in the international system—the only one able to provide stability—have contributed to the conceptual confusion between hegemony and leadership.

The introduction of a "negative" connotation of hegemony is due to Gilpin (1981), who transposes the theory from the analysis of international economy to the broader study of international relations. Gilpin's neorealist approach, founded on an assumed marginal utility maximization by international actors, frees hegemony from its benevolent stance and associates it more closely with the pursuit of national interests. The hegemonic state provides public goods, in this case stability and peace, but it imposes a sort of "tax" on subordinate states, obliging them to contribute to the costs of provision. Since the other states are too weak to exercise effective opposition, they will be forced to comply. However, possible benefits deriving from the public goods provided could induce subordinate states to accept hegemony and legitimize it. Herein lies the reason for the "egoistic" provision of public goods by the hegemon: a cost/benefit calculation tells it that the realization of its interests through the establishment of an order acceptable for the other states is "cheaper" than resorting to the use of force (Snidal 1985: 587).

Gilpin's contribution marked the beginning of a debate in which a clearer discrimination of the concepts of "hegemony" and "leadership" was attempted, and the ambiguous nature of hegemony already taken into consideration by Gramsci was highlighted (Snidal 1985; Lake 1993). Snidal (ibid.: 614) comes to the conclusion that hegemony can be "benevolent, coercive but still beneficial, or simply exploitative." Lake, on the other hand, tries for a broader distinction between "leadership theory" and "hegemony theory," which he believes are separate components in the theory of hegemonic stability, both including, however, elements of coercion. Hegemony theory, he argues, concerns the hegemon's efforts to create economic openness by manipulating the trade policies of other states, which could prefer a closed system (Lake 1993: 460-462f; 469-478). "Thus, hegemony is necessarily coercive and based on the exercise of power; the hegemon must effectively change the policies of other states to satisfy its own goals" (ibid.: 469).

Somewhere between these benevolent and coercive interpretations of hegemony lies a more explicitly egoistic account of hegemony provided by power transition theory. This approach is based on the idea of a hierarchical international system where hierarchy depends on the distribution of material resources and dominant states are supposed to be satisfied and interested in maintaining status quo. The dominant state is thought to realize its main interest,

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[10] As Kenneth Waltz (1979: 198) put it: "The greater the relative size of a unit the more it identifies its own interests with the interests of the system. [...] Units having a large enough stake in the system will act for its sake, even though they pay unduly in doing so."

the maintenance of stability, by co-opting (potential) smaller allies through the provision of incentives, that is, of private goods (Bussmann/Oneal 2007: 89).

This debate demonstrates how the term hegemony has been adapted (and deformed) to describe a whole range of strategies and behaviors, some of which would be better defined as leading or imperial. Interestingly, all approaches highlight the fact that the hegemon primarily follows its own interests. Also, in the case of the provision of public goods, even if subordinate states gain more than the hegemon, its primary aim is the establishment of a stable environment *for itself*. The benefits deriving to subordinate states from this provision are essentially a sort of by-product.

This insight corresponds to the assumptions made by neo-Gramscian authors such as Cox (1996b: 421), who argues that hegemony constitutes a subtle form of domination:

> In the hegemonic consensus, the dominant groups make some concessions to satisfy the subordinate groups, but not such as to endanger their dominance. The language of consensus is a language of common interest expressed in universalist terms, though the structure of power underlying it is skewed in favor of the dominant groups.

2.2.2 Material vs. Ideational Power Resources

While the debate about the benevolent VS. coercive character of hegemony essentially takes place within rationalist approaches to IR, the other great debate around the concept of hegemony, concerning the kind of power resources required for and employed in the exercise of hegemony, sees an antagonism between rationalist and constructivist approaches. For rationalist authors, the central problem concerns the conversion of military and economic power resources into political power (Erdmann 2007: 2) since a hegemonic state is supposed to be predominant in terms of material power resources.

Realists assume that hegemonic states provide material incentives to their weaker counterparts in order to establish a stable international order. Hegemonic stability theory, with its emphasis on the provision of public goods in the international economy, and power transition theory, which concentrates on the provision of private goods to allies of the dominant power, focus on the role of material incentives. Other realists, however, recognize the importance of moral and normative factors in the successful establishment of hegemony (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990b: 50-51). Thus, Gilpin (1981) recognizes that the distribution of power, which represents the "principal form of control" (ibid.: 29), is not the only factor necessary for the maintenance of international order: prestige ("the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed," even without the direct exercise of power (ibid.: 31)) also counts, as well as a set of rules imposed by the hegemon in order to advance its interests (ibid.: 36).

At the other extreme, in opposition to realist theories, post-structuralist accounts privilege the role of norms and ideas in the establishment of international hegemony. Nabers (2008)

argues that hegemony (or leadership, in his terminology) is based on the "intersubjective internalisation of ideas, norms, and identities" (ibid.: 11) by subordinate states. According to this perspective, the distribution of material capabilities is thought to influence other states' ideas about the world, but material power factors have no intrinsic significance in and of themselves. Hegemony is therefore characterized as discursive hegemony (Nabers 2007): the hegemon "exercises power over another state by influencing, shaping, or determining his wants, beliefs, and understandings about the world" (Nabers 2008: 8).

The insight deriving from this debate is that, apart from the "hardest" realist accounts, most other approaches to hegemony assume that material power factors and ideational aspects such as norms, rules, value orientations, or, more generally, an influence on the "way to see the world" interact in the exercise of hegemony. "These two ways of exercising hegemonic power are mutually reinforcing and frequently difficult to disentangle" (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990a: 286). In this case we can again refer back to Gramsci and the neo-Gramscians, who underline the interplay between material and ideational power resources "to found and protect a world order […] universal in conception, i.e. not an order in which one state directly exploits others but an order which most other states […] find compatible with their interests" (Cox 1983: 171). While the employment of material power resources implies altering the incentives, that is, the costs and benefits for other states of following different courses of action (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990a: 287; Nabers 2008: 10), the employment of ideational power resources is considered necessary in order to gain acceptance of the hegemonic state's preeminent position, and thereby establish some degree of consensus (Cronin 2001: 112; Hurrell 2005: 172-173; Hurrell 2004: xxix; Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990a: 285-286).

This brief analysis of the main debates about hegemony highlights two essential features of this concept:

a) Hegemony is essentially self-interested and aims primarily at the realization of the hegemon's goals, which, however, are presented to subordinate states as collective goals.
b) Hegemons operate by employing a combination of material incentives and "ideational" power instruments (the changing or reshaping of norms and values in the subordinate states) in order to gain consensus in the subordinate states.

For this reason, "hegemony rests on a delicate balance between coercion and consensus, between the exercise of the direct and indirect power of the hegemonic state and the provision of a degree of respect for the interests of the weaker states" (Hurrell 2004: xxix). What makes the concept of hegemony so difficult to define and analyze is the wide range of policy options and strategies that a state defined as "hegemonic" can pursue. The literature tells us that "some degree of consensus" is required and that a whole range of power resources, reaching from the imposition of sanctions to the "normative persuasion" (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990b: 55) of subordinate states, can be utilized. From the awareness of a variation in the exercise of hegemonic power derives a widespread assumption that hegemony can assume different,

more or less unilateral VS. cooperative or coercive VS. benevolent, forms, and that the different character of these types of hegemonic strategies depends on the kind of power resources employed (Snidal 1985: 614; Joseph 2002: 129; Pedersen 2002: 682).

In order to make the concept of hegemony suitable for empirical analysis, I argue that a further specification and differentiation of forms of hegemony is necessary, one which goes beyond the outlined benevolent/coercive and material/ideational divides and combines these analytical categories into new subtypes. Otherwise the fuzzy concept of hegemony can hardly be employed to study state strategies in international relations. Only a few attempts to go beyond mere assumptions of the existence of different kinds of hegemony, if not to build a taxonomy of forms of hegemonic strategy or behavior, have been made so far in IR theory.[11] An initial approach could be the broad division of hegemony into three subtypes, which I will label as "hard," "intermediate," and "soft" hegemony, according to the power instruments employed. A further guiding framework for this differentiation will be Ikenberry and Kupchan's work on the legitimation of hegemony (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990a; 1990b), since the more or less effective "manufacturing of consent" (Wendt/Friedheim 1995: 700) and the consequent degree of legitimation depend on the hegemonic strategies used.

2.2.3 Forms of Hegemonic Strategy

If we exclude the use of military power or the threat of intervention, which is typical for imperial power, the first form of hegemonic strategy, "hard" hegemony, can be conceived of as a system of domination based on coercion but exercised, as Gramsci suggests, in a more subtle way. This means that the hegemonic state primarily aims to realize its own goals and satisfy its own interests, but seeks to hide this aspiration by emphasizing, to some extent, a community of interests with subordinate states. This kind of hegemonic strategy is based on a discrepancy between the stated, rhetorical commitment to common goals by the hegemon

[11] Ikenberry (2001: 196-197) argues that three kinds of hegemonic order exist: the first corresponds to what I have defined as empire, since it is based on coercive domination; the second displays a certain, sometimes minimal, convergence of interests and is held together by the provision of useful services to subordinate states (security protection and access to the hegemon's market); the third, defined as "open hegemony" (ibid.: 197), is more benevolent and acceptable to subordinate states, since the hegemon's power is restrained by rules and institutions. Pedersen (2002: 682-683) distinguishes four possible strategies for regional powers: unilateral hegemon (strong realist element and low institutionalization), cooperative hegemon (soft rule and high degree of institutionalization), empire (strong realist element and high level of institutionalization), and concert (division of privileges and responsibilities among a group of great regional powers). In his model of cooperative hegemony, Pedersen (ibid.: 686) identifies two further ideal types: The offensive type is centered around the realization of advantages of scale (access to markets in the region), advantages of inclusion (access to raw materials), and advantages of diffusion (propagation of the hegemon's ideas). The defensive type of cooperative hegemony, in contrast, primarily aims to stabilize the system. Hurrell (2004: xxv-xxvi) identifies three models for the hegemonic diffusion of norms and values: "progressive enmeshment" (developed by liberalism), based on emulation, learning, and normative persuasion; "hegemonic imposition" (developed by neorealism and neodependency theories), based on coercion and, as the name says, imposition; and "coercive socialization", an intermediate model combining coercion and consensus to induce the incorporation and internalization of the hegemon's ideas, norms, and practices.

and the intention to act unilaterally and establish a sort of dominance over subordinate states. Secondary states are forced to change their practices through sanctions, threats, political pressure, and, to a lesser extent, inducements. This has been suggested by Ikenberry and Kupchan (1990b: 56) in their "coercion" model and by Pedersen (2002:682) in his "unilateral hegemony" model, as well as by most realist accounts. Another element, which most authors do not explicitly mention, but which fits to this kind of hegemonic strategy, is the exercise of political pressure or the imposition of diplomatic and political sanctions (from protest notes and postponement or cancellation of state visits to the suspension of diplomatic relations) on subordinate states to induce them to fit into the hegemon's hierarchical conception of order. A particular form of pressure is represented by "threats of exclusion" (Pedersen 1999: 91), for instance, in established international (or, in this case, regional) institutions. It takes place particularly through the formation of (or the threat of forming) "subsystemic schemes" (ibid.) from which subordinate states risk being excluded if they do not comply with the hegemon's wishes: "Members facing this kind of threat face the cost of not being able to influence future decisions in a subordinate group provided that the threat is credible" (ibid.).

To a great extent, the sanctions imposed by hard hegemons are of an economic nature, for example, the denial of access to the hegemon's market (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990a: 287); the revocation of trade agreements; or the reduction, intermission, or cancellation of foreign aid. Financial sanctions and restrictions on travel are also possible instruments in the exercise of hard hegemony, as well as military measures, as long as they do not involve a threat of intervention, such as a weapons embargo or an interruption of military assistance or cooperation.

If the dominant state follows a hard hegemonic strategy, the compliant behavior of subordinates derives mainly from the fact that "secondary states make rational calculations about the expected costs of noncompliance" (ibid.). This implies that there is no real change in their normative orientation. Therefore, instead of real legitimation based on the adoption of the norms and values promoted by the hegemon, in hard hegemony we find something which could be called "pseudo-legitimation": subordinate states change their behavior, but without internalizing the values promoted by the hegemon.

"Intermediate hegemony" is centered around the provision of material benefits and rewards to subordinate states (as suggested by hegemonic stability theory) in order to make them acquiescent. Moreover, norms and values are shared to a certain degree between hegemon and subordinate states. In this case the hegemon also pursues its narrow national interest and its own goals, and it also emphasizes the existence of common interests and objectives, shared with subordinates. However, in intermediate hegemony the discrepancy between rhetorical commitment and actual behavior is less blatant than in hard hegemony, since the hegemon renounces the use of threats and sanctions. The side payments provided by the hegemonic state are mainly of an economic nature: trade facilitation and economic assistance (loans, de-

velopment aid—with a particularly strong hegemonic influence in the case of tied aid or conditionalities). However, as Pedersen (1999: 91) underlines, side payments can also take the form of institutional power sharing. Military support can also play a role as reward or incentive for compliant behavior (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990a: 287). This form of hegemonic strategy is based on what Knorr (1975: 7) in his distinction of forms of power defines as "reward power": "It is influence based on A's promise of some sort of goal gratification to B *on condition* that B will supply something of value to A." One of the means employed in intermediate hegemony strategies is therefore bribery, which corresponds to a "prepaid reward" (ibid.).
In intermediate hegemony also, the compliance of subordinate states derives from rational cost-benefit calculations. The existence, to a certain degree, of common values and the absence of threat make the intermediate hegemonic strategy more acceptable for subordinate states than the "hard" one. As pinpointed by Knorr (ibid.: 8), "promises are commonly taken as less unfriendly than threats as a way of manipulating relationships. B feels less put upon and is less likely to defy the influence attempt. He receives something of value even if he also loses something of value." For this reason we can speak of a "partial legitimation" of intermediate hegemony.

"Soft hegemony" denotes a strategy which strongly resembles leadership. However, in contrast to leadership, the ends and interests of the hegemon are still at the forefront.[12] This kind of hegemonic strategy is based on the hegemon's efforts to modify and reshape the norms and values of subordinate states, as illustrated by Ikenberry and Kupchan (1990b: 57) in their "normative persuasion" model:

> The hegemon is able to alter the normative orientation and practices of secondary elites without sanctions, inducements, or manipulation. Rather, the hegemon engages in a process of socialization and ideological persuasion in which legitimacy emerges through the osmosis of norms and values from dominant to secondary elites. (ibid.)

The complex socialization process also leads to a redefinition of the subordinate state's national interests in terms of the hegemon's normative order and to a transformation in its policies corresponding to the hegemon's values and principles (ibid.). As possible instruments to efficiently realize normative persuasion through ideological persuasion and transnational learning, Ikenberry and Kupchan (1990a: 290) mention various kinds of contact with elites in secondary states, for example,. through diplomatic channels, cultural exchange, and foreign students.

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[12] In this case, I will not follow Knorr (1975: 24), who argues that "noncoercive influence, no matter how one-sided, can bring about leadership but not hegemonial supremacy." Since what I have identified as the prominent feature of leadership is the pursuit of common interests and goals (in contrast to the "one-sidedness" of hegemony), I believe that one-sided noncoercive influence should be subsumed under hegemony, thereby admitting the existence of a cooperative, "soft" form of hegemony. In his book, Knorr (ibid.: 24) himself later emphasizes that the essential features of leadership are noncoercive influence and the "mutual flow of benefits," thereby excluding the hypothesis of one-sidedness for leadership.

In soft hegemony the compliance of subordinate states does not derive from utilitarian calculations but is rather a result of the convergence of norms and values. For this reason, soft hegemony is the only form of hegemonic strategy which can obtain a full legitimation by subordinate states (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990b: 57).

The three forms of hegemony outlined above can be conceived of as different specifications of the same concept. A transition from one form of hegemonic strategy to the other is possible, if not probable. In fact, as Ikenberry and Kupchan (1990a: 290-292; 1990b: 57-58, 65-68) have underlined, the projection of norms and values (soft hegemonic strategy) can follow a coercive moment (hard hegemonic strategy) or the provision of material incentives (intermediate hegemonic strategy or, in their terminology, "external" or "positive" inducement). The authors argue that policy coercion and different forms of pressure represent a sort of "first stage" in the process of establishment and legitimation of international hegemony: the hegemon first forces subordinate states to change their policies, and later, gradually, the elites in subordinate states adopt the hegemon's norms and values. This is what the authors call "acts before beliefs" (ibid.: 58). The final objective of a hegemonic state is the establishment of an accepted, uncontested and legitimated international order fixing hierarchical asymmetries, since such an order is much "cheaper" to manage because no use of force or side payments is necessary. But the attainment of such an uncontested order may require, first, the employment of "harder" strategies. The final attainment of the hegemon's goal, the successful diffusion of its norms and strategies, however, is only of secondary importance here. The object of this study is the strategy used by the hegemonic state to reach this final goal. Probably in most cases the complete acquiescence of subordinate states is never achieved. In any case, socialization processes are very lengthy and difficult to observe, in part because they are still under way. If we just focus on the strategy of the dominant power, however, the first step is to find out if this state aims to establish an international (or, in this case, regional) order, allowing it to realize its goals without the need to resort to the use of force (hegemony). The second stage would then consist of the identification of the means preferred to establish this order, that is, the detection of the hegemon's choice of a "hard," "intermediate," or "soft" hegemonic strategy.[13]

2.3 Leadership

Like empire and, to a greater extent, hegemony, leadership is a controversial concept in IR theory. What is especially confusing is the sometimes undifferentiated usage of hegemony and leadership, which mainly derives from the theory of hegemonic stability and its as-

[13] Of course the distinction between these three forms of hegemony is ideal-typical and tentative: in reality dominant states most probably follow strategies lying somewhere between the three kinds outlined above. What will be relevant for analysis, therefore, is a "prevalence" in the use of coercive/threatening, coopting/rewarding/inducing, or convincing/persuading means.

sumption that only a "hegemonic" state with disposal over predominant resources can assume a leadership position by providing public goods.[14]

In this study I argue that there is a fundamental difference between hegemony and leadership, which lies in the goals pursued by the dominant state: while the hegemon aims to realize its own egoistic goals by presenting them as common with those of subordinate states, the leader guides—"leads"—a group of states in order to realize or facilitate the realization of their common objectives.

Some helpful tools for better grasping the meaning of leadership are theories from social psychology and political science, the fields in which the study of leadership began.[15] While early studies were devoted to the identification of the character traits and attributes of great public figures, starting in the 1960s various theories aiming to provide managers with useful instruments to improve their leadership style began to deal with the relationship between leader and followers (Northouse 1997: 32-73). For instance, the "situational approach" studied the ways in which leaders have to adapt their leadership style to different situations in order to recognize the needs of their subordinates and to cooperate with them. On the basis of Burns' (1978) work, the ability of leaders to influence their followers became a central object of study in the 1980s, thereby implying that leadership excludes the exercise of power and coercion since great significance is attributed to the followers' needs (Northouse 1997: 130-158). Leadership was therefore conceived of as "transformational": leaders are able to alter the motives and preferences of followers, but they are in turn influenced. Therefore, leader and followers "share a common cause" (Goethals/Sorenson/Burns 2004: 870). Northouse (ibid.: 3) has summarized the salient aspects of this whole range of social psychological leadership theories as follows: "(a) leadership is a process, (b) leadership involves influence, (c) leadership occurs within a group context, and (d) leadership involves goal attainment." From these points, the following definition is derived: "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (ibid.).

The aim of this brief digression is to underline how various theories outside the discipline of international relations have conceptualized leadership as an interaction between leader and followers on the basis of common goals. This conception is radically different from the materialistic assumptions made by the theory of hegemonic stability, which identifies leadership with the provision of public goods, and from "transactional" accounts highlighting the role of mutual gains and benefits in the exercise of leadership. For instance, according to Knorr (1975: 24-25), the essential features of leadership in international relations are represented by the absence of coercion and the reciprocal flow of benefits: "one actor gives something of value to another without condition, without any stipulated payment, now or later" (ibid.: 311). Fitting examples are the case of the creation of a custom union, "from the establish-

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[14] For a critique of this aspect of the theory of hegemonic stability see Wiener (1995b).

[15] For an overview on this early literature see Paige (1977: especially chapter 3); Stogdill (1974); Goethals/ Sorenson/ Burns (2004); and Northouse (1997).

ment of which all participants would gain—not one from the other, but all from sharing newly created values, in this case, of an economic nature" (ibid.). Or the case in which "A acts as a successful mediary in bringing conflict between B and C to a conclusion that is acceptable to both, and preferable to continued conflict" (ibid.). According to this perspective, as Young (1991: 285) put it in his article on institutional bargaining, "leadership […] refers to the actions of individuals who endeavor to solve or circumvent the collective action problems that plague the efforts of parties seeking to reap joint gains in a process of institutional bargaining."

The transactional approach, focused on an exchange of benefits, might be of importance for leadership, but we should go a step further and conceive of leadership as being characterized by the pursuit of common objectives and, therefore, by a commonality of interests between leader and followers.[16] This trait of leadership, developed by social psychological theories, has been taken over by some authors in the field of IR. However, the idea of a leader not acting exclusively for the pursuit of its own national interest but rather helping a group of states in pursuing common goals is difficult to conceive of for IR scholars—and not just for realist ones. Moreover, the tendency in IR to ignore the possibility of a commonality of interests and goals between leader and followers is related to the strong focus which most analyses place on the leader, thereby disregarding the interests and motivations of followers. As Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal (1991) have demonstrated, ignoring the dynamics of followership can be misleading. Thus, the USA did not exercise "real" leadership in the second Gulf War, even though their allies seemed to "follow," because there was a lack of common interests and goals (ibid.: 399). "For in order to give leadership concrete meaning, a leader must have followers, those willing to buy into a broad vision of collective goals articulated by a leader in whom both legitimacy and trust are placed" (ibid.: 408).[17]

As Wiener (1995a) underlines, international leadership should be studied from a behavioral perspective, independently of the possession of material power resources by the leader. More generally, we can affirm that leadership does not imply the exercise of power by the leader since the followers' participation is voluntary and in their own interest. The provision of incentives or side payments is not relevant for understanding leadership. On the contrary, leadership implies "leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations—the wants and the needs, the aspirations and the expectations—of both leader and followers" (Burns 1978: 19).

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[16] On the distinction between "transactional" and "transformational" leadership see Goethals/ Sorenson/ Burns (2004:870). The focus on a commonality of gains between leaders and followers could be misleading in defining leadership: in fact, a state following an intermediate- or soft-hegemony strategy might also reap joint gains with its subordinates. As the theory of hegemonic stability tells us, subordinate states take advantage of the collective goods provided by the hegemon—and gain even more than the hegemon itself since they act as free riders. But this does not necessarily mean that they willingly follow the leader in the effort to reach common goals.

[17] For an interesting analysis on the responses by small regional states to the power of the dominant states (regionally and globally) see Acharya (2007: 642-650).

How, then, does international leadership take place? On the basis of the relevant literature, I argue that two kinds of leadership exist, depending on who initiates the leadership relationship. In this case also, Ikenberry and Kupchan's (1990b: 55-58) models of "hegemonic" order are helpful. On the one hand, in the "normative persuasion" model presented above, the "hegemon" (in this case, the leader) " engages in a process of socialization and ideological persuasion in which legitimacy emerges through the osmosis of norms and values from dominant to secondary elites" (ibid.: 57). On the other hand, the authors develop two legitimation models based on the voluntary participation of followers: The first, named "endogenous learning," is based on the development of identical norms and values in different states due to coincidence or to a common reaction to structural conditions.[18] The second, the "emulation" model, is focused on the adoption by the followers of the dominant state's norms and policies in an effort to imitate its success, but without attempts by the leader to influence their normative orientations or policies.

2.3.1 Leader-Initiated Leadership

The first possible way of establishing international leadership originates from the initiative of the leader. In this case the leader's strategy is based on its engagement in a socialization process with the aim of creating shared norms and values and generating "true" followership.

> The leader may have to consult, to explain, to persuade, even on occasion to cajole. But because followership involves followers intertwining their own interests with those of a leader in whom they place confidence and trust, these followers are likely not simply to defer and acquiesce to the leader, but to willingly follow that leader. (Cooper/Higgott/Nossal 1991: 398)

This model corresponds to the "normative persuasion" process outlined by Ikenberry and Kupchan. The difference between this leader-initiated leadership and hegemonic normative persuasion lies, as specified above, in the goals pursued: in soft hegemony, the hegemon promotes its own norms and values for the realization of its own interests and objectives, while in leadership the goals striven for are collective. It is also possible that the socialization process initiated by the leader makes followers aware of their group interests or of an existing commonality of interest with the leading state. In this context, I hypothesize that soft hegemony and leadership can represent different strategies in an ongoing process: the hegemon initiates a socialization process with the aim of realizing its own objectives, but in a second stage the adoption of its norms and values by subordinate states leads to a commonality of ends and interests, thereby transforming subordinates into followers. It is at this

[18] Instead of endogenous "learning" we should, however, talk about endogenous "adaptation." Learning implies an active, conscious process, while in this case we are dealing with an almost automatic and unconscious reaction to a given situation or context.

point that the dynamic and interactive character of strategy emerges, which is based on the assumption that "states may learn and in the process incorporate causal ideas and principled beliefs in revised state strategies" (Pedersen 2002: 683).

2.3.2 Follower-Initiated Leadership

The second kind of leadership relationship originates from the initiative of smaller states in need of a leader in order to achieve their common goals. This aspect, which is strongly neglected in IR theory, is derived as a logical consequence of the adoption of a "bottom-up" perspective on leadership, which not only concentrates on the leader, but also places the followers in the center of the analysis. A group of states can be too heterogeneous or simply too weak to reach a collective goal—and therefore in need of a leader to become capable of acting. This might happen, following Tucker's (1981: 15-18) reflections on political leadership, in two different situations: in crisis situations or, more specifically, if the group is threatened from outside, and in the "everyday business" of international relations.

In the first case, the leader will help the group achieve the common goal of defending itself or of reacting to the crisis situation by assuming a "directive" function. The followers will ask the leading state for help or, at least, for support in terms of coordination: "A leader is one who gives direction to a collective's activities" (ibid.: 15).

In the second case, the leader is induced by followers to adopt a "managerial" function, helping them "organizing action" (Wiener 1995a: 223) in order to reach their objectives. This implies that common norms and values and especially shared ends already exist among the group of states constituted by leader and followers—the aspect outlined in Ikenberry and Kupchan's "endogenous learning" model described above. The leader therefore does not have to launch a socialization process, but just has to bundle the interests of the group and "lead" its followers towards their realization.

Regardless of the initiator of leadership, in any case we can affirm (and this is one of the few points on which most leadership theories agree: e.g. Wiener 1995a: 225-226; Cooper/Higgott/Nossal 1991: 398; Rapkin 1990a: 196) that international leadership is always legitimated. This is due to the commonality of goals and to the convergence of norms and values between leader and followers: "followers see the leader as legitimately placed to make decisions on their behalf" (Cooper/Higgott/Nossal 1991: 398). By hypothesizing the existence of truly "benevolent" leadership strategies, I do not intend to assume that states act completely altruistically or against their own interests. This is simply not imaginable. Nor do I claim that the kind of leadership strategy and relationship outlined above is common in the empirical reality of international relations. However, the pursuit of common goals is not that unusual, at least in certain policy areas; I thus consider the inclusion of leadership in this discussion about the ideal-typical strategies of dominant states to be adequate and helpful.

3 Overview and Concluding Remarks

The aim of this paper was to clarify the meaning of empire, hegemony, and leadership as useful concepts for the study of possible strategies adopted by states which are clearly predominant in a certain international context. Table 1 recapitulates the findings derived from the theory-led distinction according to several dimensions identified as relevant.

Table 1: Main Features of Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership

	Empire	Hegemony			Leadership	
		Hard	Intermediate	Soft	Leader-initiated	Follower-initiated
Brief definition	System of domination based on the use or threat of military intervention	Establishment of an order for the realization of the hegemon's goals through coercion, but without recourse to military power	Establishment of an order for the realization of the hegemon's goals through the provision of material benefits	Establishment of an order for the realization of the hegemon's goals through normative persuasion and socialization	Pursuit of common goals through a socialization process launched by the leader	Pursuit of already existing common goals through the conferring upon the leader of a directive or managerial function
Ends	Egoistic	Egoistic	Egoistic	Egoistic	Common	Common
Means	Military intervention, threat of intervention	Sanctions, threats, political pressure	Material benefits/inducements: economic side payments, military support	Normative persuasion, socialization (e.g., through diplomatic channels, cultural exchange, student exchanges)	Normative persuasion, socialization process	Acceptance of directive or managerial function
Self-representation	Aggressive, threatening, compelling subordination	Cooperative	Cooperative	Cooperative	Cooperative	Cooperative
Discrepancy between self-representation and actual behavior	Low	High	Middle	Low	Low	Low
Legitimation	No legitimation	Pseudo-legitimation	Partial legitimation	Legitimation	Legitimation	Legitimation
Subordinate states' strategies	Resistance or subordination	Compliance based on rational calculations about the costs of non-compliance	Compliance based on rational cost-benefit calculations	Compliance based on redefinition of norms and values	Willing followership	Initiation of leadership as reaction to a threat/crisis or because of lack of coordination
Change in subordinate states' normative orientation due to dominant state's policy	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	(No)

Source: Author's compilation.

Some concluding remarks have to be made at this point. The distinctions between the features of empire, hegemony, and leadership are, as outlined above, ideal-typical. This implies that probably only rarely will a state follow a "pure" imperialistic, hard/intermediate/soft hegemonic, or leading strategy. Empire, hegemony, and leadership should be conceived of as points along a continuum reaching from the hardest and most coercive strategy imaginable, empire, to the most cooperative one, leadership. In most cases, I presume, the border-

lines between strategies are blurred. This is especially important for the three different forms of hegemony, since hegemonic regional powers will probably adopt a *combination* of material and ideational inducements to spread the norms, values, and conceptions of order most suitable to their interests. The heuristic instruments developed in this paper should therefore act as a guideline for analysis, but what most probably will be identified in empirical research are situations in which a particular form of strategic orientation *prevails*. Moreover, since strategy is dynamic and subject to learning processes (Pedersen 2002: 683), I assume that regional powers can modify their strategies in the course of time, passing, for instance, from a hard to an intermediate hegemonic strategy or from a soft hegemonic strategy to a leading strategy as a response to changed reactions in subordinate states, to domestic factors redefining state priorities, or to pressures deriving from the external environment, for example, from global powers.

On the basis of the insights derived from this theory-led identification of regional powers' strategies, further research will have to be devoted to the operationalization of the categories developed, as well as to the choice of appropriate methodological instruments for empirical analysis.

Other interesting questions which could be addressed using this conceptual framework as a point of departure are, on the one hand, the applicability of the outlined strategies in different policy areas—since, for example, the hardest strategies will probably not be applicable in fields like economic policy—and, on the other hand, how the interference of external powers in regional affairs limits the strategic options available to regional powers.

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