Technology, networks and international order
Technological revolutions

William Brown
So to start with Helen, can I ask you to outline in a bit more detail how both technology and networks as drivers of change operate within an international system that remains conceived of as a state-based system.

Helen Yanacopulos
Technological revolutions and waves of innovation have contributed to the rise of new economies in the past. And state-based and national systems of innovation have been part of that equation. Viewed from the perspective of the state centric views of international order this is clearly very important. For example for realists, this shuffling of the pack of economic leadership in the world is important for altering the balance of power by changing states' capabilities. For Marxists the uneven development of the capitalist world economy plays a central role in explaining the politics between states and both technology and networks therefore have some role in changing patterns of inequality of wealth and power. In Part Three, we see an explanation of what is called the "convergence club" which is made up of OECD wealthy countries, which has benefited from technological advancement and systems of innovation. It presents the international order with a group that is in a leadership position and a lot of developing countries which are in another group, a second group, following behind. This is being challenged by India and China; and what we see now, in levels of inequality, in measurements of levels of inequality, is India and China challenging the convergence club.

William Brown
Okay. So from that point of view we have an idea about technology fuelling economic change and that has an effect on relations between states because it affects who's the most technologically economically advanced and who's left behind and the divergence between the most powerful countries who are also the most advanced economies in the West and realists see that for example in changes in the balance of power being driven by technological change. So what about the second view that we wanted to look at about the role of networks within the politics of states?

Helen Yanacopulos
The more limited view of networks is that they can be seen as an increasingly potent political actor influencing the politics of states and this would easily fit with the views of international order associated with liberal analytic models. Here you have a view of international order in which the political struggles over state policy play a crucial role in determining state preferences, which in turn shape patterns of interdependence in the world. An example of this is the campaign over debt relief, and what we see with the debt relief campaigns, specifically Jubilee 2000, are a – an attempt to influence state politics and international organisation politics through campaigning through advocacy, through political mobilisation. And we see that continuing with the Make Poverty History campaigns that followed on from Jubilee 2000 and some would argue the Global Justice campaigns which are some would say networks of networks of campaigning organisations that are following the same pattern that Jubilee and Make Poverty History have followed.

William Brown
And the importance for international politics is that those campaigns change what states are seeking to achieve internationally. And so change international politics kind of from the inside out almost even though they are trans-national campaigns it's operating through state policy.

Helen Yanacopulos
Absolutely.

William Brown
So in that sense both technological change and networks viewed in these ways are important in terms of their impact on the politics of states. I just want to pause before going on to the – to our second version of this question – I want to pause and just discuss how far these ideas of change driven by technology networks are convincing and particularly how far they're new. Simon.

Simon Bromley
I think there is a question as to how far they're new. If you go back to the Nineteenth Century and look at the rise of Germany and Japan, which had a major impact on international order, there's a case of economic and technological change re-shuffling the pack internationally bringing about the rise of new powers, the eclipse of other powers. So for at least a couple of hundred years, at least as long as we've had an industrial world economy, this idea of economic and technological change, changing the distribution of capabilities amongst states, has been a fairly constant feature of the international order. So I think it's a question about the novelty of these processes there. I think there's also a question about how new networks are. Clearly networks based on information communication technologies in the modern sense are pretty new. But we've had powerful international networks before which have had an impact on state policy. One example that's discussed in Part Three, or at least mentioned in Part Three, is the international campaign against the slave trade in the Nineteenth Century. That arguably had as an important effect on the politics of its time as the debt campaigns, anti-debt campaigns do in our time. So that's another grounds for caution as to how far these processes are really new.

William Brown
That's questioning the newness. It's not questioning the importance of these drivers of change within international order. In fact it's rather emphasising their importance by going back in time and showing…

Simon Bromley
…Indeed…

William Brown
…their importance in the past.

Simon Bromley
Yes.

William Brown
In terms of the newness of networks – do you want to come in Helen?

Helen Yanacopulos
Yeah – one thing that is different in the ICT-driven networks is the speed and the reach and the importance of information and I think that's something that has to be also kept in mind. The slavery campaign took over fifty years whereas the debt campaign actually lasted only about three or four. So what we're seeing is a – is a rapid increase because of ICT's. And they're the same processes I would argue as well that have existed, that have existed in the past. However, we're seeing an acceleration of the processes because of ICT's acting as an enabler for speed.

William Brown
And that's why technology networks come together because what you're saying is new technology has changed the speed with which networks can have an impact on state policies.