Part 1:

Part one defines what is meant by the term great power (or super power). Bull describes that firstly: in use of the term super power there is an implication that there are at least two or more powers comparable in status, taking the United States as an example, some critics have argued that in the mid-1960’s they had so far out-stripped the Soviet Union that they were the single dominant power in the world. If they were then the United States could no longer rightly be called a great power. Secondly: through implication, in order for a state to remain a superpower it must be comparable to other great powers militarily, it must also be able to maintain its own security without allies and against all comers. Thirdly: great powers are unique in the fact that they are expected to play a role in the determining of issues that affect peace and the security of international relations as a whole. Therefore states which are great military powers but are not deemed responsible for determining issues are not properly speaking great powers. The idea of great powers as a whole implies the idea of an international society rather than an international system, and the recognition of special rights and duties of great powers is not accorded because of the United Nations but in fact made possible because of it.

(Although great powers are defined by their military capabilities among other things, it is a mistake to define a great power through its nuclear capabilities, as states such as the United States and the Soviet Union were recognized as superpowers before their acquisition of strategic nuclear arms.)

Due to their similar standings in international relations by varying means, the United States, Russia and China are generally accepted by the international community as being the dominant or great powers of today. Their predominance can be gauged by the degree of attention paid them by other states in deciding their foreign and military policies. However under the second criterion previously examined it is arguable if China should be excluded from the list, due to its relative backwardness in military capabilities, in this sense it remains only a great power on a regional scale. Under the third criterion both the United States and the Soviet Union are generally deemed by the international community to have certain international responsibilities, however in the case of China the general rhetoric goes so far as to deny that China is, or seeks to become, a great power. Though China’s status as a great power remains so due to its standing as the champion of the ‘have-not’ states of the third world in their struggle against ‘super power hegemonism’.
Part 2:

In part 2 Bull defines the inequalities of states and its results on international relations. Because states are grossly unequal in power, generally weak states must submit to the will of strong states. The inequality of states in terms of power has the effect of simplifying the pattern of international relations. However above all the contributions great powers are said to make, their dominance over other states is partly the reason for international order and stability, as they pursue policies that work for international order rather than against it. Great powers greatly contribute to international order due to their dominance over other states within their sphere of influence. This dominance imparts a degree of central direction to the affairs of international society as a whole. Great powers attempt to maintain international order through the preservation of the general balance of power and mutual nuclear deterrence.

Part 3:

Avoidance and control of crisis: usually great powers attempt to avoid entering each-other’s spheres of influence, however this does not mean that they do not sometimes attempt to provoke or intensify certain crises. Although sometimes great powers seek to intensify certain crises, the general policy making when the United States and Soviet Union find themselves associated with opposite sides has been in attempt to restrain their associates.

Part 4:

Limitation of war: Great powers also contribute to international order through measures taken to avoid war, which in the nuclear era, is of far greater importance than it has ever been before. This is done in a number of ways but majorly done through the aversion of Dangerous crises, the reduction of misunderstandings between great powers, the controlling of the competition of armaments through treaties, and the mitigation of confrontation between lesser powers.

Part 5:

Part 5 defines the unilateral exercise of preponderance and describes it as taking three forms, which are as follows.
Dominance: characterised by the habitual use of force by a great power against lesser states. An example of dominance would be the position of the United States in relation to the states of Central America and the Caribbean from late in the 18th century where the preponderance of the United States was expressed in habitual and uninhibited military intervention in the internal affairs and external relations of the local states. Dominance in short is a relationship in which a great power stops just short of imperial sovereignty but treats the states within its hinterland as second-class members of international society.

Primacy: is achieved through greater powers preponderance over lesser states without the use of force. The position of leadership given to a greater power is conceded freely by lesser states due to the contribution the greater power provides. A good example is NATO, in this case the United States is given the position of leadership due to the fact that the other members are dependent on the U.S for their defence.

Hegemony: Imperialism with good manners. Where a great power exercises hegemony over the lesser powers in a particular area, there is a resort to force and the threat of force, but this is not habitual and uninhibited but occasional and reluctant. The great power prefers to rely upon other instruments other than the direct use of force. In this sense the great power is willing to violate the rights of sovereignty enjoyed by lesser states but it does not disregard it.

Part 6:

The idea of spheres of influence can presumably go back to the papal bull assigning exclusive rights of conquest to both Castile and Portugal in particular areas of the world. The classic period of spheres-of-influence agreements was the late nineteenth century, the first was an agreement between colonial powers to recognize each other’s exclusive rights in areas which were either *territorium nullius* or inhabited by groups not recognizable as sovereign states. Spheres of influence are usually ambiguous and are not in all cases recognized by the other party as legitimate, they are instead generally recognized and understood through the behavior and actions of great powers not through formal treaties or agreements. Spheres are generally placed into one of two groups, negative and positive. Negative spheres is where a great power has sought to exclude other powers in order to have them recognize their désintéressement in what that power was seeking to achieve in a particular area. Positive spheres set up a division of labour among parties to it in the execution of a common task, it establishes spheres of responsibility.

Part 7:
The great powers of today do in fact at least in some measure carry out the roles that have been mentioned in previous paragraphs. Thus the international order that is provided by these great powers is celebrated by most states, even at the cost of justice within weaker states. However due to their position as great powers the responsibilities that rest on them can also be a hindrance. In order to be accepted as legitimate managerial leaders, great powers must at least be seen to accommodate the demands of lesser countries within their policies, lesser powers however are not under these constraints and may shrug off responsibility.