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Order without Victory: International Order Theory Before and After Liberal Hegemony

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This article contributes a step towards the consolidation of the wide-ranging intellectual history and rapidly growing literature of international order theory. It traces the development of international order theory across three eras: 1919 and the interwar era; 1945 and the Cold War era; and 1989–1991, the post-Cold War era and rise of the "liberal" order debate. Gathering this history finds that critics in contemporary debates are deploying arguments with a quasi-polemical style similar to those used by E.H. Carr and others in past international order debates. These polemical qualities, it is suggested, may likely make contemporary debates difficult to assess and persistently controversial, even after the contemporary crisis of international order has run its course in practice.

Este artículo contribuye a consolidar la amplia historia intelectual y la creciente literatura sobre la teoría del orden internacional. Analiza el desarrollo de la teoría del orden internacional en tres épocas: 1919 y la época de entreguerras, 1945 y la época de la Guerra Fría, y 1989–1991, la época posterior a la Guerra Fría y el auge del debate sobre el orden «liberal». Recopilando esta historia se constata que, en los debates contemporáneos, los críticos despliegan argumentos con un estilo cuasi polémico similares a los utilizados por E.H. Carr y otros en anteriores debates sobre el orden internacional. Se sugiere que estas cualidades polémicas pueden hacer que los debates contemporáneos sean difíciles de evaluar y persistentemente controvertidos, incluso después de que la crisis contemporánea del orden internacional haya seguido su curso en la práctica.

Le présent article permet de faire progresser la consolidation du large éventail de l'histoire intellectuelle et de la littérature sur la théorie de l'ordre international qui connaît une croissance rapide. Il retrace l'élaboration de la théorie de l'ordre international en trois époques: 1919 et l'entre-deux-guerres; 1945 et la guerre froide; 1989–1991, l'après-guerre froide et l'avènement du débat sur l'ordre « libéral ». Le rassemblement de cette histoire permet d'établir que les critiques des débats contemporains utilisent des arguments au style quasi polémique, similaires à ceux employés par E.H. Carr ou d'autres figures des débats passés sur l'ordre international. Il est suggéré que ces qualités polémiques pourraient compliquer l'évaluation des débats contemporains et les rendre toujours plus controversés, même après la fin pratique de la crise contemporaine de l'ordre international.

Introduction

It is a truism, perhaps still best expressed by Marx, that the predominant ideas of any age are those of the powerful. It was Marx's charge and complaint, however, that because these predominant ideas, as ideologies, fail to fully grasp historical and sociological reality, they contribute to their own contradictions and instabilities in practice. E.H. Carr made this kind of attack on interwar thinkers, suggesting their ideas were the ideology of the sated "liberal" powers and, as such, failed to fully grasp reality and contributed to its own limitations in practice. Similar styles of argument are being deployed again in the "liberal" international order debate today. Realist critics (Mearsheimer 2018; Walt 2018; Porter 2020) most forcefully have argued that "liberal hegemony" in practice is self-defeating, highlighting how its policy advocates are "deluded" and its theorists fail to grasp the realities of power politics. Critical theorists too (Jahn 2018, 2013) have charged "liberal" international order theory with eliding the processes by which liberal internationalism in practice constructs the conditions that produce its own contradictions and crisis.

This "liberal" international order debate has generated enormous interest and is arguably among the most significant debates in International Relations (IR) today, both for its import for practice and for its implications for theory (Acharya 2017, 2018; Deudney and Ikenberry 2018; Goddard 2018; Hurrell 2018; Ikenberry 2018; Jervis et al. 2018; Duncombe and Dunne 2018; Lissner and Rapp-Hooper 2018, 2020; Schake 2019; Mearsheimer 2019; Badie 2019; Ikenberry and Nexon 2019; Goh 2019; Goh and Sahashi 2020; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann 2020; Flockhart 2020; Cooley and Nexon 2020; Norlof et al. 2020; Porter 2020; de Graaff, ten Brink, and Parmar 2020; Lascurettes 2020; Adler and Drieschova 2021; Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021; Buzas 2021; Farrell and Newman 2021; Tourinho 2021; Weiss and Wallace 2021; Lake, Martin, and Risse 2021; Molloy 2021; McKeil 2021, 2022a). While the burgeoning of this literature in response to contemporary crises of international order is making numerous important and innovative contributions, there is a sense that many of the controversies and arguments involved have been made before, and that in these debates there is a danger of wheel reinvention and an oversight of exchanges and insights made in prior debates. At the same time, while the intellectual and disciplinary history of IR has received growing interest (Long and Wilson 1995; Hall 2012; Ashworth 2014; Rosenboim 2017), the broad and growing literature of international order theory remains scattered and difficult to fully employ for scholars engaging in contemporary debates. There is opportunity for gathering and assessing ideas and arguments made in prior debates about international order and for clarifying how the concept of order and its surrounding debates have developed and changed over time.

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With these aims, this article contributes a step towards consolidating the wide-ranging intellectual history and rapidly growing literature of international order theory, conceived as a subset of IR theory more broadly. I find that in the crisis of the "liberal" international order today, its expression in theory has been met by a phalanx of critiques deploying arguments with a quasi-polemical style similar to those used in past debates about international order. By polemical, I mean a kind of argument that makes a strong critique with the deliberate aim of invalidating and discrediting its target, so as to advance an alternative position. Carr's critique of interwar "liberal" internationalism and his characterization of it as "utopian" science, so as to make room for his preferred approach, is an iconic and influential example (Carr 2016 [1939]). By way of conclusion, I suggest that the use of this style of argument in contemporary debates about international order, leaning heavily on critique and blame, is likely to make the debate's outcome and assessment of its positions persistently controversial, even when contemporary crises of international order are resolved in practice.

I make and present this argument through a chronological overview of the historical background and development of international order theory. I consider how the concept of international order and its explanation in theory have changed over time, while underscoring major theoretical interventions that have influenced its history.

The Sources of International Order Theory

By "international order theory," I mean texts that have abstracted the concept of international order and have sought to explain and understand it. The literatures of international studies and IR are broader than the literature international order although the study of international order has nevertheless been a prominent literature in them (Lascurettes and Poznansky 2021).

The theory of "international order" is relatively modern literature. The ancient and medieval worlds contained ideas of "order" among polities, typically conceived as hierarchical cosmic harmonies. In the modern age, these ideas transformed into distinctly "international" and progressive notions of "ordering" the world. The perpetual peace literature, for instance, from L'Abbé de Saint-Pierre to Kant's *Perpetual Peace* and Bentham's international peace proposal, expresses the characteristically modern idea of a progressively ordered international world. Modern cosmologies of humankind in the universe also reconfigured what order in the world could mean and gave rise to scientific theories of how order could be deliberately reconfigured and managed (Allan 2018). The emergence of modern visions and practices of ordering the international world involved continuities with the ancient and medieval thought, being made by repurposing and reformulating older inherited ideas. Medieval ideas of God's imposed order in the world, for instance, have been shown to have prefigured influential modern Western concepts of international order as something that is imposed on the world (Bain 2020). Modern ideas of *international* order have involved further important changes. The works of international law, such as in Grotius, Pufendorff, and Vattel in particular, developed modern notions of an existing international order alongside the emergence of modern political theories of the state, sovereignty and practices of foreign policy, i.e., the emergence of modern state power (Schmidt 1998; Armitage 2013; Ashworth 2014).

The Napoleonic Wars and their settlement, 1815, are often noted as a watershed moment when the modern idea of "ordering" the world, expressed earlier in theory, was experimented with in practice (Mazower 2012; Sluga 2021b). Beyond Europe, however, the early modern world contained numerous international orders, loosely connected, each with longstanding traditions of "world order" thought (Suzuki, Zhang, and Quirk 2014; Buzan and Acharya 2022). In a globalizing world, the rise of modern nation-states and global interaction captured the political imagination of modern thinkers such as Mazzini and Marx, who articulated sweeping visions of "reordering" the modern international world (Bell 2007, 2016; Mazower 2012, 13–7; Ashworth 2014; Lawson and Buzan 2015; Acharya and Buzan 2019, 8–12). The modern global empires of this age also later established the fields of colonial administration and race relations, which contributed to the intellectual terrain out of which international order theory later emerged (Vitalis 2015). All these modern ideas and discourses about "international order" formed the political and intellectual milieu from which its predominant approaches emerged when, in the interwar era, academic and popular interest in international order exploded (Long and Wilson 1995; Williams 2007; Ashworth 2014; Rosenboim 2017; Acharya and Buzan 2019, 8–12).

In my examination of the literature of international order, I find continuities and gradual changes across its eras, but also moments punctuated by flurries of literature around the conclusion of world wars and major world order changes in practice. Following this pattern, I organize the literature into three eras:

(1) 1919 and the interwar flurry of international order thought,
(2) 1945 and the post-war emergence of international order "theory,"
(3) 1989–1991, post-Cold War theory, and the rise of the "liberal" international order debate.

In each of these eras, I find considerable intellectual diversity of approaches, surrounding predominant approaches. The method employed in my analysis as such is contextualist, but also diachronic, showing how changes in the theory of international order have followed changing contextual circumstances and experiences of international order in practice (Bevir 2004, 212–64, Ashworth 2014, 3–4). The history of international order theory offered below is not comprehensive—space available makes this impossible—but it strives to provide an inclusive analysis of its intellectual development, which illuminates patterns of arguments across it.

(1) *1919 and the Interwar Flurry of International Order Thought*

The course and aftermath of the First World War gave urgency to international order as a problem, the challenge of how to make a lasting peace system. As power shifted to the Atlantic victors, statespersons, including Woodrow Wilson most prominently, sought a "new" kind of international order, chiefly through the League of Nations (Williams 2007; Cohrs 2022). The concept of "international order" in this context was generally understood as an aspirational and normative ambition. Debates about international order in this era revolved around how best to make a lasting and reasonably just order as a working peace system. For thinkers in this era, the "idea of order embodied their attempt to make sense and reorganise the belligerent and disordered post-war world" (Rosenboim 2017, 3). Interwar international jurisprudence approached the problem of making

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international order as one of devising mechanisms to conciliate and constrain sovereigns in a shared legal order, i.e., the idea of "world order through world law" (Koskenneimi 2004, 406; Hathaway and Shapiro 2017). George W. Keeton's *National Sovereignty and International Order*, for example, argued, "a fundamental change must be made in the attitude of the international lawyer towards war" (Keeton 1939, 176).

In this context, the influential idea emerged, following G. Lowes Dickinson's famous formulation of the problem, that in the "history of Europe there is a turning-point that marks the defeat of the ideal of a world-order and the definite acceptance of international anarchy" (Dickinson 1917, 13). This idea of "anarchy" was also increasingly combined with the idea of its "global" setting (Rosenboim 2017). Working with these ideas, prominent thinkers such as Alfred Zimmern, Leonard Woolf, J.A. Hobson, and David Mitrany advanced international organization as an "anarchy" ordering device (Long and Wilson 1995; Long 1996; Schmidt 1998; Wilson 2003). The role of empire and imperialism in the making of world order was another characteristic feature of many interwar writings (Morefield 2005, 136–8). Imperial visions of order-making in this era, moreover, were often wrapped in a modern social Darwinist worldview, reflected in ideas of global racial hierarchies (Mazower 2009, 82; Bell 2020).

For Zimmern, the British Empire was imagined as a leading imperial-hegemonic source of world order, on the model of the ancient Athenian Empire (Mazower 2009, 66–76). Zimmern's (1936) greatest work, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law,* presents the history of the League, from the "old order" through the League to an aspired more orderly international future (Markwell 1986). His main insight into the idea of international order, as an aspirational concept, in this and other works was that international order requires not only the machinery of international organization but also, and perhaps more importantly, an "international consciousness" and "internationalist spirit" to make effective use of it. Although his writings conveyed an aspirational concept of order, he was not unthoughtful or unanalytical in his treatment of it. In his essay, "The Ethical Presuppositions of a World Order," for instance, he distinguished the concepts of a "world order which exists" from one that might or might not come to exist for a nascent "world society," both of which were contrasted with the idea that "there is no world order and, humanly speaking, there can never be one" (Zimmern 1938, 27).

Among the most ardent proponents of "world order" in the interwar era, whose aspirational conception of order was characteristic of the time, was Lionel Curtis. Like many others in this era, Curtis was deeply religious in his approach to order while also "global" in his conception of its challenges, defending a world federalist path to world order. For Curtis, international law without a federal power above it "is just that old wolf anarchy, closely disguised in a clothing of legal sheepskin" (Curtis 1939, 307). Famous, at the time, was the American journalist Clarence K. Streit's *Union Now* (1938), which called for a transatlantic federal union as a path to order selling over 300,000 copies. Perhaps the most famous proponent of "world order" in this era, however, was the author H.G. Wells, who offered another world federalist vision of world order in his *The New World Order* (1940), while he gave his preferred vision a global socialist character (Bew 2017; Bell 2018). In practice, however, during the interwar years, fascist powers were also prominent on the international stage, calling for "new orders" in Europe and Asia. Mixed in the discourse of this context were visions of "fascist internationalism" as well, calling for order through international organization (Steffek 2015).

In this era, there was also a growth in thought about international economic order, notably in John Maynard Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (2019 [1919]), and Lionel Robbins' *Economic Planning and International Order* (1937). For Keynes, the peace settlement created a strained situation needing the "re-establishment of prosperity and order" (Keynes 2019 [1919], 193). Earlier, Normal Angell's *The Great Illusion* (1909) had argued that economic globalization was producing incentives and interests conducive to peace, although not necessarily its sufficient basis. Lenin's (1916) essay on imperialism depicted the inverse trend of imperial globalization as a precondition of inter-imperial war. Among Marxist economic approaches to international order, Lenin may have produced the most influential writings in this era, but other interwar Marxist thinkers became influential and remain of interest today, notably Trotsky and Gramsci. Trotsky's "Uneven and Combined Development" theory has grown into a research agenda and full-fledged IR theory, UCD (Rosenberg 2006). And, Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* and further writings made important theoretical insights into the nature of power and role of elite networks, for instance, that remain enduring insights and sources of inspiration and interest for contemporary neo-Gramscian approaches to international order (Cox 1996; Parmar 2019).

In the interwar context, women's international thought also became increasingly pronounced, particularly through the advocacy of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and prominent intellectuals and academics such as Jane Addams, Dorothy Buxton, Lucy Philip Mair, and Helena Swanwick (Owens 2018; Tickner and True 2018; Owens and Rietzler 2020). The idea of international order as gendered and patriarchal gained clearer expression, although women's international order thought in this era included numerous and varied outlooks. Some advanced aspirational notions of international order through progressive peace, while others advanced thought on the hierarchical orders of race, class, and empire too (Owens, Rietzler, Hutchings, Dunstan 2022). Among these thinkers and texts, Florence Melian Stawell's *The Growth of International Thought* (1929) is a classic (Sluga 2021a). The text conveys a story about the growth of "internationalist" ideas and practices, from the ancients through the post-Napoleonic moderns. Only when states have formed a League and make use of it, Stawell suggests, "Then it might fairly be said that the belligerent offering arbitration was now acting in the interests of world-order" (Stawell 1929, 129). Swanwick's numerous works offer further textual examples of lasting interest (Ashworth 2011; Owens and Rietzler 2020), including *Women and War* (1915), *The Builders of Peace* (1924), *New Wars for Old* (1934), *Collective Insecurity* (1937), and *The Roots of Peace* (1938). For Swanwick, the League's reliance on punitive collective security and sanctions would not produce order, but the League's diplomatic capacities, if used to instil the habits and atmosphere of cooperation, promised an order in the making.

In this era, intellectuals and leaders of the Pan-African movement also made distinctive insights into international order, critiquing the racialized ordering of international politics while developing alternative visions of international orders without domination (Shilliam 2006; Vitalis 2015; Henderson 2017; Abrahamsen 2020; Getachew 2020; Barder 2021). The lack of racial equality as a world order principle and the embedded racial hierarchies of modern imperialism formed defining features of the international order of

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the era (Acharya 2022; Gani and Marshall 2022). Intellectuals of the Pan-African movement brought these features of international order into theoretical focus. The ideas and insights of W.E.B. Du Bois in particular, and his influence on the Howard School of international thought, have been of increasing influence and interest among international theorists (Henderson 2017; Mamphilly 2022). His article, "The African Roots of War" (1915), for instance, has been noted for anticipating Lenin's theory of imperialism, and his insights into the problem of international order as that of a global "colour line" marks a significant development in the theory of international order.

Political actors and thinkers beyond the Atlantic world in the interwar era produced writings on international order that were often anti-colonial in character but also tended to draw upon non-European traditions of political thought (Acharya and Buzan 2019, 97; Bayly 2022; Hartnett 2022). In Asia, there was also general disappointment with the Versailles settlement, instigating new thinking about alternative and regional international orders (Zachmann 2017). Sun Yat Sen's writings, such as *The International Development of China* (1922), proposed international organization as a means to assist in the development of China, and offered a Pan-Asian vision of order. Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (1944) also conveyed a vision of an anti-imperial international order in a "world association" beyond traditional great power politics.

Although the literature of international order was clearly diverse and busy in this era, one text from this context has stood above the others in the disciplinary memory, perhaps with the most lasting influence E.H. Carr's *Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (Wilson 1998; Cox 2000). Carr's arguments made powerful and damaging critiques of the prevailing "liberal" order and a wide and varied range of thinkers, lumping them into his category of "idealists" (Wilson 1998). Carr's alternative proposal for international order through accommodation of dissatisfied powers suffered its own serious limitations, and his critique of wide-ranging and varied international order thinkers as "utopian" suffered from the imprecision of a broadside assault, but the damage done was significant, partly because Carr's rhetorical power was derived from the indiscriminate and inexact force of a polemic (Wilson 1998). He offered little evidence that the order was in fact brought into crisis by its "liberal" character, rather than by the rise of illiberal politics or other factors, and his argument elided fuzzy connections implied between a "liberal" international order in practice and "idealist" international theory. His text nevertheless became an iconic classic with lasting influence on the way international order is thought about and discussed in the field.

Carr's argument contained a certain logic that deliberately sought to make this lasting effect. Firstly, he attacked "liberal" internationalism as the prevailing ideology of the sated powers, then, secondly, charged it therefore with failing to fully grasp reality in practice, and consequently accused it of failing to offer real insight into how to make order while even contributing to the worsening of tensions between sated and dissatisfied powers. Then, having indiscriminately cleared away a wide and varied range of theories, Carr advanced his own preferred version of "realism." He marshalled little evidence in support of his argument, however. He argued the "liberal" features of the League order were a continuation of nineteenth century liberal order projects, and then he pointed to the existence of a crisis in the 1930s and its failure to conform to liberal aspirations. But he offered little if any evidence that these "liberal" features of the order were the singular or primary source of the order's crisis. Counterfactually, moreover, it is unlikely that the outbreak of the Second World War could have been avoided, even if Western powers had recognized the existence of conflicting interests and further modified the prevailing order, as Carr's argument suggested was necessary (Dunne 2000, 223). Carr's argument problematically implied a policy of "appeasement," and his conflations of power with reality and morality with utopia muddles his argument further (Wilson 2009), but his attack on "idealists" has nevertheless had lasting implications for how international order is thought about and discussed in theory.

Carr made numerous other publications, including *Conditions of Peace* (1942), *Nationalism and After* (2020 [1945]), and a lecture on "moral" world order held at Denver University, published in E.L. Woodward's volume *Foundations of World Order* (1949), in addition to his lengthy works on the Soviet experience. In these texts, he developed and advanced a preferred alternative vision of an economically managed international order. It was his polemical attack against a wide and varied array of theory, however, that has been Carr's enduring legacy in the field. The idealist-realist dichotomy advanced as a polemical device in Carr's *Twenty Years' Crisis,* has contributed to a blurred disciplinary memory of the diversity of interwar international order thought (Wilson 1998), and the use of his style of argument has become something of a trope of the literature.

(2) *1945 and the Post-War Emergence of International Order "Theory"*

International order thought in the wake of the Second World War held many continuities with the prior interwar era, but new concerns also emerged, in a new wave of literature. New agendas emerged concerning post-war settlement and reconstruction, decolonization, and nuclear weapons. Classical realist responses gained steam in this context, although many contained new aspirational notions of order-making. Before the conclusion of the war, Nicholas Spykman's *America's Strategy in World Politics* argued that "balanced power is the only approximation to order" (Spykman 1942, 25). In the post-war years and nuclear age, several classical realists, such as Hans J. Morgenthau in his *Politics among Nations* (1948), advanced the need to develop a world community and potentially a world government as a basis for world order (Craig 2003; Scheuerman 2011). This era, in hindsight, is described as the "heyday" of advocacy for world order through world government (Scheuerman 2011). Henry Kissinger's *A World Restored* (1957), contrary to several of his contemporary realists, turned instead to a study of concert diplomacy as a world order approach. Although realism gained prominence, this era was intellectually diverse and productive, further developing traditions from the interwar era, including Marxism, while the politics of decolonization increasingly became a source of international order thought too (Pham and Shilliam 2016; Getachew 2020). "Liberal" international theory was not entirely vanquished either. Inis L. Claude Jr., for instance, developed a pragmatic liberal internationalist approach to international order that was pluralistic and American-style. His *Swords into Plowshares* (1956) was one-time required reading for IR students. It made the case for international order through pragmatic international organization and critiqued both the balance of power approach to international order and the proponents of world government.

The concept of order changed in the post-war context, however, as the idea of "theory" emerged and the distinction between descriptive and normative approaches

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became more apparent (Guiholt 2011). A particularly influential Rockefeller-funded conference on "The Conditions of World Order" was held in Bellagio in 1965, later published as a special issue of *Daedalus* (1966) and as a collected volume (1968). The contributions included notable figures such as Kissinger, Raymond Aron, and Stanley Hoffmann, among others. In his conference paper "The Anarchical Order of Power," Aron (1966) discerned five definitions of world order, two descriptive (order as any arrangement or order as the relations of parts), two that were partly descriptive and partly normative (order as the minimum conditions of *existence* or order as the minimum conditions of *coexistence*), and one purely normative (order as the good life). The fourth definition (order as the minimum conditions of coexistence) was noted as the favoured definition by Hoffmann in his summary of the conference (Hoffmann 1966). Revisiting the collected texts of this conference, however, it becomes evident that there were also deeper or broader contentions about how order can be conceived. The final two papers of the collected volume, for instance, "Buddhism and World Order" and "Toward a World Order: An African Viewpoint," made the point that more profoundly distinct outlooks on "world order" exist in non-Western perspectives. It was Aron's minimalist definition, however, that came to be more widely used in international order theory.

Within Britain, at the London School of Economics and through the Rockefeller-funded British Committee on International Theory, the study of international order also became the heart of a distinct research agenda, defined by the idea of an "international society" (Suganami 2003; Hall 2012). C.A.W. Manning also advanced this approach at the LSE, with influence on his students who were "not agreed as to the precise content which should be given of the concept of international order … But in general terms they unreservedly endorse the contention that the international society can properly be described as ordered" (James 1973, 8). Martin Wight, also, in famous lectures at the LSE and in Chicago during the 1950s, developed the theory that international institutions have deeper ideational sources that make ordered international relations possible (Wight 1992; Porter 2007). Wight analysed institutions not by their structures or procedural rules as such, but by their embedded and animating "ideas" (Hall 2012, 103). Bull's landmark *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (1977) adapted these concepts and approaches from Manning and Wight. Bull also adopted Aron's minimal definition of international order, combining it with other ideas. "By international order I mean a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society" (Bull 1977, 8). Bull's adoption of a "minimal" and "purposive" definition has been widely influential in its own right (Hurrell 2006, 2–3). In the context of a perceived decline of British and Western power in world politics (Hall 2012), Bull also worked with Adam Watson and the British Committee to advance the historical study of international order through explorations of "the transition from a European to a global international order" (Bull 2000, 175; Dunne and Reus-Smit 2017).

It should also be noted that Bull's earlier work contributed insights into nuclear order in his book *The Control of the Arms Race* (1961) and influential essay "Arms Control and World Order" (1976). Bull's distinctive contribution was to explore the sources of nuclear arms races, in the competing values of rival powers, and to insist that nuclear order was possible through responsible arms control based on common interests (Bull 1980). In this context, the literature of Strategic Studies was rethinking the sources of international order as based on "a delicate adjustment of power to power, a mutual exploration of intentions and capabilities, so as to find and preserve an order which, though fully satisfying to nobody, is just tolerable to all" (Howard 2009 [1964], 153). Classics of nuclear strategy, such as *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (1946), explored the question of whether nuclear weapons necessitated a revised world order model, with lasting influence on the theory of nuclear order and understandings of its role in international order (Paul, Harknett, and Wirtz 1998).[1]

Meanwhile, starting in the 1960s, the World Order Models Project was organizing by far the largest and most systematic world order research project in the history of the field (McKeil 2022b). Convened by Saul Mendlovitz from the 1960s to 1990, WOMP organized a global body of eminent scholars to systematically explore alternative preferred world order models attainable in the short- to medium-term future of the 1990s (Falk and Mendlovitz 1966; Falk 1975). WOMP developed a partly descriptive but largely normative approach to world order. In this literature, Richard Falk's essay, "Contending Approaches to World Order," defined world order ambitiously as a just world order realizing the common values of humankind (Falk 1977, 187). The critics of WOMP, internal and external, charged it with Enlightenment-style "utopianism," although WOMP scholars defended their approach as one of "realistic utopias" (Walker 1994).

Falk's participation in this project was highly influential on the project and the study of world order in general. Notably, Bull's engagement with Falk was formative in the refinement of his own concepts and approach, sharpening their conceptual differences on order and justice, and the debated question of whether the path to order lay through international society or world society. Falk's enduring insight into world order is that due to its great power-centric structure, the common interests of humankind are superseded and subverted by the interests of great power politics, stymying progress on common interests in climate change, nuclear arms control, and equitable global development (1975). This argument remains influential in the contemporary debates on international order (Falk 2016), as well as in the literature of world order reform, including in the cosmopolitan world order and global democracy literature (Archibugi, Koenig-Archibugi, and Raffaele 2011; Cabrera 2018).

A student of Falk, Friedrich V. Kratochwil, produced an early "constructivist" text, employing the social theory of "rules" and their "grammar," "to develop an approach to the problem of international order" (Kratochwil 1978, 1). Within the 1970s, analytical approaches, leaning towards the descriptive conception of order, became influential, however. An influential example was the approach to order-making through complex interdependence, advanced by Keohane and Nye (1977). When Waltz (1979) made his watershed structural realist intervention two years later, however, he removed complex transnational relations from the analytical picture. Distinguishing anarchical versus hierarchical orders and positing the perpetual patterning of the balance of power, he suggested a shifting equilibrium of power approach to international order.

In this context, the order implications of US decline became a major concern in the literature. Stanley Hoffman, for instance, published another major statement, *Primacy or World Order*, developed as papers for the Council on Foreign

[1] For the emerging theory and practice of cyber order, see Kello (2017).

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Relations' 1980's Project and its successor working group on International Order (1978, 15). This book has an uncanny relevance today and offers an immense depth of thought on the problem of international order through a critical reflection on Kissinger's approach as well as his WOMP critics. Anticipating the decline of US primacy, Hoffman argued for a US foreign policy that took into greater account the interests of its allies, creating an evolutive and adaptive international order in greater collaboration with them rather than imposing one on them.

Also, in this context, Charles Kindleberger's *The World in Depression, 1929–1939* (1973) offered the thesis that open international economic orders require stabilizing hegemons. Power transition theory suggested international orders generate disorder and war in periods of hegemonic transition between rising and declining powers (Organski 1968, Organski and Kugler 1980). Building on these works, Robert Gilpin's *War & Change in World Politics* (1981) brought a refined approach to the study of hegemonic orders, notable for its integration of security order and international economic order. Gilpin sought to explain the sources and forces of change in international orders, pinning the wheel of change on hegemonic struggles. For Gilpin, "The peace settlement following such a hegemonic struggle reorders the political, territorial, and other bases of the system" (Gilpin 1981, 15). In this context, John Gerrard Ruggie also contributed his highly influential concept of "embedded liberalism" in his argument that liberal ordering purposes would remain "embedded" within the institutions of the economic order, even after the decline of US hegemony (Ruggie 1982). In turn, Keohane's *After Hegemony* suggested international order could be fashioned in areas of overlapping interest, without hegemons (Keohane 1984).

Intervening in these debates, Robert Cox made the influential intervention of "critical" theory in his now classic article, "Social Forces, States and World Orders" (1981). Cox's theoretical attack against "problem-solving" theory held a similar, if not the same, logical structure as Carr's earlier polemic against "utopian" idealists. In his argument, Cox's first move was to claim that "Theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose" (Cox 1981, 128). This he suggested applied to mainstream theories, which undercut their pretence to universality and general applicability by reducing them to "ideologies." "When any theory so represents itself," Cox argued, "it is the more important to examine it as ideology, and lay bare its concealed perspective" (1981, 128). Cox's second move was then to argue that mainstream theories were "problem-solving" theories that, therefore, failed to see or explain the sources of world order transformations happening in practice.

Cox's argument, in places, explicitly gestures towards Carr. He notes, for instance, that unlike problem-solving theorists, "E.H. Carr" was "sensitive to the continuities between social forces, the changing nature of the state and global relationships" (1981, 127). And elsewhere, he describes problem-solving theory as stuck in fixed frameworks, "rather than standing back from this framework, in the manner of E.H. Carr" (Cox 1981, 131). Deploying an argument with a similar logical structure to Carr's, Cox attacked mainstream theory to advance his preferred world order theory. His argument did not dislodge mainstream theory, but it did make a lasting influence on the literature, giving rise to "critical" theory's search for an emancipatory world order transformation (Linklater 1992). It is easily overlooked that this article was explicitly about the theory of "world order." Like Carr, Cox also considered an alternative approach to world order in practice. Having cleared away mainstream IR theory as "problem-solving," Cox suggested the hegemonic US-led order was in decline, and an alternative non-hegemonic order was emerging. As history unfolded, however, it was the methodological aspects of his argument that have been most remembered and influential in international order theory, as the US-led hegemonic order did not decline as many at the time anticipated.

(3) *1989–1991, Post-Cold War Theory, and the Rise of the "Liberal International Order" Debate*

The dissolution of the Cold War and George Bush's "new world order" speech provoked another wave of international order literature (Holsti 1991; Nye 1992; Cox 1992; Waltz 1993; Ruggie 1994, 1996; Holm and Sorensen 1995; Ikenberry 1996; Hoffman 1998; Clark 2001). The debate, then, was whether the "New World Order" was an order proper and not actually a new disorder (Ikenberry 1996; Hoffman 1998). In this context, Ruggie offered one of the clearest expressions of a constructivist approach to world order in his essay "Third Try at World Order?," by pointing to US "liberal" identity to explain US pursuit of liberal-democratic ordering values, rather than some other and possibly more self-serving values (Ruggie 1994, 1996).

Intervening in these debates, G. John Ikenberry's *After Victory* (2001) made a landmark contribution to the literature. Ikenberry was dissatisfied with the available realist explanations of hegemonic orders, particularly their oversight of the interactions between hegemons and smaller powers in the process of order-making. Instead, he argued, hegemons have strategic choices between imposing order and building orders with hegemonic restraint. For Ikenberry, "powerful states make international order but not entirely as they wish" because of the need to interact and make bargains with states, even in opportune moments after victory in hegemonic wars (Ikenberry 2006, 3). Because the United States has exercised restraint in its strategic ordering choices after major wars, he argued, the US-led order has developed a "constitutional" quality, beyond the balance of power politics. Realists have not been without counterarguments. Schweller (2001), for instance, argues that Ikenberry's theory equates order with its institutions and overlooks the ordering dynamics of the balance of power. For Schweller (2016), the balance of power is a spontaneous type of order mechanism whereby states generate security by balancing independently.

In practice, Ikenberry's idea of a "liberal" international order with a buy-in logic has been highly influential, although not without challenge or crisis. The terrorist strikes of 9/11 disrupted the idea that the "liberal" order had made the United States more secure, and the global war on terror undermined perceptions of the United States as a "liberal" power (Booth and Dunne 2002; Reus-Smit 2004). The dramatic rise of China also generated a "test" for Ikenberry's arguments, sparking debate on whether China will follow the "buy-in" logic of the order or instead seek a Chinese-preferred international order (Kang 2007; Callahan 2008; Callahan and Barabantseva 2011; Clark 2011; Foot and Walter 2011; Schweller and Pu 2011; Goh 2013, 2019; Kissinger 2014; Flockhart 2016, 2020; Acharya 2018; Tang 2018; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann 2020; Goh and Sahashi 2020). Alongside these debates, have been studies on US "dollar hegemony" in the international monetary order and its role in the US-led order more widely (Norrlof 2010, 2014; Gill and Culter 2014; Mastanduno 2015; Ikenberry and Nexon 2019, 415–6; Kitchen and Cox 2019; Norrlof et al. 2020; Norrlof et al. 2020).

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The populist revolt against "globalism," manifest in Brexit and the Trump presidency in 2016, generated a further enormous debate about the future of the "liberal" international order (Ikenberry 2018; Deudney and Ikenberry 2018; Jervis et al. 2018; Duncombe and Dunne 2018; Acharya 2017, 2018, Goddard 2018; Hurrell 2018; Lissner and Rapp-Hooper 2018, 2020; Schake 2019; Mearsheimer 2019; Badie 2019; Ikenberry and Nexon 2019; Goh 2019; Goh and Sahashi 2020; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann 2020; Flockhart 2020; Cooley and Nexon 2020; Norlof et al. 2020; Porter 2020; de Graaff, ten Brink, and Parmar 2020; Buzas 2021; Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021; Adler and Drieschova 2021; Farrell and Newman 2021; Tourinho 2021; Weiss and Wallace 2021; Lake, Martin, and Risse 2021; Molloy 2021; McKeil 2021, 2022a). Interestingly, critics in this debate are deploying arguments with a quasi-polemical style and similar structure to arguments deployed by E.H. Carr and Robert Cox in past debates. Realist critics have been prominent and the most forceful in their polemical style (Mearsheimer 2018; Walt 2018: Porter 2020). Interestingly, these realist critics distance themselves from Carr, by suggesting that the kind of liberalism and liberal order that they are critiquing in the contemporary order is a different kind from that which Carr critiqued (Mearsheimer 2018, 10; Porter 2020, 33). This distancing may be unsurprising, given Carr's early support for "appeasement" and his later Soviet sympathies (Hall 2012, 29–47). Yet, the use of his style of argument, attacking liberal internationalism both in theory and practice, root and branch, is striking and not unproblematic.

Contemporary realist critics make the case that liberal hegemonic order theory fails to see how policies of liberal hegemony in practice undermine themselves, by worsening security dilemmas with foreign powers. They also identify a sclerotic policy elite—"the blob"–as an explanation for perpetuating these self-defeating policies of liberal hegemony. This is a telling sign of the polemical qualities of these arguments that they lay as much blame as possible on the policies of liberal hegemony, neglecting evidence of other factors (Bellamy 2019; Jervis 2020). Another polemical quality of these arguments is that they use the force of their attack on liberal hegemony as a means to advance their preferred alternative "realist" foreign policies of "restraint" and "offshore balancing." Leaning heavily on critique, however, they spend little time and offer little evidence for why their alternative realist policies would counterfactually have produced better results.

In the crisis of the "liberal" international order, Carr is in vogue again. Carr scholar Sean Molloy suggests that "Carr's vital theoretical intervention in 2020 is the same as in 1939" that it "forces us to question whether or not the postulates upon which LIO is based are bankrupt" (2021, 328). Phillip Cunliffe's *The New Twenty Years' Crisis* (2020) explicitly invokes Carr's argument as well, redeploying it in a new polemical broadside, not only against contemporary "liberal" internationalism, but against cosmopolitan, critical, and constructivist theory too, as the "new utopianism." Cunliffe argues,

> "just as Carr saw the liberal utopianism of the interbellum giving expression to a particular vision of US-inspired and Anglo-French world order, so too today the complex of baroque superstructure of IR … are built on the foundations of the American-led world order" (2020, 21).

Cunliffe's indiscriminate broadside assault on large literatures, although forceful, struggles to convince analytically because of its imprecision, and its style of argument lumps diverse positions in these debates into blurry categories.

Critical theorists have joined realist critics in an attack on the "liberal" international order, deploying arguments of a similar structure but with different contents. Beate Jahn (2018, 2013), for instance, offers a sophisticated and lucid argument that makes another deep critique of liberal internationalism in theory and in practice. Jahn's first move is to show how the distinction between the domestic and the international was historically constitutive of liberalism, because the "international" as such historically enabled the enjoyment of liberal rights at home by licensing imperial appropriation of property abroad. Jahn's second move is to show that the globalization of liberalism has not produced a harmonious world order of liberal economic interdependence, but instead has undermined its constitutive and vital distinction between the domestic and the international. "It was the triumph of liberalism over its Cold War competitor and the resultant liberal world order that engendered this crisis" (Jahn 2018, 18). From this argument, follows Jahn's further claim that liberal internationalism, applied to practice, is unable to fully grasp the crisis of its own making and so contributes to the hastening of its own unmaking. The argument in these respects has the quasi-polemical quality of a forceful attack in how it describes liberalism as self-defeating so as to make room for an alternative preferred integrative international order approach.

Ikenberry's major response in this debate, *A World Safe for Democracy* (2020), acknowledges that some "liberal" interventions were misguided and that inequalities have been insufficiently managed, conceding considerable ground to critics. Engaging in some controversy, however, Ikenberry and his long-time intellectual collaborator Daniel Deudney have argued that the "coalition" of critics of liberal internationalism have diverging and individually limited visions of international order, relative to liberal internationalism (Deudney and Ikenberry 2021). For Ikenberry and advocates of "liberal" internationalism, its crisis is a "crisis of success," therefore requiring modifications to stabilize the excesses and mistakes made in its achievement rather than its abandonment. Using Carr's argument as a shorthand, Ikenberry explains, "It is not, fundamentally, what might be called an "E.H. Carr" crisis, in which liberal internationalism fails because of the return of great power-politics and the problems of anarchy" (Ikenberry 2020, 258). Although Ikenberry makes some concessions to critics, he nevertheless still regards liberal internationalism as essential to the maintenance of international order, if adequately modified, thereby supporting his liberal theory of the "constitutional" sources of order. Given the excesses and challenges of liberal internationalism in practice, a domestically more equitable and internationally more "defensive liberal internationalism" is needed, Ikenberry argues (Ikenberry 2020, 286–311). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has deepened the crisis in practice, further sharpened the stakes of its debate, and intensified its controversy in theory.

A distinct constructivist position in this debate does not argue that liberal internationalism is undermining itself in practice, but it does suggest that the theory of the "liberal" order is a reflection of Western power and that as power shifts in practice with the rise of non-Western powers, this theory will increasingly fail to grasp the realities of an emerging post-Western world order (Acharya and Buzan 2019). Confident in the anticipated decline of the US-led "liberal" order, however gradual, so too does this argument suggest that Western and American intellectual hegemony over international order theory in IR will decline in time

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as well. In these debates about the future of international order, the concept of international order has shifted to a descriptive, structural sense (Tang 2016), although the different positions in this debate nevertheless contain often near-surface normative preferences as to what kind of order they consider more desirable. The literature of international order remains varied and wide-ranging beyond these debates, including a rapidly growing literature on international orders in world history (Philips 2011; Zhang 2014; Suzuki, Zhang, and Quirk 2014; Phillips and Sharman 2015; Reus-Smit 2018; Kang 2020; Spruyt 2020; Phillips and Reus-Smit 2020; Philips 2021; Zarakol 2022; Buzan and Acharya 2022). Yet, debates on the future of international order remain prominent and contentious. While the future of international order is still unclear, the quasi-polemical qualities of some of the arguments deployed in this debate may likely make its outcome difficult to assess and persistently controversial, even after its contemporary crisis has been resolved in practice.

Conclusion

This article has sought to contribute a step towards consolidating the wide-ranging intellectual history and rapidly growing literature of international order theory. I have suggested that in the crisis of the "liberal" international order today, its expression in theory has been met by a phalanx of critiques deploying arguments with a quasi-polemical style similar to those used in past debates about international order. These kinds of arguments used in past debates about international order have tended to have lasting, but not all beneficial, impact in the development of international order theory. They tend to narrow and blur debates in a field of considerable and longstanding diversity of approaches. A polemical style of argument also tends to muddy rather than clarify the complex reality of international order and disorder in world politics. Perhaps it has become a trope of IR's literature on international order to produce arguments similar in structure to that of Carr's *Twenty Years' Crisis*, following the powerful impact of his intervention. Yet, this polemical style of argument, which leans heavily on critique, often struggles to support the amount of criticism it makes while also often having limited basis for its own favoured alternatives.

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