

The US-led liberal order: imperialism by another name?

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It is widely agreed that the US-led liberal international order (LIO) is at the very least in transition, if not in crisis.¹ This article raises a number of significant questions with the aim of clarifying the current conjuncture in the US-led LIO, with particular attention to the academic ‘theory’ (liberal internationalism) that underpins the system. Above all, it asks: is liberal internationalism a legitimating ideology more than it is a description or theoretical explanation of the existing system? I explore this question by considering several specific sub-questions, the cumulative effect of which is to provide pathways to address the main issue: How did we get here? Who built the order? What were the foundational principles in theory and practice? How has the international order’s leadership managed change within it since 1945?

I address these questions by considering detailed examples of actual practice by US and allied elite leadership groups at key moments: first, in conceptualizing and building the order, both during and immediately after the Second World War, by exploring the creation of the South Korean state; and second, in looking at the management of change and challenges—in particular, the (re-)emergence of China as a Great Power. Both cases are claimed by leading liberal internationalists as primary examples of the successes of the LIO: hence, examining these cases in some detail allows us to compare liberal internationalist rationales—and the stated aims of policy-makers—with historical and contemporary evidence.

¹ Emerging powers are demanding a renegotiation of power within the international system, there are strong criticisms of and political movements against growing inequalities, and a more ideological left–right politics, challenging domestic and global economic, commercial and military strategies, is on the rise. See Jacob Vestergaard and Robert. H. Wade, ‘Establishing a new global economic council’, *Global Policy* 3: 3, Sept. 2012, pp. 257–69; David Rothkopf, *Superclass: the global power elite and the world they are making* (New York: Little, Brown, 2008); Raphael Kaplinsky, *Globalization, poverty and inequality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); Matthew Goodwin, *Right response: understanding and countering populist extremism in Europe* (London: Chatham House, 2011), <http://mail.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/sites/default/files/library/Right%20Response%20Chatham%20House%20Report.pdf>; The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, ‘Remarks by President Donald Trump at NATO unveiling of the Article 5 and Berlin Wall memorials’, 25 May 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/25/remarks-president-trump-nato-unveiling-article-5-and-berlin-wall>. Rorden Wilkinson, ‘Back to the future: “retro” trade governance and the future of the multilateral order’, *International Affairs* 93: 5, Sept. 2017, pp. 1131–48; Ali Burak Güven, ‘Defending supremacy: how the IMF and the World Bank navigate the challenge of rising powers’, *International Affairs* 93: 5, Sept. 2017, pp. 1149–66; Jinghan Zeng and Shaun Breslin, ‘China’s “new type of Great Power relations”: a G2 with Chinese characteristics?’, *International Affairs* 92: 4, July 2016, pp. 773–94. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 6 Oct. 2017.)

The overall finding is that liberal internationalist thinking/theory is, in effect (albeit unconsciously on the part of its proponents), a legitimating ideology rather than an effective explanatory frame for understanding the way in which the LIO actually works. That conclusion is reached, in part, by suggesting the applicability of a rather different perspective on the operations of the LIO and US power: specifically, a synthesized Gramscian–Kautskyian framework, explained below.

The key point is that the LIO is a class-based, elitist hegemony—strongly imbued with explicit and implicit racial and colonial/imperial assumptions—in both US domestic and foreign relations. At home, this analysis helps to explain in part the phenomenon of the ‘left behind’ white working/middle class, including the affluent but economically anxious voters whose salience on the right has transformed US politics since the Reagan revolution of the 1980s.² Responding to the (minorities’) rights revolution of the 1960s, and the loss of economic opportunity and decline in living standards due to technological change and the global redistribution of industry,³ white working- and middle-class voters drifted towards the Republicans as the party of low taxes and fiscal conservatism.⁴ This delivered little in material terms, however; and, as inequality increased with market freedom and real wages stagnated, workers in the ‘rust belt’ and other areas grew increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo of establishment politics, their frustration exacerbated by anxieties about ethno-racial diversity and American identity as the United States moves towards a society in which whites are a minority.⁵ The result was the election as president in 2016 of Donald Trump on an overtly anti-conservative and barely concealed white identity platform at home and a programme of protectionism and non-interventionism—America First—abroad.⁶

Yet political dissatisfaction or disaffection was not confined to the political right.⁷ ‘Occupy Wall Street’ and other movements and groups vented their anger at the inequalities of power, wealth and income, particularly in the wake of the Iraq War and the 2008 financial crisis.⁸

In external policy, the analysis helps to explain the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of the US readily embracing a more diverse international order, as well as the character of that very embrace.⁹ Accepting nations of the global South on an equal footing may become a strategic necessity, but the process remains

² Thomas B. Edsall, *The new politics of inequality* (New York: Norton, 1985).

³ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The deindustrialization of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Robert Reich, *The work of nations* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

⁴ Kevin Phillips, *The emerging Republican majority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁵ Mike King, ‘Aggrieved whiteness: white identity politics and modern American racial formation’, *Abolition Journal*, 4 May 2017, <https://abolitionjournal.org/tag/aggrieved-whiteness/>; Michael Kimmel, *Angry white men* (New York: Nation Institute, 2013); J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly elegy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016).

⁶ Kimmel, *Angry white men*.

⁷ Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williams, *The Tea Party and the remaking of Republican conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸ Kate Crehan, *Gramsci’s commonsense: inequality and its narratives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁹ It could be asserted that capitalist societies have little or no interest in either embracing ethnic diversity or reducing class inequality. I would suggest that this is historically contingent: reform movements in Britain and the United States, for example, have secured greater equality on several occasions, such as during the New Deal era, in the post-1945 welfare state, and in the Great Society reforms of the 1960s. That is, these are both capitalist societies but also political democracies, however elitist they may also be.

problematic given the racialized discourses of western power over the past several centuries, fortified in the United States by the experience of the slave trade, slavery, the 'Jim Crow' era, Orientalist views of Asians, and other factors.¹⁰ Class power helps to explain the strategic embrace of foreign elites as the sources of change and the agents of American influence, however diluted it may have been due to target states' national interest considerations. Those at the apex of America's hierarchies sought to forge alliances with and incorporate their foreign elite counterparts—with their full cooperation—in South Korea and China.¹¹ Hence, the liberal internationalist 'successes' in the cases of South Korea and China must be qualified by considering the repercussions of developing market-oriented societies marked by economic inequality, rising social unrest and varying degrees of political repression. In 'successful' China and South Korea, as in India and other emerging powers, there remain major challenges underpinned by profound inequalities in power, wealth and income, associated with a politics that is frequently class-based but also heavily racialized and xenophobic.¹²

Why choose South Korea and China as key cases? Although these are two very different states, varying in global significance, and analysed at different periods of historical time, they do allow us to test out important claims made by liberal internationalists. South Korea is considered as a key test at the very birth of the US-led order—at a time when we might expect the new principles embodied in the UN, such as the rule of law, the lessons of the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials, the Geneva Conventions and the rights of civilians in combat zones, to be pursued with some determination if not fully achieved. Given the fervour of anti-colonialism at the time, and US claims to champion that cause, we might also expect the behaviour of the international system's leading power to differ sharply from that of colonial rulers in what became known as the Third World. The case of South Korea tells us a great deal about the practical application of a new international system developed by US power within an international system of rules, applicable to hegemon and others alike, a key liberal internationalist claim.

China's integration into the US-led international system from the late 1970s also tells us a great deal about the character of the international order, especially about how significant change is managed within it and what the embrace of diversity means in practical terms. By the 1970s, the US-led order was facing challenges, of course—from West Germany and Japan, for example, and the oil-producing states—not to mention demands from the G77 for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), and was also recovering from defeat in Vietnam and the legitimacy crisis following the Watergate scandal. For liberal internationalists, the

¹⁰ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and US foreign policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987). 'Jim Crow' is a term for the system of de facto racial segregation and oppression in the deep South after the Civil War.

¹¹ Julian Gewirtz, *Unlikely partners: Chinese reformers, western economists, and the making of global China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation building in South Korea* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹² Pranab Bardhan, *Awakening giants, feet of clay: assessing the economic rise of China and India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); William A. Callahan, *China: the pessimist nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); James Traub, 'Is Modi's India safe for Muslims?', *Foreign Policy*, 18 Aug. 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/26/narendra-modi-india-safe-for-muslims-hindu-nationalism-bjp-rss/>.

integration of China is claimed as a success story both for the liberal order and for China. Yet, without denying the country's dramatic increase in economic power, I question the character of China's success, given the high levels of internal turmoil and the extremes of inequality that are giving rise to major political and economic instability. China, then, is a test of the claim that the liberal order rewards societies as a whole; a Gramscian–Kautskyian counter-argument would suggest that it is largely the Chinese ruling elite and its business allies, not the mass of ordinary Chinese, who have been accommodated in the US-led international system.

Liberal internationalism: theory, ideology, practice

Liberal internationalism is an ambiguous, multifaceted approach to understanding, explaining, justifying and practising international politics. One aspect of it is as a positive theory taught in academic International Relations (IR), derived from liberalism as applied to international affairs, explaining how the foreign policies of leading states, especially the United States and Britain, work. It is also a normative world-view, used by some of its proponents to indicate what the world ought to look like and how it might, and frequently does, work. Liberal internationalism, therefore, is also a set of policies, institutions and established practices.¹³

As an IR theory, the key pillars of liberalism, as embodied in liberal societies, are limited government, individual freedom, private property, pluralism and tolerance, progress, institutions and cooperation for peace, and interdependence. As a theory of US foreign policy, which is the object of analysis here, it encompasses democratic values, economic interdependence, international institutions as a framework for cooperation in addressing global crises and problems, and the broad promotion of general welfare. Emerging historically from the era of rising anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, with the United States and Britain in the lead, the US-led order laid claims to being opposed to colonial rule, and in favour of national and human rights, within a system of international power undergirded by rules binding hegemon and others alike. It was promoted not as a continuation of empire by other means, but as a new system based on universalistic principles applicable to all regardless of race, colour or history.

For my immediate purposes, it is unnecessary to disentangle the positive from the normative, the theoretical from the practical, because this framework of thought emerges both from deep principles and also as a set of solutions to international problems, especially world wars. Hence, liberal internationalism is frequently referred to as Wilsonianism, after the internationalist programme promulgated by US President Woodrow Wilson after the First World War that included the formation of the League of Nations, the forerunner of the longer-lasting post-1945 United Nations system.

¹³ Perry Anderson, *American foreign policy and its thinkers* (London: Verso, 2015), esp. pp. 159–88. The main textbooks used to teach US foreign policy agree that liberal internationalism is multifaceted: both normatively and positively theoretical, as well as constituted by a series of practically applicable principles and institutions. See Michael Cox and Doug Stokes, eds, *US foreign policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 14–15.

I argue here that, as a theory, it operates as ideological legitimation even when its proponents offer reform; it justifies the status quo. In that regard it differs little overall from other theories like Marxism, for example, or realism. But because it is the principal system of ideas and practices, and ideals, that are used to explain, implement and defend the present international status quo, I would suggest that it elides too much to be fully validated beyond the circle of its proponents. Of course, it explains aspects of the world's functioning; but its interpretation tends to be benign: crises and challenges are explained as resolvable within the system's governing principles through socialization, integration and assimilation.

I use the term liberal internationalism, then, as an amalgam to suggest that, while it is all of the above, upon reflection it serves within academia and in IR as a positive theory of how things actually are—that is, as the opposite of an ideology. It purports to be able to explain the world, at the same time as its adherents are normative supporters of the theory. I show that it is actually ideological, because it elides key factors of how the liberal world order actually works, and that other theories suggest better ways of explaining the world.

In the next section of the article, I analyse liberal internationalist ideas and claims in more depth and more critically, with a view to identifying key elements of a more viable framework to explain the LIO—a critical theory influenced by the work of Antonio Gramsci and to some extent synthesized with the work of Karl Kautsky. The principal aim of this article is to identify the weaknesses of liberal internationalism in practice with the purpose of opening space for subsequent theorizing. In sum, what appears to be missing from liberal internationalism is any recognition of domestic power inequalities—such as those based on class and race—its broad attachment to (democratic) elitism, and its hierarchical approach to other powers, especially in the global South.

While Wilsonian liberal internationalism is widely recognized as privileging a belief in the free movement of people, capital, goods and services, less attention has been given to its origins in a time when 'international relations' was overtly understood as 'race relations', and its consequent implication in managing overtly racialized imperial power after the First World War.¹⁴ The Wilson administration's role in racially segregating the US federal government had its foreign policy counterpart in a belief in an eventual, but far distant, self-government of the colonies and opposition to a Japanese proposal for a racial equality clause in the charter of the fledgling League of Nations.¹⁵ The development of liberal internationalism, then, was symbiotically bound to Wilson's conviction that US intervention in world affairs was essential, and to what were effectively parastatal organizations created both by the federal executive and by private foundations—the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, among others. Wilsonian 'theory' was practical, idealistic and ideological from the very beginning. It is also the case

¹⁴ Robert Vitalis, *White world order, black power politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015). President Wilson racially segregated the federal government: see Desmond King, *Separate and unequal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Noriko Kawamura, 'Wilsonian idealism and Japanese claims at the Paris peace conference', *Pacific Historical Review* 66: 4, 1977, pp. 503–26.

that, long after overt racial discourses became politically damaging, subliminal racial thinking remained—and (unconsciously) remains—a significant element of liberal internationalism, affecting its analyses of the politics of domestic and global demographic power shifts.¹⁶

Nevertheless, liberal internationalists are cosmopolitans—opposed to *narrow* nationalism and trade protectionism, within a US-led international system. But its core ideas—rule of law, superiority of the western idea (however lightly worn), a rules-based institutional order open to all, in principle—are deeply embedded in US political-intellectual elite think-tanks, university public policy schools, corporate media and the leaderships of both main political parties,¹⁷ the core of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment.¹⁸ Importantly, however, there are influential voices in the emerging powers and regions that support the liberal international order by calling for internal reform to take account of the changing distribution of global power away from the West and towards the ‘rest’.¹⁹

The upshot is a broad consensus around certain core ideas: that the post-1945 rules-based world order, whatever its weaknesses, serves the world well by spreading prosperity and maintaining peace; and that, although it cannot continue unreformed, the US-led system draws on deep resources—economic, military, systemic and ‘soft’—that bestow upon it continuing strengths to contain, engage, manage and socialize emerging powers. Charles Kupchan lists a range of problems requiring US leadership, even if only within a suitably reformed international system reflecting ‘the real distribution of power’.²⁰

John Ikenberry of Princeton University, the leading proponent of this school of thought, makes significant claims as well as several unquestioned assumptions, undeveloped allusions to core powers’ violent and other connections with the periphery, and a number of significant silences. He claims, for example, that the United States is a fully functioning democracy, yet fails to acknowledge evidence of the power of racialized, class-based elites. For critical theorists, such as Robert Cox, Stephen Gill and Craig Murphy,²¹ the international relations of elites across states and societies operate to reproduce extant patterns of power and manage or engineer change to the benefit of elites in a generally zero-sum game in which broad masses and lower classes lose out. This is clearly a far cry from liberal internationalist claims associated with the benefits of globalization, notwithstanding

¹⁶ John Hobson, *The Eurocentric conception of world politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Frank Furedi, *The silent war: imperialism and the changing perception of race* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), and ‘Racial and imperial thinking in international theory and politics’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 18: 2, 2016, pp. 351–69.

¹⁸ Godfrey Hodgson, ‘The establishment’, *Foreign Policy*, no. 10, Spring 1973, pp. 3–40.

¹⁹ Gregory Chin and Ramesh Thakur, ‘Will China change the rules of global order?’, *Washington Quarterly* 33: 4, 2010, pp. 119–38; Kishore Mahbubhani, *The great convergence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013); Shashi Tharoor, *Pax Indica* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2012).

²⁰ Charles Kupchan, *No one’s world: the West, the rising rest, and the coming global turn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²¹ Robert W. Cox, *Production, power, and world order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Stephen Gill, ed., *Gramsci, historical materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Enrico Augelli and Craig Murphy, *America’s quest for supremacy and the Third World* (London: Pinter, 1988).

proposed ameliorative remedies against the harshest effects. Likewise, claims about the centrality of the rule of law occlude consideration of significant violations in practice. The question of imperial power is hardly addressed, and there is a general Eurocentric neglect of the significance of global areas beyond the core to the 'welfare' and cohesion of the core itself. There is a clear link between Ikenberry's overt theory of American democracy and its liberal-hegemonic world role. The United States, and the western order it built, is characterized as a pluralistic liberal market democracy that is broadly inclusive and tolerant of ethnic diversity. The US-built security community exhibits its leading state's internal character as a plural one and, very significantly, one in which the United States is bound by rules.²² Yet liberal internationalists' underlying assumptions effectively deny the findings of numerous well-researched studies challenging American democracy's principal claims.²³

As far as Ikenberry and Deudney (and many others) are concerned, the 'western idea' is a significant part of the strength of the US-led order.²⁴ The West, a spectacularly successful 'civilizational heritage', was underpinned by America's New Deal liberalism, and extended globally via Bretton Woods, the Marshall Plan and NATO. In effect, this vision and programme aimed to defuse domestic class conflict and the threat of war through 'activist government, political democracy, and international alliance'. That system is *in principle* capable of assimilating emerging powers, given the universalism of its values and its tolerance of ethnic differences, although others joining this privileged grouping are expected to conform to its rules and accept US leadership. Western order is exclusive also because special rules apply within its zone of peace. Beyond it, conversely, other rules apply—cruder, neo-imperial and violent, although the implications of this contrast are left unaddressed.²⁵ By drawing a line around the West, Ikenberry cuts off the rest of the world while addressing questions about the sources of world order which, empirically, lie in a symbiotic relationship between core and periphery. Yet, even within the 'greater' West, Japan and South Korea were not accorded the same treatment as western Europe.²⁶ The LIO really was conceived and developed as a system of the West and the rest, in a zero-sum game. As Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, noted on Twitter in May 2017, the whole point of 'Euro-Atlanticism' was to 'prevent post-West world order'.²⁷

²² G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: the origins, crisis, and transformation of the American world order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 1, *Liberal order and imperial ambition* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 95, and 'Explaining crisis and change in transatlantic relations', in J. Anderson, G. John Ikenberry and Thomas Risse, eds, *The end of the West?* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 6.

²³ See the long-running series of studies by Thomas R. Dye, 'Who's running America?', spanning the presidencies from Carter to Obama, published variously by Prentice Hall, Pearson, and Routledge; also Inderjeet Parmar et al., *Elites and American power*, special issue of *International Politics* 54: 3, May 2017, all articles available at <https://link.springer.com/journal/41311/54/3/page/1>.

²⁴ Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, 'Wither the West?', in Armand Clesse, Richard N. Cooper and Yoshikazu Sakamoto, eds, *The international system after the collapse of the East–West order* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1994), p. 41.

²⁵ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 16 n. 17.

²⁶ Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, 'Why is there no NATO in Asia?', *International Organization* 56: 3, Summer 2002, pp. 575–607.

²⁷ For Tusk's tweet on 17 May 2017 see <https://twitter.com/eucopresident/statuses/867489575937216512>.

Yet the claim persists that this is no empire, despite America's privileged place at the top of the 'hierarchical political order', because its hegemony is built on 'consent' and bounded by law. Power, which was necessary at the creation, faded away as consensual hegemony developed. This interpretation, of course, elides America's overwhelming military superiority, including in and over Europe. Beyond Europe, however, Ikenberry concedes that American hegemony remained hierarchical, 'with much fainter liberal characteristics',²⁸ again closing off an avenue of analytical and empirical analysis that might threaten the intellectual edifice of the LIO.

The (unconsciously) racialized world-view of Ikenberry's Eurocentrism is subtly buttressed by Walter Russell Mead's exploration of the significance of superior Anglo-Saxons who win wars, build world structures, and govern efficiently owing to ethno-cultural, not biological, characteristics.²⁹ Mead's interpretation of Anglo-Saxonism makes it appear benign, assimilative and universal—a scaffolding to support Ikenberry's more overtly institutional analysis.

Assimilating minorities, however, is not embracing diversity—learning from other cultures and creating something new; it is maintaining conformity to the cultures of the powerful, dominant group.³⁰ Looking to the future, as new global powers emerge, Mead advises America to both embrace and contain them, retaining military superiority should 'rising' powers become 'opponents'.³¹ Mead complements the prescriptions of other liberal-realist internationalists, all seeking to incorporate, assimilate and mobilize emerging powers to absorb difference and produce conformity.

The liberal view is challenged by scholars who argue that the New Deal order effectively represented a political compromise, made in order to attain class peace and greater productivity, that mainly benefited major corporations while incorporating organized labour and thereby drawing its teeth. The postwar settlement was a narrow one—excluding racial minorities, unskilled and unorganized labour, and women—and relied on war and a heavily militarized economy that arose with the war in Korea and led directly to that in Vietnam.³² Liberal internationalists' accounts elide the class, gendered and racial bases of the order, both at home and abroad. Ikenberry paints an appealing picture of a liberal order that delivered material benefits and security to all, while also raising some doubts about the operation of the system, especially with regard to the inequality of rewards generated by globalization and its potential political consequences. Those consequences are regarded by Ikenberry as posing the greatest threats to the stability of the liberal order, laying bare a central mechanism and dynamic of the system itself: market-driven class inequality, exacerbated in a society in which racialized class politics is salient.³³ Yet Ikenberry never mentions class,

²⁸ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, pp. xi, 27.

²⁹ Walter Russell Mead, *God and gold: Britain, America, and the making of the modern world* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

³⁰ G. William Domhoff and Richard Zweigenhaft, *Diversity in the power elite* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

³¹ Mead, *God and gold*, p. 360.

³² Richard J. Barnett, *Roots of war* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1972).

³³ Ikenberry, *Liberal order*, p. 184.

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race or gender—an omission central to critical theories of the making of the LIO.³⁴

The other key omission is the role played in building the order by violence and outright war—not just the Second World War but also the Korean War, the ‘hot’ war at the birth of the order that propelled the formation of NATO, the rearmament of Germany, the security alliance with Japan and indeed the US military–industrial complex.³⁵ Accordingly, a key focus of consideration here is wartime planning for a new world order and the manner of its foundation as a direct result of military violence that violated the UN Charter, international law, the lessons of the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials, and the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Wars ‘out there’ secured the core ‘over here’.³⁶

And, of course, what is referred to as benign ‘liberal internationalism’ is what Mark Mazower refers to as ‘imperial internationalism’—trying to maintain a global hierarchy established by centuries of colonial and semi-colonial rule over what is now called the global South.³⁷

Finally, the construction of the postwar western order was constitutive of a political, social, economic and ideological ‘vital center’, as Schlesinger terms it³⁸—opposed to both right-wing nationalists and left-wing anti-imperialists. This entailed the acceptance by core forces of the ‘New Deal order’ that the price of class harmony, stability and mobility at home was the export and continuation of inequality,³⁹ and therefore military violence, on the periphery; and that the removal of vast quantities of raw materials required a global military basing strategy, both to protect allied trade and to deny it to adversaries.⁴⁰ Ikenberry accurately notes that the internal character of the leading state in the liberal order has an impact on the international system it built; but I diverge from his presentation of this impact as the externalization of a democratic regime. He elides the racial, class and gendered character of American historical, economic and political development—including that of Wilsonianism itself.⁴¹ His conclusion, however, is accurate, even if he fails to recognize its significance in the building and maintenance of the liberal order: ‘Access to resources and markets, socio-economic stability, political pluralism, and American security interests—all were inextricably linked.’⁴²

The framework that may best fit the actual underlying engine of liberal order-building and maintenance, however, must also incorporate understanding of the ‘soft’ processes of socialization or incorporation. Violence is a powerful tool, but

³⁴ Parmar, ‘Racial and imperial thinking’; E. Bastiaan van Apeldoorn and Nana de Graaff, *American grand strategy and corporate elite networks* (London: Routledge, 2015).

³⁵ Robert Jervis, ‘The impact of the Korean War on the Cold War’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24: 4, 1980, pp. 563–92.

³⁶ Alexander D. Barder, *Empire within: international hierarchy and its imperial laboratories of governance* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

³⁷ Mark Mazower, *No enchanted palace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

³⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr, *The vital center* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949).

³⁹ Penny von Eschen, *Race against empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁴⁰ Parmar, ‘Racial and imperial thinking’.

⁴¹ King, *Separate and unequal*; Hunt, *Ideology and US foreign policy*; Vitalis, *White world order*.

⁴² Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 174.

always and everywhere it is connected with the processes of non-violent elite socialization and alliance-building. It is one of the great strengths of Ikenberry's analysis of international order that elite socialization is considered so significant.⁴³ Yet a critical view of elite socialization in the building and perpetuation of hegemony views it not as a reflection of a democratic and benign foreign policy, but as incorporation into hegemonic agendas or 'domestication'.⁴⁴ In the Gramscian perspective, capitalist Great Powers, including the United States, are deeply unequal at home and imperialistic abroad, ultimately pursuing the interests of their ruling classes and elites, whether embedded in private, public or state-private realms.⁴⁵ Their hegemony is a combination of persuasion and coercion involving a 'state-society complex'.⁴⁶ Admittedly, liberalism gives an account of elite socialization processes that overlaps with Gramscian approaches. However, liberal approaches see it as relatively benign, politically neutral or representative of democracy/popular sovereignty.

A theoretical underpinning for criticism of the LIO: Gramsci and Kautsky

My critical approach connects Gramscian thinking with a largely forgotten early twentieth-century socialist theoretician of 'ultra-imperialism'—Karl Kautsky. According to Kautsky, in contrast to Lenin's claim of the inevitability of inter-imperial wars of hegemony, ultra-imperialism—the tendency of national ruling classes to form international class-based alliances to jointly exploit the world's resources⁴⁷—leads to cooperation rather than conflict between capitalist states. Kautsky notes that inter-capitalist corporate/state cooperation could take numerous forms—such as cartel-like agreements or even the formation of a 'league of states'.⁴⁸ Of course, there is a strong tradition of critical thinking by neo-Gramscians—including Cox and Gill, but also other Marxists such as Kees van der Pijl⁴⁹—that extends to the building of transnational alliances. That work, however, largely focuses on alliances of the Cold War era between the United States and western Europe as junior partner. In this article, I consider two Asian states—South Korea and China—whose political-cultural incorporation would clearly differ from the Euro-American example. On the other hand, all incorporation processes come up against strictly national interests and specific cultural differences, including in the British case: hence the controversies over naval armaments in the 1920s and the terms of the alliance after 1945, the refusal by Prime Minister Harold Wilson to support the United States with troops in

⁴³ Ikenberry, *Liberal order*, ch. 2.

⁴⁴ Robert F. Arnove, *Philanthropy and cultural imperialism* (Boston: Hall, 1980).

⁴⁵ Augelli and Murphy, *America's quest for supremacy*; Parmar, *Foundations of the American century*.

⁴⁶ Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), pp. 258–9.

⁴⁷ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1970), p. 112.

⁴⁸ Steven K. Holloway, 'Relations among core capitalist states: the Kautsky–Lenin debate reconsidered', *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 16: 2, June 1983, pp. 321–33 at p. 324.

⁴⁹ Kees van der Pijl, *The making of an Atlantic ruling class* (London: Verso, 2014).

Vietnam and, later, frictions over the Falklands War.⁵⁰ The attempt to incorporate any power, great or small, is always going to be extremely difficult.

Kautsky is forgotten largely because his claim—which essentially suggested there would be no major war between capitalist Great Powers—was spectacularly disproved by the outbreak of the First World War.⁵¹ However, clearly there are numerous alliances and international agreements that uphold Kautsky's approach. The EU is a case in point—a supranational alliance, bringing together several great and smaller powers with a colonial past, which has effectively prevented war between them and generated enduring cooperation over decades. Stokes argues that American power, exercised via the LIO with its panoply of multi-lateral organizations, perfectly exemplifies ultra-imperialism given its system-maintenance role serving a range of other states—much to President Donald Trump's pluto-populist chagrin.⁵²

Kautsky's ultra-imperialism was hardly a utopia free of rivalries and wars, however, given the levels of exploitation and subordination endemic in capitalist international relations.⁵³ Yet even critics argue that Kautsky's idea has applicability to the post-1945 era of the LIO, underpinned by US hegemony and an influential web of institutions that embed western powers—NATO, the IMF, the World Bank and the G7, among others. Indeed, it could be argued that since 1989 ultra-imperialism spans virtually the world,⁵⁴ although I would argue that in the case of China the process began in the late 1970s. Of course, Kautsky is clear that the pattern of international capitalist alliances is subject to change along with the uneven development of power and economic strength. Therefore, we would expect tensions to emerge within the system of relationships, despite the basis of shared interests, placing great strain on institutions amid muscle-flexing on the part of certain states that feel unduly constrained by the international system. Hence the current tensions between the Trump administration and China, Germany, the EU and NATO, for example. Whether this represents the breakdown of the post-1945 order or its recalibration remains to be seen.

Kautsky is therefore useful for our understanding of the LIO in two ways: first, in suggesting that, notwithstanding the emergence of unavoidable tensions, war is not inevitable between Great Powers, but for reasons rather different from those suggested by liberal internationalism's egalitarian and benign ideas about interdependence; and second, in pointing out that Great Powers, aiming to jointly promote their power against others at home and abroad, build alliances with their elite foreign counterparts where they already hold power or, by extension, where such a nascent elite might be fostered. Such is the case in the instances of South

⁵⁰ David Reynolds, *Britannia overruled* (London: Routledge, 2013; first publ. 1991).

⁵¹ Kautsky's support for Germany's declaration of war drew Lenin's wrath; see his *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky* (Moscow: Progress, 1974; first pub. 1918).

⁵² Martin Wolf, 'Trump's pluto-populism laid bare', *Financial Times*, 2 May 2017; Doug Stokes and David Maher, 'Marxism and US foreign policy', in Inderjeet Parmar, Linda B. Miller and Mark Ledwidge, eds, *Obama and the world* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 53–66.

⁵³ Karl Kautsky, 'Ultra-imperialism', *Die Neue Zeit*, 11 Sept. 1914; repr. Marxist Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1914/09/ultra-imp.htm>.

⁵⁴ Martin Thomas, 'Empires and war', 2002, <http://www.workersliberty.org/files/ultra.pdf>.

Korea and China discussed below. In neither case is there any suggestion that one state controls another—the point is that their ruling elites hold shared interests, even if that means their enrichment at the expense of the broad mass of their own people. This analysis challenges Leninist,⁵⁵ realist and liberal conceptions of the international order: the system is imperial but not necessarily doomed to perpetual war, and is not benignly liberal. This is international ‘high’ (class) politics—cooperation for shared narrow self-interest but resting on unstable social and political foundations.

Wartime planning for a postwar US-led order

Ikenberry’s benign interpretation of the US-led order is read back into the activities between 1939 and 1945 of elite planners of the postwar order. Developing the ‘Grand Area’ concept, planners in the State Department and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) identified the world zones the United States ‘required’ in order to avoid having to radically reform its economy—zones that together encompassed practically the whole world.⁵⁶ The key point elided is that it was to cohere that imperial ‘Grand Area’ that so much of the institutional architecture of western power was built—the IMF and World Bank, the UN, the Marshall Plan, GATT and NATO.⁵⁷ The interrelations between the Grand Area’s regions were never envisaged as being in any sense equal—raw materials would flow towards western reconstruction and social peace, and finished industrial goods in the other direction. The postwar settlement at home that coalesced, as Hogan argues,⁵⁸ around high-technology capital-intensive industries, international finance and organized skilled labour, was located within an international settlement that secured broad corporate interests under the auspices of an interventionist state. And, in that respect, America’s military capacity to police flows of goods across the world was at the very least a part of the reason why the United States acquired ‘forward bases in Asia and Europe’.⁵⁹ As policy-makers such as Henry Stimson and John J. McCloy noted, American and western well-being relied on “‘open markets, access to raw materials, and the rehabilitation of much—if not all—of Eurasia along liberal capitalist lines’”.⁶⁰

CFR and State Department wartime planning was therefore driven above all by a vision of global-imperial leadership exercised by US elites, strongly supported by Britain’s ruling elites, via an international order of organizations and relationships.⁶¹ The aim was, acting in concert with Britain’s elites, to resurrect European Great Powers by means including the restoration of shattered colonial trading and

⁵⁵ Lenin, *Imperialism*.

⁵⁶ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 173.

⁵⁷ Lawrence Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial brain trust* (New York: Monthly Review, 1977).

⁵⁸ Michael J. Hogan, ‘Corporatism: a positive appraisal’, *Diplomatic History* 10: 4, 1986, pp. 363–72.

⁵⁹ M. Leffler, ‘The American conception of national security and the beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–48’, *American Historical Review* 89: 2, April 1984, pp. 346–81.

⁶⁰ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 174.

⁶¹ Inderjeet Parmar, *Special interests, the state and the Anglo-American alliance, 1939–1945* (London: Cass, 1995), and *Think tanks and power in foreign policy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

The US-led liberal order: imperialism by another name?

economic and financial linkages. The Marshall Plan viewed European reconstruction in just that global context.⁶² The UN was envisaged as a key international agency for American imperial internationalism, at least in its earliest days⁶³—and, as its role in the making of South Korea shows, it remains the official basis of America's role in that country today. And, as I will show below, the building of a hegemonic multilateral order indicates the significance of a Gramsci–Kautsky synthesis.

The UN and Korea

The manner of America's division of Korea, including its military occupation, its foundation of the republic in the South and the war to sustain the division, is highly instructive as to the character of the new world order that the superpower sought to build and of its actual conduct as opposed to its publicly stated claims. Observable behaviour fell far short of the tenets of human rights, the rights of civilians, and the rule and due process of national and international law. The building and consolidation of a South Korean ruling elite and its narrow but important base in civil society—incorporating critical friends and friendly critics—undermines liberal explanations and supports the Gramscian–Kautskyian perspective.

Shortly after detonating two atomic bombs over Japan in August 1945, the United States divided the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel, offering the Soviet Union the northern sector and claiming the southern for itself. At that time, the Soviet Union chose not to take control of the entire peninsula, despite American forces' unreadiness to effect an occupation of any portion of the Korean peninsula. Upon subsequently occupying southern Korea several weeks later, however, the United States declared it 'semi-hostile' territory and applied military law, using Japanese colonial laws and police methods, reinforcing the national police and bringing in the extreme right-wing, anti-communist Syngman Rhee, who had been absent from the country for decades, as putative leader to head the fight against the popularly established people's committees that had declared a provisional government.⁶⁴

In brief, popular uprisings in support of an independent unified Korean government led to massive repression even before the outbreak of the (civil) war. The violence preceding the outbreak of war in June 1950 saw the deaths of 100,000 people. Thereafter, the United States, going into action even before the UN had passed a Security Council resolution authorizing military action, waged a military campaign against North Korea of rare ferocity. Obliteration and saturation bombing led to millions of deaths. The American mission in Korea was formally undertaken under the banner of the UN, but the UN had little or no voice in the 'police action'.⁶⁵

The creation of South Korea as a separate independent state resulted from extreme US pressure on the UN Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK)

⁶² Parmar, *Foundations of the American century*, p. 151.

⁶³ Mazower, *No enchanted palace*.

⁶⁴ Bruce Cumings, *The origins of the Korean War*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, 1990).

⁶⁵ Parmar, 'Racial and imperial thinking'.

which was authorized by the UN to hold national elections in the whole of Korea (North and South).⁶⁶ The United States effectively forced UNTCOK to go ahead with elections in the South in 1948 against the will of the majority of its inhabitants, apart from Syngman Rhee's conservative party and the national police, the two most extreme right-wing organizations in southern Korea. All other organizations from across the political-ideological spectrum—including labour organizations, farmers, women, students and youth groups—had opposed elections on the grounds that right-wing violence had made free and fair polling a virtual impossibility. Hence the declaration by UNTCOK that elections were fairly held in South Korea was used as a pretext by the United States in the UN to win recognition of the Republic of Korea as a sovereign state. UNTCOK observed a mere 2 per cent of polling stations during the 1948 elections.⁶⁷ After the declaration of the Republic of Korea, the North also declared itself a sovereign state as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Thus the very creation of South Korea entailed a violation of agreements made at the UN and between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁶⁸

American military violence in Korea has been characterized as 'military orientalism',⁶⁹ in which racist attitudes about the character of Koreans and Chinese and assumptions of their general inferiority play a prominent part.⁷⁰ According to Bruce Cumings, Anglo-American atrocities outnumbered those carried out by North Korean and Chinese troops by a proportion of six to one.⁷¹ Reginald Thompson, the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent in Korea, noted that US marines considered Koreans apes, not humans, and rained death on them on an unprecedented scale. It was machines versus men, warfare reminiscent of colonial-era wars, with liberal use of napalm in obliteration bombing by B-52s that inflicted 'holocausts of death', eliminating distinctions between combatants and civilians.⁷²

General MacArthur ordered relentless bombing to create "a wilderness of scorched earth". North Korea was carpet-bombed for three years with 635,000 tons of bombs (half the total dropped on Germany in the Second World War, and more than in the entire Pacific theatre between 1941 and 1945) and 32,000 tons of napalm. Massive casualties resulted: deaths of somewhere between 2.5 and 4 million Koreans, 900,000–1,000,000 Chinese, 54,000 Americans and nearly 700

⁶⁶ The UNTCOK papers in the UN archives in New York show, among other things, the near-total lack of legitimacy of the foreign occupation and of any elections planned by the US military government.

⁶⁷ UNTCOK papers, UN archives, New York, S-0684, box 2, file 1.

⁶⁸ The UNTCOK papers for 1947–8 catalogue right-wing repression and violence, the control of UNTCOK by the US military government, the anti-communist framing of Korean conditions by US Commanding General Hodge, the violation of election laws, intimidation and murder. The forces of repression were policing the elections. See also interview with Harding Bancroft, UN Political Affairs officer in the State Department, UN Oral History Project, 17 Dec. 1990 (UN archives).

⁶⁹ Tarak Barkawi and Keith Stanski, eds, *Orientalism and war* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁷⁰ UNTCOK papers, S-0684, box 2, file 1.

⁷¹ Journalist James Cameron reported atrocities committed by South Korean troops at a concentration camp in Pusan: 'I had seen Belsen, but this was worse. This terrible mob of men—convicted of nothing, un-tried, South Koreans in South Korea, suspected of being "unreliable" had been starved and chained while US officers took photographs.' When Cameron took the report to UNTCOK, he was told: 'Most disturbing, yes; but remember these are Asian people, with different standards of behavior': Jon Halliday and Bruce Cumings, *Korea: the unknown war* (London: Viking, 1990; first publ. 1988), pp. 92, 146.

⁷² Reginald Thompson, *Cry Korea* (London: MacDonald, 1951).

Britons.⁷³ Almost from the very beginning of the war, Truman and MacArthur threatened to use atomic weapons;⁷⁴ MacArthur advocated dropping 20 small atomic bombs across Korea to create a no-man's-land between South Korea and China. There was a general belief that Asians were weak and could not possibly stand up to relentless high-technology American firepower; but also a feeling of humiliation among military and civilian leaders that the weakest 'communist satellite'—North Korea—was beating the United States. US military operations in Korea cost around US\$70 billion. A small, largely rural country saw between 40 and 90 per cent of all its urban areas destroyed; even after just a few months, North Korea had no targets of any worth to bomb.⁷⁵

Military orientalism prolonged the war and increased casualties.⁷⁶ It also created the main barrier to ending hostilities by preventing an agreement on the return of prisoners of war. As this was defined as a war between races and cultures as much as between freedom and slavery, barbarism and the rule of law, both Truman and the military commanders on the ground wanted to make Asians pay for their resistance.⁷⁷ Hence, in violation of the Geneva Conventions on compulsory and swift return of enemy prisoners of war, the Anglo-Americans demanded all prisoners be 'screened' to see whether they wished to return to North Korea or China, thereby prolonging the war.⁷⁸ The veil of 'voluntary repatriation' allowed the torture and punishment of Chinese and North Koreans in prison camps run by Syngman Rhee and Kuomintang forces, leading to thousands of killings, as reported by numerous press agencies, the International Commission of the Red Cross, and British, Canadian and US troops who had policed the PoW camps.⁷⁹ Anglo-American allegations of torture of western troops in Chinese and North Korean camps were undermined by later US Army studies of released US PoWs who reported generally good treatment rather than torture.⁸⁰

After the ceasefire of 1953, the United States helped build a repressive state in South Korea with consistently high levels of military and economic aid that sustained a dictatorial regime headed by Rhee until his overthrow by popular rebellion in 1960. Simultaneously, but at a highly restricted level—in contrast to generous aid for police and military institutions, training, arms, etc.—the

⁷³ Halliday and Cumings, *Korea*, pp. 201, 115.

⁷⁴ Truman ordered Strategic Air Command to dispatch atomic bombs to the Far East (30 Nov. 1950) and authorized dummy runs from waters off North Korea: see Halliday and Cumings, *Korea*, pp. 123–4.

⁷⁵ Parmar, 'Racial and imperial thinking'.

⁷⁶ 'As soon as those North Koreans see an American uniform . . . they'll run like hell', was the general belief. See Russell A. Gugeler, *Combat actions in Korea 3*, Army Historical Series (Washington DC: Center of Military History, 1970). Military historian Walter Karig called Korea an example of 'Indian warfare' because the foe 'scorns all rules of civilized warfare': Bruce Cumings, 'Occurrence at Nogun-Ri Bridge', *Critical Asian Studies* 33: 4, 2000, pp. 509–526. The war's racist character was clear to State Department officers at the UN; see interview with Harding Bancroft.

⁷⁷ John Dower, *War without mercy* (New York: Norton, 2000).

⁷⁸ Wilfred Burchett and Alan Winnington, *Koje unscreened* (Beijing: Britain–China Friendship Association, 1953).

⁷⁹ David Morgan, 'AP: US allowed Korean massacre in 1950', CBS News, 5 July 2008, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/ap-us-allowed-korean-massacre-in-1950/>, accessed 15 November 2013. For more on the 138 massacres by US forces, see Dong Choon Kim, 'Forgotten war, forgotten massacres—the Korean War (1950–53) as licensed mass killing', *Journal of Genocide Research* 6: 4, 2004, pp. 523–44.

⁸⁰ Eugene Kinkead, *Why they collaborated* (London: Longman, 1959). Over 20 Americans chose to live in China; not a single soldier tried to escape; large numbers collaborated with their captors.

social basis was laid of a narrow elite democracy, or at least a 'liberal' leadership: a modernizing elite in a parastatist civil society (state-sanctioned/approved/ permitted), working within the system as friendly critics or critical friends of the regime.⁸¹ In effect, this was an elite fostered in preparation for a period in the future when repression and dictatorship would become unsustainable in a radical nationalist populace with leftist tendencies and a desire to reunify the country. Indeed, by the 1980s, as popular unrest grew, US strategy had shifted towards 'democracy promotion' (the initial move in this direction actually beginning with the end of the Vietnam War) as the basis of 'stability'.⁸²

Yet up to the 1970s South Korea remained economically backward, outstripped by North Korea in terms of economic growth and living standards. The Vietnam War changed the equation significantly. In return for the deployment of a cumulative total of 300,000 troops, South Korea received aid without strings to the tune of billions of dollars between 1965 and 1973. It was the massive boost from war contracts and to consumer goods production for export that drove South Korea's economic growth, raised living standards and, indirectly, fed the demand for political freedoms. War, therefore, played a fundamental role in the making and remaking of modern South Korea.⁸³

However, in the only book-length analysis of the US role in building 'civil society' and 'democracy' in South Korea, Brazinsky argues that, despite its decades-long support for an unpopular repressive regime, the United States would have preferred to build democracy had it not been for the Cold War and the concomitant Soviet threat.⁸⁴ As it was, a stable alliance took precedence over democracy. Brazinsky separates US support for repression from US support for the construction of South Korean civil society, the laying of a liberal social sector as the social basis for limited democracy. In line with liberalism and liberal internationalism, Brazinsky fails to appreciate the complex character of regime formation, in which there are roles for both coercion and consent, violence and reform, exclusion and inclusion.

In addition, Brazinsky either ignores, misses or misunderstands the role of race and racism, sidelining the evidence as isolated incidents outside the essential fabric of American attitudes, or within dominant liberal thinking. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that race and racism were fundamental to the construction both of American society, economy and polity, and of its foreign policy.⁸⁵ Koreans were viewed as a backward people, dependent, requiring massive cultural transformation to ready them for modernity and civilization; as semi-humans whose lives were cheap.⁸⁶ Such attitudes were embedded within the military leadership as well as in 'Asian studies' programmes funded to enable Americans to comprehend 'the Asian mind' in readiness for their civilizing mission. MacArthur

⁸¹ Brazinsky, *Nation building in South Korea*.

⁸² Robert Pee, *Democracy promotion, national security and strategy* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁸³ Charles Armstrong, 'America's Korea, Korea's Vietnam', *Critical Asian Studies* 33: 4, 2001, pp. 527–40.

⁸⁴ Brazinsky, *Nation building in South Korea*.

⁸⁵ Hunt, *Ideology and US foreign policy*; King, *Separate and unequal*.

⁸⁶ Bruce Cumings, 'American orientalism at war in Korea and the United States', in Barkawi and Stanski, eds, *Orientalism and war*, pp. 39–64.

himself believed that Asians understood only one thing—violence—and that the Pacific Ocean was an ‘Anglo-Saxon lake’.⁸⁷

In this respect General MacArthur, President Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson, among others, expressed essentially the outlook commended by Mead in *God and gold*, a work in which he celebrates the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons in those very terms—as builders of peace, of the global conditions for capitalism, of the international institutions of order.⁸⁸ Modernization theory, the secular distillation of this creed in the Cold War, demanded the sustenance of an elite and elite networks for moulding leadership and strategies for western-style economic and political development. Although Brazinsky examines numerous initiatives to modernize South Korea and build a civilian elite to lead it, he fails to see the exclusive, statist and elitist character of the project, or to comprehend the linkage between repression of radicals and the processes of elite socialization in ‘civil society’ programmes.

More research, and more critical examination of the historical record, are required. In theoretical terms, the Gramsci–Kautsky synthesis may provide a better explanation of relations between elites in postwar order-building, and of the fostering of a South Korean ruling elite and a broadly supportive civil society sector.

The challenge of China

Research on the role of China studies and other programmes in the long-term shift towards the gradual integration of China into the US-led order is more advanced.⁸⁹ The existing body of work offers an understanding of the ways in which US hegemony operated, especially at a time of relative weakness—in the wake of the Vietnam War, the OPEC crisis, and demands for an NIEO from the global South. In effect, China was prised away (after Mao, quite willingly) from its revolutionary role in world politics, along with several other so-called middle-class global South nations—Brazil, India, Mexico and Turkey, among others—via loans and investments, and incorporated into the dominant order to the point where China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the 1990s. NIEO demands, in effect, were gutted by a strategy of divide and rule and partial incorporation.⁹⁰ The key point here is that what appeared to be a solution to a problem in the 1970s planted the seeds of later political-economic (and related legitimacy) problems, most significantly in accelerating the process of deindustrialization in the United States.⁹¹ This in turn impelled the drift of white working- and middle-

⁸⁷ Parmar, ‘Racial and imperial thinking’.

⁸⁸ Mead, *God and gold*.

⁸⁹ Tie Han, *The Ford Foundation and Chinese studies 1950–1979*, PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997; David Finkelstein, *Reflections on China*, report 004080 (Ford Foundation Archives, Tarrytown, NY, 22 Sept. 1975).

⁹⁰ Holly Sklar, *Trilateralism* (Boston: South End Press, 1980); Jennifer Bair, ‘Taking aim at the NIEO’, in Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, eds, *The road from Mont Pelerin: the making of the neoliberal thought collective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 347–85; Philip S. Golub, ‘From the New International Economic Order to the G20’, *Third World Quarterly* 34: 6, 2013, pp. 1000–15.

⁹¹ David H. Autor, David Dorn and Gordon H. Hanson, *The China shock: learning from labor market adjustment to large changes in trade*, working paper 21906 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, Jan. 2016), www.nber.org/papers/w21906. The authors estimate that China’s opening up between 1991 and 2007

class voters to the subliminally racialized and gendered messages of the Republican Party in the wake of the 1960s ‘rights revolution’, constructing the ‘angry white male’⁹² who helped Ronald Reagan to office and aided the rightward shift of the Republicans and the sharpening of partisan politics. It is the disappointment with the mainstream Republican leadership that Donald Trump harnessed to win the presidency in 2016 on a message that overtly challenged the US-led international order.⁹³ Trump’s approach also appears to threaten the carefully crafted Sino-US relationship.⁹⁴

Liberal arguments reject realist predictions of inevitable military conflict between ‘rising’ and ‘declining’ powers and suggest that Sino-US conflict is avoidable through a dual strategy of ‘containment’ through security alliances—of which the United States has many and China only one, with North Korea—and integration through a variety of means including the diplomatic and commercial.⁹⁵ Basically, the strategy seemed to be one of making China another pillar of the US-led order, although not so powerful as to be a threat to the hegemon.⁹⁶ Yet again, liberal approaches elide the hierarchical and unequal character of Chinese society and in practice commend elite-to-elite cooperation to maintain an apparently stable but unequal system. But the hegemony in China of the party state and other elites attached to a growing private, market-oriented sector is inherently unstable, owing to the massive changes wrought by industrialization, urbanization and mass migration.⁹⁷ It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Chinese elites actively sought assistance from foreign (especially American) agencies to learn about the world and to help manage China’s transformation into a more outward-looking state, society and economy. After all, the United States had spawned the modern corporate foundation, and concomitant extensions of federal and state powers, in close alignment with its own transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and its elite visions of eventual global leadership.⁹⁸

A Gramscian–Kautskyian approach may better align with what President Xi Jinping has called ‘a new type of Great Power relationship’ between the United States and China.⁹⁹ This idea strongly suggests that there are both push and pull factors in the relationship between the two Great Powers, and many shared inter-

caused the loss of over 2 million American manufacturing jobs, and that China’s trade surplus probably accounts for almost 3 million US manufacturing jobs.

⁹² Frederick R. Lynch and William R. Beer, ‘You ain’t the right color, pal’, *Policy Review*, no. 51, Winter 1990; Kimmel, *Angry white men*.

⁹³ Kimmel, *Angry white men*; Joyce C. Kaufman, ‘The US perspective on NATO under Trump’, *International Affairs* 93: 2, March 2017, pp. 251–66.

⁹⁴ Rosemary Foot, ‘Power transitions and great power management: three decades of China–Japan–US relations’, *Pacific Review*, March 2017; pp. 829–42.

⁹⁵ For an alternative view, see Joseph S. Nye, *Is the American century over?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015); Christopher Layne, ‘The US foreign policy establishment and grand strategy’, *International Politics*, 54, 3, May 2017 pp. 260–75.

⁹⁶ John Bresnan, ‘China’, Inter-Office Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy and David E. Bell, 25 Sept. 1978, p. 3; *The Ford Foundation’s Program in China*, discussion paper, Board of Trustees meeting, Sept. 1997 (Ford Foundation Archives, box 721, reel R-9296, report 013610), p. 9.

⁹⁷ Bardhan, *Awakening giants*.

⁹⁸ Parmar, *Foundations of the American century*.

⁹⁹ President Xi Jinping’s declaration is echoed in Rudy deLeon and Yang Jiemin, eds, *US–China relations: toward a new model of major power relationship*, published under an initiative of the Center for American Progress and the China–US Exchange Foundation (Washington DC: Center for American Progress, 2014).

ests at both regional and global levels. It is too early to argue that the two economies are truly interdependent, as equals, but it is clear that there are many linkages and bidirectional codependencies. China's ownership of US debt and dollars, its role in assisting recovery after the 2008 financial meltdown, the scale of American direct investment in China, the sheer numbers of students criss-crossing the Pacific, the two countries' reliance on each other's export markets—and a shared interest in cooperation on nuclear tensions over North and South Korea—all indicate high levels of shared interests.¹⁰⁰ Add to this the increasing number of American foundations, think-tanks, university branches, and scholarly and other exchanges linking the United States and China, and there is a depth to the two states' interaction over the several decades since the death of Mao that appears durable and lasting.¹⁰¹

At the core of the relationship of the two powers appear to be powerful elite knowledge networks, closely aligned with their respective states, which facilitated the *rapprochement* after Mao, and helped to effect transformational change in key areas of Chinese society. In particular, the development of so-called market socialism was certainly assisted by American economists teaching in China, by the return home of US-trained Chinese PhDs to establish university programmes in 'modern economics' that focused on market relations and the price mechanism, and by think-tanks within the party state.¹⁰² Economic reform was not spontaneous but well organized and led from the top. Progress has not been consistently positive, reflecting uncertainties and political opposition to the westernization of China, especially among the 'new left'.¹⁰³ Yet the direction of travel and the distance already travelled are clear—and became even clearer when President Xi stepped forward at the World Economic Forum at Davos in 2017 and declared that China would defend and promote globalization should President Trump's America 'retreat' from its hegemonic role.¹⁰⁴ Similar declarations were made following Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement on climate change.¹⁰⁵

The United States has a record of exporting economists and transplanting economic thinking and ideas to transform states, although China is a qualitatively different 'project' when set against the activities of the 'Chicago Boys' in Chile and the so-called 'Beautiful Berkeley Boys' in Indonesia.¹⁰⁶ The latter were both relatively weak, dependent states compared to China.¹⁰⁷ However, the key point here is the willingness of Chinese party elites to invite American (and other foreign) ideas and methods, duly adapted. China sought transformative ideas,

¹⁰⁰ Carnegie Council, 'The strategic importance of US–China trade ties', 3 June 2015, https://www.carnegie-council.org/publications/ethics_online/0106.

¹⁰¹ deLeon and Yang Jiemian, *US–China relations*.

¹⁰² *The Ford Foundation and China* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1991); Gewirtz, *Unlikely partners*.

¹⁰³ Gewirtz, *Unlikely partners*, pp. 4, 10–11.

¹⁰⁴ 'Xi Jinping delivers robust defence of globalisation at Davos', *Financial Times*, 17 Jan. 2017.

¹⁰⁵ 'China and EU offer sharp contrast with US on climate change', *Financial Times*, 1 June 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Parmar, *Foundations of the American century*; Juan Gabriel Valdes, *Pinochet's economists: the Chicago School in Chile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Bradley Simpson, *Economists with guns* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ Gewirtz, *Unlikely partners*, p. 9; Finkelstein, *Reflections on China*.

training and strategies, and has transformed its economy as a result; and it was dependence on the global market and the US-rules based system that enabled that transformation.¹⁰⁸

Ford Foundation investments in China yielded major dividends through students and scholars who had studied modern economics abroad. In particular, the 'Ford class' programme of exchange masters and doctoral research—led by influential economists such as Lawrence Klein, Gregory Chow and others—graduated over 500 students in micro- and macroeconomics, econometrics, development economics, international finance and other disciplines.¹⁰⁹ Ford's grants helped China's think-tanks to gain access to relevant experience and expertise through collaborative research and training in applied economics, helping to build independent policy research institutes like the China Center for Economic Research and the China Center for Agricultural Policy, combining the best internationally trained Chinese analysts with domestic scholars. The entire complex of programmes was designed to 'build a field'; once this had been successfully achieved, Ford support focused on specific policy research projects and institutions that expanded other ongoing Foundation work in China.¹¹⁰

Equally interesting, even if change in this sector appears slower than in the economy, are the initiatives by US agencies to build 'civil society' in China, with funding running to over US\$500 million from, among others, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. Since 2002, a further US\$400 million has been invested from US sources into civil society programmes. The core purpose of this exercise—derided by critics as the building of 'government-organized non-governmental organizations' (Gongos)—is to strengthen stability by experimentally releasing the tight grip of overstretched state institutions (local, regional and national) behind a programme of 'small government, big society'.¹¹¹ The aim is to help the state to better manage social and political change, not to build a fully functioning independent civil society. And in that regard there are some interesting similarities with the United States' own historical development. In the US, state-building private elite organizations promoted the formation of official state agencies and departments at federal level to manage a rapidly changing and increasingly complex society with few nationally oriented institutions, as opposed to locally oriented ones that reflected the prevailing parochialism.¹¹² Collectively, the nascent federal agencies and their state-oriented private elites effectively constituted the new American state of the twentieth century, nourished by war and economic crisis and emerging as a superpower after the Second World War.

¹⁰⁸ Hong Liu, *1980s and Chinese economists* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010), pp. 327–32. I would like to thank Dr Shuhong Huo for translating parts of Liu's book for my benefit. See also Gregory Chow, 'Teaching economics and studying economic reform in China', *China Economic Review* 1: 2, pp. 193–9.

¹⁰⁹ Klein was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. See Ross Garnaut, *The Ford Foundation programs in China on economics education and research*, 15 April 1994 (Ford Foundation Archives, report 013807).

¹¹⁰ *The Ford Foundation's Program in China*, discussion paper, p. 12.

¹¹¹ Maria Edin, 'Re-making the communist party-state', *China: An International Journal* 1: 1, 2003, pp. 1–15; Kenneth W. Foster, 'Associations in the embrace of an authoritarian state', *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35: 4, 2001, pp. 84–109; Carolyn Hsu, 'Beyond civil society: an organizational perspective on state–NGO relations in the People's Republic of China', *Journal of Civil Society* 6: 3, 2010, pp. 259–77.

¹¹² Stephen Skowronek, *Building a new American state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

China's fundamental problem is how to manage change with an overstretched state; it is using the banner of 'small government, big society' to release new energies that can be harnessed to the stability project. American foundations have been vital to this programme, hence the criticism. The Gramsci–Kautsky formulation can explain this project well.

The activities in the United States of various private organizations interested in China (such as the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China) and within China itself were effectively authorized by successive American administrations.¹¹³ They were formally 'independent of the government and yet operated with its support', including that of the CIA and other agencies. In effect, China's stable development is an American vital interest—or at least it was assumed to be until the advent of President Trump's (rhetorically) *disruptive* administration. The above activities, then, constituted a process of broadening the basis of China's state legitimacy, funded to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars from mainly private American sources. According to Spires, over 95 per cent of all Ford Foundation funds for civil society building went to Chinese state-licensed organizations.¹¹⁴

The 'new type of Great Power relationship' is being tested by the (rhetorically) unpredictable and transactional approach to global politics of the Trump administration.¹¹⁵ Although we have already seen disruption of the atmospherics of liberal hegemonic culture, President Trump remains under pressure to retain the international security structures of the US-led order as well as its international trading regimes, notwithstanding the rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (which was also opposed by other presidential candidates in 2016, including Hillary Clinton). A correction, in other words, was politically viable. It remains to be seen, however, whether Trump's economic nationalism, as further indicated by withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate change, is merely recalibrating the system or represents a fundamental rejection of it. Up to now, it looks more like the former than the latter, but only because of virtually unremitting pressure from establishment figures within and beyond the administration.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

The foundational values, interests and institutions of the (Anglo-)US liberal international order, with due respect for important but not fundamental recalibrations and corrections along the way, are the sources of its current crises or at

¹¹³ Kathlin Smith, 'The role of scientists in normalizing US–China relations: 1965–1979', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 866: 1, 1998, pp. 114–36.

¹¹⁴ Anthony J. Spires, 'Organizational homophily in international grantmaking: US-based foundations and their grantees', *Journal of Civil Society* 7: 3, 2011, pp. 305–31.

¹¹⁵ Mira Rapp-Hooper and Alex Sullivan, 'Trump's team has no idea what it's doing on China', *Foreign Policy*, 5 April 2017.

¹¹⁶ A. Mitrova, 'The deep state is now working for the good guys', *Al Jazeera Magazine*, 2 April 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/03/deep-state-works-good-guys-170330124521027.html>; Daniel Haiphong, 'Has Trump lost his battle with the neo-cons and neo-liberals?', *American Herald Tribune*, 16 April 2017, <http://ahtribune.com/us/maga/1617-trump-neo-cons-neo-liberals.html>; Zack Beauchamp, 'Democrats are falling for fake news about Russia', *Vox*, 19 May 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/5/19/15561842/trump-russia-louise-mensch>.

least challenges. The mentalities and power structures of the LIO's leaders are constructed by hierarchical, imperial and racial-civilizational ways of thinking, albeit in most cases subliminally embedded to the point of being unconscious deep structures themselves.¹¹⁷ The American white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (Wasp) establishment built and maintained the liberal order in a 'competitively cooperative' alliance with their British counterparts,¹¹⁸ whose own imperial and racial mentalities were hardly in conflict with those of their American cousins.¹¹⁹ Whatever changes occurred or were forced on US elites over time, those underlying and mainly subliminal values have remained significant in decision-making, including when nurturing new states and powers such as South Korea and China.

As a result, liberal internationalism as a 'theory' or approach to world order, eliding and skirting matters of hierarchy, race and class just as it does in its outline understandings of American democracy, misses a critical part of the picture—of the dynamics of international power as well as the dynamics of domestic power. Because of that elision, that failure to see, I suggest it is a legitimating ideology of the American ruling elite. I have argued above that the LIO is better understood as a system of hierarchy and inequality, and as what Persaud calls a 'racio-civilizational' phenomenon. What does that mean? It means that this system and its leaders cannot yet comprehend an order that encompasses on the basis of something approaching equality the broad mass of people—citizens—at home, let alone the non-western peoples of the global South, or even their elites. The tweet from Donald Tusk quoted above is revealing and instructive because it was addressed to President Trump in simple and stark terms, worth repeating here: 'Euro-Atlanticism means the free world cooperating to prevent post-West world order'—so, please 'do not touch'. International alliances of elites, including those of the emerging powers such as China, are in large part attempts to manage and channel change to prevent radical power shifts, to sustain a world order that serves elites and masses, in West and East, in starkly unequal ways. A Gramscian-Kautskyian synthesis combines consideration of domestic and international class-based imperial hegemonies and offers a good explanation of the existing order. However, it also offers a way out, in theory, and provides ways to assess the likelihood of avenues towards egalitarianism being taken by ruling elites. The prognosis is not positive at present, although the bases of ways forward appear to be coming into view as political strife and electoral shocks challenge the status quo.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Randolph B. Persaud, 'Frantz Fanon, race and world order', in Stephen Gill and James Mittelman, eds, *Innovation and transformation in international studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 170–84.

¹¹⁸ David Reynolds, *The creation of the Anglo-American alliance, 1937–1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

¹¹⁹ Parmar, 'Racial and imperial thinking'; *Think tanks and power*; and 'Institutes of international affairs', in Diane Stone and Andrew Denham, eds, *Think tank traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 19–33.

¹²⁰ Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes, *Shattered: inside Hillary Clinton's doomed campaign* (New York: Crown, 2017).