



# **International Relations Theory and World Order After COVID-19**

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## International Relations Theory and World Order After COVID-19<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

International relations theory has always tried to either preserve the world as it is or prescribe the world as it should be. The first great debate between realists and idealists embodied these two premises and subsequent development of theory also evolved within the same parameters. Whether critical or problem-solving theory, each in its turn either attempted to preserve and legitimise the status quo or sought alternatives to challenge it. Before COVID-19 the current international system was already going through a transition, with the tension between those who would like to preserve a globalist liberal order and those mercantilists reacting to it. COVID-19 will force new modes of cooperation to emerge and states will be neither totally mercantilist or protective of a global liberal order. States are likely to be more self sufficient and less reliant on international supply chains but more engaged in international trade. International cooperation will be needs based on a functionalist model and ideologies will not be in the forefront of policy making and theoretical development. International relations theory will no longer be preoccupied in preserving or legitimising a status quo or challenging it with alternatives. It will most probably try and explain the various non political, non ideological strands of international cooperation emerging out of needs not prescribed grand designs.

### **Keywords**

*Theory, hegemony, legitimacy, international system, international community, world order, COVID-19, functionalism*

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## Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 on international modes of cooperation and transactions is likely to last longer than the present crisis. The policy choices of decision makers and the implementation of those policy choices are likely to be affected as patterns of cooperation and concepts of power go through transformations. Practitioners will not be the only ones affected by these changes. The problem solving and critical enquiries into how the international system works or ought to work, will also be challenged. Therefore, scholarly perspectives on international relations will also be forced to rethink some assumptions as well as policy makers. The relationship between scholarly perspectives and practitioners' choices and how they shape each other, has by and large been a western practice. International relations theories since 1945 either challenge or legitimise prevailing parameters of world order that are most favourable to the powers of the time.

International relations as a subject of enquiry borrows from a number of disciplines. Although, international relations became a main subject of study after 1945, in actual fact the first chair of international relations in the world was established at the University of Wales at Aberystwyth in 1919. Until this time, philosophy, political thought, law, economics, sociology, diplomatic history and strategic studies or the study of war were all separate fields of study. International relations consist of an amalgamation of all of these fields to make sense of the relations governing the world and the conditions of war and peace. As a predominantly western practice, even the ideas that came before international relations, which international relations are based upon are essentially Euro-centric. The great debate between idealism and realism was based on classical political thought largely derived from the works of Immanuel Kant and Thomas Hobbes. This then begs the question if international relations theory since 1945 has indeed offered us anything new in the way we think and make sense of the world? While international relations

theory has borrowed from other disciplines and works that have been widely acknowledged and discussed before the latter half of the twentieth century, it has made a contribution that is unique in the sense of how theory shapes policy and vice versa. This has been a practice embedded in Western academia and think tank culture which has its own very robust network amongst its many institutions. Although this network of academics and think tankers and their constant liaison with the policy world is dominated by a transatlantic core, it is not confined to geography alone, as Australia and New Zealand are also part of this scholarly milieu. Whereas the rest of the World aspires to emulate and absorb the standards set by these practices. This western core in the study of international relations holds a monopoly over widely accepted publications and the power to set and create widely accepted discourses. In other parts of the World it is less likely to see the same level of academic/ think tank interaction with policy making as in for example Washington DC and many other European capitals. In fact, in the United States it is more common practice for academics to be seconded from their posts to the policy environment or get recycled from the think tank circuit each time a new administration comes into power.

The post 1945 world order reliant on a bipolar balance of power but which nevertheless sought to create an inter-dependent liberal order through international institutions, was reinstated and reinvigorated as a normative dominant liberal order in the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union. This liberal order was overseen and dominated by a transatlantic core which wielded legitimacy through its institutions and exerted power not just through military and economic might but through the inspiration of values and ideas (Mandelbaum, 2002). Therefore, one of the most powerful assets of the liberal world order was the control of discourses on how the world made sense of current and past events. Labels are very powerful tools, especially when they emanate from a core that dictates widely acknowledged ideas embedded in globally respected academic publications. Therefore, in such a system of world order, legitimacy of the core is the key source of power above material assets and thus exerts global influence through widely accepted ideas and institutions. It becomes both the paradigm maker and the paradigm itself.

In a post COVID-19 world it is unlikely that this dominant Western monopoly on paradigms will change. Popular discourses and widely held ideas will still emanate from the same scholarly circles. Their dissemination through mainstream media will continue to bolster their position. However, the way ideas legitimise policies will suffer a set back. Practices will in turn shape ideas, not the other way round. This is because as international patterns of cooperation become less dominated by value and identity based relations, and become driven more by result oriented transactional relations focused on needs, the construction of ideas that legitimise policy decisions will become less and less frequent.

Will there be a paradigm shift? Thomas Kuhn describes a ‘paradigm shift’ as when a theory is no longer relevant and new theories emerge to take its place. In international relations theory such a paradigm shift has hardly ever happened (Kuhn, 1962). Although it is fair to say that each theory is unique to its own age as it seeks to explain phenomena as they arise and consciously or inadvertently legitimise or challenge the policies of the time. However, in international relations, there are a plethora of theories, none which have been replaced in a paradigm shift. It is therefore likely that although patterns of cooperation between states and international actors might undergo some changes in a post pandemic world, how we make sense of the world is unlikely to undergo a paradigm shift.

Since we are interested in historical change for the purposes of this chapter, we need to start with the difference between problem solving and critical theory as put forward by Robert Cox. Problem solving theory takes the world as it is and does not question existing patterns of institutions and relationships but rather focuses on fixing a problem in a specific area of activity. Critical theory on the other hand, takes a more holistic view and does not take institutions and power relations for granted, but questions them and looks for processes of change. Therefore, critical theory concerns itself with historical change. Cox posits that periods of stability like the cold war favour a problem-solving approach, whereas periods of uncertainty require a critical approach to “make sense of opportunities and risks of change.” (Cox, p.130).

In this chapter, I argue that the case in a post COVID-19 world, will be the exact opposite. This new uncertainty will require more problem-solving approaches. Theory for theories sake that question the larger picture of the existing order or dis-order, will become superfluous.

There will be little place for grand designs or prescriptive critical theories that offer ‘guides to strategic action.’ (Cox, 1981: 130) All action will be forced to be tactical for a while, but not to perpetuate the existing order, as Cox would describe problem solving theory. This will be a different problem-solving approach, one that will be tactical but will not be interested in seeking an alternate order like critical theory, nor preserving the current one, like problem solving theory. This brings us to the question: Is there still room for theory at all in such a world? As long as relations exist and have to continue between actors in the international system, yes, there is a room for a theory of international relations in the post COVID-19 era. That theory is more than likely to be a form of functionalism. A descriptive, problem solving approach that deals specifically with how actors cooperate on the basis of common needs. This is an approach driven by needs, not ideologies or norms. Rather than perpetuating a given order or suggesting alternate orders to the current one, it concerns itself with processes of survival. An alternate order may gradually emerge from various strands of cooperation that become necessary.

## Theory as a Legitimiser and Challenger of World Orders

What shaped the foundations of international relations theory was the ‘great debate’ between idealism and realism that dominated thinking on the state of international affairs from the interwar period between the two world wars and the aftermath of the second world war from 1945 onwards. The debate laid down the parameters of international relations theory as a struggle to explain the world as it *is* and the world as it *ought* to be. Idealism prescribed how the world ought to be, but nevertheless consolidated the status of quo of power relations of the day. This was the basis of Carr’s critique of idealism as nothing more than the ‘satisfied powers’ at the time trying to preserve the ‘status quo’ (Carr, 1946: 225). Realism on the other hand seeks to preserve the prevailing order without any attempt to design it. Both realism and idealism consolidate existing power structures. Apart from this debate between the world as it is and should be, the second question which dominated international relations theory particularly since the 1970s was exactly who the actors in the international system were and why some ought to be more prominent as a subject of study than others. This challenge to states as the predominant actors in the international system derived from many theories with different methodologies that criticised the state centric notion of realism. In fact, we could say that international relations theory has largely been driven by critiques of realism.

Liberalism as it emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was driven by the belief that wars and commerce were incompatible. The devastation of World War One and its aftermath set the stage for liberal idealism to become the forefront paradigm in rethinking how the world ought to be rearranged. Idealists or liberal institutionalists by another name, believed that the balance of power was not a phenomenon unique to the international system but was constructed by the ruling elites to perpetuate their interests. This was what liberal idealists called ‘secret diplomacy’ where a few bargained and maintained the power relations of the day through a war system, and statecraft was an elitist secret practice that did not reflect the wishes of the masses. Liberal idealists did not see war as a natural consequence of the international system but an aberration which had to be fixed. This could be fixed by correcting international anarchy by regulating the international system the same way as domestic politics. In other words, a system of global governance and international institutions would solve the age-old problem of an international system dominated by the balance of power that was corrected only by wars. Wilson’s Fourteen Points at the end of the World War One, embodied the application of American constitutional values globally. The creation of the League of Nations through a system of collective security was supposed to safeguard these principles (Howard, 2008: 74-78). However, the failure of the League to stop Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and Italy’s invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 showed that states did not have a universal and normative commitment to peace. Carr’s critique of liberalism at the outset of World War Two not only laid bare the motivations behind the ideas of liberal institutionalism to preserve the status quo for the victors of World War One, but also refuted the idea that there was any natural harmony of interests between states that could be institutionalised (Carr, 1946: 60).



At the end of World War Two, Realism emerged as the dominant paradigm in international relations theory. Beyond the work of Carr, Hans Morgenthau brought a certain intellectual rigour to the furthering of the realist thesis. Morgenthau's brand of realism was based on the universality of human nature, rather than the predominance of the nature of the international system which was the main premise of neorealism and the work of Kenneth Waltz. Morgenthau put forward six principles of political realism: Politics governed by human nature based on rational behaviour; interests defined in terms of power as key to understanding political decisions; the changeable nature of forms of state power; the absence of universal moral principles to guide state behaviour; the nonexistence of a universally agreed set of moral principles; and an *autonomous political sphere* from legal, moral or economic concerns (Morgenthau, p. 12). Waltz and the neorealists on the other hand emphasised the international system as a uniquely defined structure which drives the need for states to accumulate power. Decisions or outcomes are therefore not driven by human nature but by the requirements of the system. Waltz justified this top down systemic approach by stating that traditional realists like Morgenthau could not explain behaviour beyond the level of the nation state (Waltz, 1990: 34).

While the debate in IR theory struggled between explaining the world as it is and should be, another struggle was the determination of the appropriate methodology with which to explain the phenomena in question. This shaped the 'second great debate' 1960s. Behaviourists of this period criticised realist methodology for its lack of rigour and introduced more quantitative methodologies and formal hypothesis testing (Burchill & Linklater, 1986: 20).

Realist/ neo realist explanations of the international system have been criticised for being ahistorical and problem solving because they take certain aspects such as interests and the pursuit of power as a given (Cox, 1981:132). If realism/neorealism require an ahistorical setting, this is because they can observe certain processes and phenomena by subtracting them from other phenomena in order to examine certain modes of behaviour inherent in human nature. For example, Morgenthau's *autonomous political sphere* from legal, moral or economic concerns is similar to Clausewitz's tripartite definition of war, where war itself is made up of three distinct components, society, the operational and the political, which Clausewitz states, the last is 'the business of government alone.' (Von Clausewitz, 2007: 30-31) Similarly in order to understand economic behaviour Adam Smith, separates 'economic man' from other other modes of human behaviour (Grampp, 1948). An abstract form of rationality allows for the examination of behaviour related to a certain type of phenomena. There is nothing wrong in being a problem-solving theory if ahistorical methodology helps us to explain the outcomes in international relations or helps us to predict recurrent patterns of behaviour. If realism chooses to stand back from a historically conditioned perspective, it does not necessarily mean that it is unaware of its historical relevance in time and space. Abstraction and subtraction of a given phenomenon and choosing to examine

it as a recurrent fixed aspect of the subject of study, be it war, the international system, or economics, is a choice of methodology, not a lack of one.

The fixed and given aspects of the functioning of the international system derive from the fact that there are certain aspects of the international system that are unique to itself. Such is the reasoning of rationalism, or the line of thought that is referred to as the English School. Somewhere between classic realism and liberalism is rationality and the notion of a world society, where states do indeed cooperate and value order, unlike the stark realist thesis of an anarchic international system, that is only corrected by the balance of power and recurrent wars.

Bull, Watson and Wight asserted that the international system may be anarchic and conducive to war as realists and neorealists claimed, but despite the lack of a central authority there was a remarkable order in international relations. This was because certain things were unique to the international system that one could not find in domestic politics such as diplomacy, international organisations, and international law. Above all, states valued order in the international system because it gave them a certain predictability about the behaviour of other states and international actors. Like realists and neo realists they were aware of the limits of international institutions, in that they could not solve all the problems of the international system, like liberal idealists had once believed. However, nevertheless the rationalists or the English School believed that the world was not necessarily as anarchic as realists/neorealists would have it. Why states would self-inflict on themselves this accommodation and compromise in an anarchic international system, starts off with functional, selfish reasons, It stems from the preference for international order, not from an innate sense of common values in the Kantian sense. There are two questions that rationalists try to answer: First, why do states value international order and secondly, is it possible that the regulatory rules and institutions of such an order will eventually lead to the formation of an international society where states are conscious of common values? (Watson, 1987) In the main rationalist literature from Wight, Watson to Bull, there is a sense of an unresolved puzzle as to what constitutes an international society. Should it aspire to a Grotian/Kantian society of humankind? Is it only a society of modern elites around the world who are engrossed in the same daily practices and routines of international rules and regulations? Would such an international society be culturally diverse, or could there be a universal culture of international society? Would the predominance of Western culture in these practices eventually lead to a clash of cultures? These questions are essential in understanding world order but remain unanswered (Wight, 1966; Bull, 1977; Watson, 1987).

The question of whether regulatory practices under international institutions could form a society of states was also explored by Deutsch who envisaged an Atlantic community of states that were members of NATO, a military alliance of necessity but one that would nevertheless lead to a society (Deutsch 1957). In all these writings that sought to bridge a gap between idealism and realism,

the role of the state as the primary actor in the international system was intact. This was also the view put forward by neorealists and neoliberal institutionalists throughout the 1970s and 1980s. As the 1970s saw an increase in transactional economic activity which challenged the centrality of the role of the state under realist and neo-realist explanations of the international system, Gilpin and Krasner brought forward the notion of order based on accepted patterns of cooperation such as hegemonic stability theory and regime theory, to underline the role of the state in an increasingly globalized world economy. Like the English School, regime theory maintained that states valued regulations and rules that gave predictability to international relations because this enabled them to calculate and reduce the costs of international transactions (Aybet, 2001).

The end of the cold war once more put liberalism or neoliberal theories at the forefront of not only explaining what had happened but also legitimising policy actions that were to follow it. The triumph of the West after the Cold War, brought in a new ideological euphoria, one that accompanied the frenzy of writing and coding keywords into official documents of institutions with academic works that legitimised the blueprints for reconstituting a liberal world order.

Fukuyama's *End of History* underlined the triumph of liberal democracy and the arrival of a post-ideological world. In actual fact, it was heralding the dominance of one ideology: the "universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." John Ikenberry in *After Victory* asks the question, what do states that win wars do with their newfound power and how do they use it to build order? He maintains that only with the spread of democracy in the twentieth century and the innovative use of international institutions--both linked to the emergence of the United States as a world power--has order been created that goes beyond balance of power politics to exhibit "constitutional" characteristics. The notion of painting progress in terms of processes that must be lived through is fine, but this takes the progress in the international system as a linear process. This begs the question, do world orders and political/ideological evolution have to come in cycles or is the progression and degeneration of the international system a haphazard series of events with no connection to each other?

Both Ikenberry and Fukuyama were surprised at the endurance of the post-1945 Liberal international order after the collapse of communism and they sought to explain it: either by the *triumph of institutionalism* (Ikenberry, 2001) or the *end of Ideologies* (Fukuyama, 1992). Doyle on the other hand proclaimed that liberal democracies would not go to war with each other, but this would not rule out their going to war with non-democracies (Doyle, 1997). A prescriptive disaster for legitimizing military intervention against whom the Western victors of the cold war deemed not adhering to their set of values. There was a given premise that institutions would have failed, or Germany and Japan would have reverted to their old ways. Neither of these dreaded consequences

happened. Had the world indeed progressed to an international society that Hedley Bull had envisaged? While the liberals were trying to explain why the post 1945 system had survived, realists like Mearsheimer warned against the over estimation of international institutions. (Mearsheimer, 1994-1995) and Huntington warned of clash of civilizations, and that the end of the cold war may not produce the rosy picture put forward by the liberals (Huntington, 1996). Critical theorists were in a realm of their own, rebelling against the age old theory/practitioner relationship from Morgenthau to Ikenberry and hanging on to their belief that a world society could be created just by refusing mainstream discourse.

In the midst of all this, along came constructivism in the 1990s, which focused on the relationship between agents and structure, claiming that the latter had a power to shape and construct the identities and interests of the former. Alexander Wendt's phrase 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt, 1992) sums this argument. Constructivism focuses on the power of norms and the study of how norms are challenged and replaced with new norms. Building on the neo liberal dominated environment of the early 1990s, constructivists contributed to the process of norm diffusion. In other words, now the explanation of how the West had won the cold war was over, it was time to diffuse that order to the post-communist space. Policy practice and theory were once again walking hand in hand.

Ironically, given that critical theory is against the policy/theory relationship and mainstream discourses, one could put critical theory and constructivism in the same box as they are both critical of neorealism and neoliberalism for their state centric approach. Both constructivism and critical theory will maintain that relationships beyond states matter in the international system and how actors in the system behave are determined by their perceptions of who they are and how they perceive themselves and others. Yet the constructivist focuses on norms and their dissemination in the early 1990s was a typical tool that legitimized the policy choices of the day. The reconstitution of a liberal world order in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the necessity to absorb the post-communist space into Western practices and institutions, created patterns of thought that justified processes of norm dissemination. This could be through post conflict state building as in the Balkans, or member state building such as the absorption of the Central and Eastern European states into NATO and the EU. Therefore, constructivism, although critical of realism which was a problem solving approach, offered a 'guide to strategic action' like a critical theory, by shaping policies through a grand design of how the world ought to be, yet at the same time offered a guide to tactical actions, just like a problem solving theory, by perpetuating a normative liberal world order inherited from the triumph of winning the cold war. Therefore, all theories have a little of both problem solving and critical elements in their approach.

## Processes of Norm Diffusion as Legitimisers of a Liberal International Order

As Cox put it: “theory is always *for* someone or *for* some purpose” (Cox, 1981:128) The literature on norm diffusion in the 1990s nevertheless contributed to the legitimization, promotion and diffusion of a reconstituted liberal world order. Norms are “beliefs embodied in practice.” (Farrell, 2001: 71). From 1990 onwards, we can see the appearance of a recurring discourse on international norms, in the official statements of various international organisations, from NATO, the EU to the OSCE. In all these documents there are three norms which are commonly referred to: the creation of a geographic space held together by *free market economies, democratic institutions and human rights*. This space is commonly referred to in institutional documents as the ‘Euro-Atlantic area’.<sup>2</sup> (Aybet, 2000: 44-89).

Patterns of norm diffusion occur through a process of *socialisation* whereby international norms are *internalised* by domestic actors/institutions. This is a process of ‘grafting’ whereby international norms are transplanted onto local ones. The 1990s rich constructivist literature provides several patterns on how international norms are diffused and how they ought to be diffused. Thus, IR theory in this period not only legitimises liberal institutionalism but also provides it with method and application. Theo Farrell’s ‘norm transplantation’ involves either an incremental process where international norms are grafted on to existing local norms through social learning, or a radical process, where international norms clash with local norms and are diffused through political mobilisation where the target community is pressured into ‘adopting new ways of thinking and doing.’ (Farrell, 2001, 65). Finnemore and Sikkink refer to norm ‘cascading’ whereby norms are taken up by states and international organisations in order to preserve and increase their legitimacy, reputation and esteem (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). This is similar to the Risse Kappen and Sikkink’s process of *socialisation* whereby domestic actors accept the validity of international norms in their discursive practices. There is also an emerging ‘moral consciousness’, as states who violate these norms are isolated by the international community (Risse Kappen & Sikkink, 1999: 7-11). Frank Schimmelfennig acknowledges rational choice on the part of the target community in a process of socialisation. Here he identifies two actors, the international community and the ‘external state’ towards which the socialisation process is supposed to be directed. “The external state learns and internalises the community values and norms because it identifies itself with the community, accepts the values and norms as legitimate and regards the community members as role models.’ It adopts these norms ‘not because it regards them as true and right, but because adoption is necessary

<sup>2</sup> The policy blueprint of using these institutions for stability in the Euro-Atlantic Area is evident in all the official documents from these institutions from NATO’s London Declaration in 1990 to the CSCE’s Helsinki Document ‘Challenges of Change’ in 1992. See: NATO The London Declaration, 1990, See *The Charter of Paris for a New Europe* November 1990, December 1990, see also NAA Political Committee *Interim Report of the Working Group on the New Security Order: From Paris to Helsinki, Animating the CSCE*, October 1991 AI 3263, PC/ESC (91) 2, International Secretariat, North Atlantic Assembly; CSCE Helsinki Document, *The Challenges of Change*, July 1992; North Atlantic Council Oslo Final Communiqué, 4th June 1992, , WEU Council, Petersburg Declaration, Bonn, 19 June 1992. See also Frank Schimmelfennig, ‘Introduction’ in Ronald Linden (ed.) *Norms and Nannies, The Impact of International Organisations on the Central and Eastern European States*, Rowen Littlefield, Oxford (2002: 7).

to further its political goals.’ (Schimmelfenning, 2000: 117; Acharya, 2004: 239-275). This assumes rationality on the part of the actor which is targeted in a process of socialisation. Schimmelfenning developed his argument by examining the absorption of the Central and European states into Western institutions after the end of the Cold War. This is member state building, different from post conflict state building, as in the case of Bosnia. In both cases norms become ‘enablers’ for policy makers. The idea of norms as enablers for policy makers exists in both neo liberal institutionalist and constructivist accounts. Although neoliberal institutionalists and neorealists take interests as a given, and constructivists take norms as basis for interest and identity formation (Wendt, 1992; Moravcsik, 1997). The liberal institutionalist design of the 1990s reinforced by norm diffusion to target states and societies, was driven by the neoliberal and neorealist assumptions of power maximisation and self-preservation as given interests. The safeguarding of those interests is undertaken by defending and promoting a certain liberal order. ‘As part of this promotion, the transfusion of externally imposed norms to other regions and countries was the means by which the survival of that of that liberal order was supposedly guaranteed (Aybet, 2000).

The post-cold war return of liberalism and the diffusion of norms in practice and theory were gradually accompanied by a decline in the euphoria surrounding the early 1990s. It became apparent that this was not the end of history, or ideologies or conflict for that matter. It also became clear that the exporting of a type of western based international society to encompass the whole world was not viable. Huntington’s doom scenario did not materialise although the rise of non-state actors, the resurgence of Russia and China on the world stage, and the global war on terror were unprecedented challenges for the new liberal order that was in fact essentially a temporary vacuum created after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The biggest challenge to the predominance of a transatlantic core dominated liberal order actually came from within itself: the new ideological struggle between the globalists and the mercantilists. It was at this just juncture of events that COVID-19 hit the world.

### **A Needs Based World Order After COVID-19**

It is hard to predict what kind of an order will emerge or how much damage a global liberal order will sustain after the COVID-19 pandemic. It is hardly over at the time of writing this article and its repercussions are as yet uncertain. However, it is possible to make some predictions as to where we can expect a change in international patterns of cooperation.

At the time COVID-19 became a pandemic, the international system was already in a state of flux. While outside the transatlantic core dominated Western system of institutions and practices, frozen and hot conflicts were rife, the global economy struggled to get back to its previous pace after the 2008 global financial crisis, as international virtual terrorist cells cropped up

in unsuspecting places at unexpected times and then disappeared with dead end trails, and the concepts of security changed from protecting the global commons to securing food supplies. Meanwhile civil wars raged on and instability had a much wider reach than in previous years. A resurgent Russia as a hard power regional player, and China's unnervingly rapid spread of global influence as a trader, investor and leader in technology left the 1990s world of reinstating liberalism at a long distance in the past. Therefore, the world was already going through a transition when COVID-19 emerged. That transition was from a declining liberal world order to another system which is still in the making, one which is referred to as a 'post-Western World.' (Stuenkel, 2017).

The existence of this order always depended on the existence of an 'other'. This usually came in the guise of an ideology. During the Cold War this was communism. After the Cold War the notion of "rogue states" emerged as well as global terrorism. Sometimes unfortunately referred to as "Islamist terrorism" particularly after 9/11. This was in essence all part of the same process since the great ideological struggles of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: fascism, communism - all against western led liberalism and free market economies. The liberal world order has always relied on an ideological struggle to justify itself. It established itself from the ashes of being a victor over fascism. It rose to the challenge as the main and only contender of communism. It then continued its 'free world' mantle with singling out radicalism. And finally, states that supposedly strayed from its fold were labeled "authoritarian". The academic discourse in a predominantly Western structure of widely accepted publications, institutions and a supportive mainstream media with global outreach enabled these discourses to be widespread. Thus, the 1990s neoliberal discourses followed by the various rigorous studies on norm diffusion all bolstered this labelling. At the beginning of this chapter I pointed out that labels are powerful if endorsed by what is widely accepted as a legitimate core. In this sense, we can say that the dominant transatlantic core and its predominantly western based institutions formed a paradigm of liberal institutionalism that was inspired and derived by American constitutional practices. A system ruled by regulations and institutions had not quite become an international society in English School terms but had become a western security community that operated predominantly through a defensive military alliance that was NATO. In many ways this was the community that Deutsch had envisaged back in 1957. However, Deutsch had envisaged a community of equals with long term expectations of peaceful change, considering that Europe as it was before 1945 was predominantly a state centric war system, correcting itself with the balance of power and perpetual wars. Out of this a society of states and peoples could emerge (Deutsch, 1957). In that sense the EU was a remarkable project. But the reinstated liberal world order of the 1990s was something different. That was the decade that saw the euphoria of victory for the liberal world order, embodied in the various books of the time, in Ikenberry's *After Victory*, Fukuyama's *End of History* (Ikenberry, 1997; Fukuyama, 1992). It was a moment where American leadership had triumphed and once more the design of World Order had fallen on the shoulders Europe and America. There was



an 'oughtness' in this design, in terms of this is what the world and other states 'ought to be like'. Peace was only the prerogative of those who deserved it – the Western liberal model of democratic states (Doyle 1997). This once again, created a label for the 'other'. That would be any space or country that did not adhere to this grand design. That gave the western security community the right to be regarded as a Gramscian hegemony, one that wielded power not only through finance, economics and military might but also through values and institutions that were widely accepted (Aybet, 2000). The legitimacy of a western security community always depended on the struggle between ideologies, real or constructed, because there always had to be an 'other'.

What became evident 30 years on, was that the “transatlantic core” that is Europe and America, were caught in a time warp of the 1990s. But in actual fact not only was the liberal world order in decline, but the resurgent powers of Russia and China were laying designs of their own. The global economy was shifting and morphing into new supply and value chains. The liberal world order was coming undone. Trust in institutions were wavering. Civil wars and regional instabilities were rising.

In the midst of these changes, a new set of ideological clashes emerged. Ironically, this ideological clash was not between the values and institutions of the western security community on one hand and a force challenging it as its 'other'. This ideological clash was happening inside the western security community itself. It was a battle between those who clung onto the globalist liberal world order and those who reacted to it with mercantilist protectionist policies, often manifesting itself with a support from the far right with racist tendencies. It was at the juncture of this new clash of ideologies that COVID-19 entered the world scene. What COVID-19 has done is it has hurried on the transition that the world order was going through. We will probably see some of these developments already underway unravelling with considerable speed.

We are also likely to see a new kind of nation state on the horizon: a self-help nation state that is self-sufficient in all sectors, less reliant on global supply chains but continues to expand its global trade relations. Therefore, not entirely a mercantilist state but one that is protective of its own national base of production and distribution.

COVID-19 has also forced countries to address the issue of cooperating on a needs-based level. Take the example of the rush to find a vaccination. The unlikely candidates are likely to come together, maybe a group of scientists in one country making a deal with a pharmaceutical company in another country. This transcends politics and international relations. These are new opportunities at the time of COVID-19 forcing everyone to think outside the box. Supply and value chains are also likely to be needs driven and will transcend politics and ideologies. On the other hand, countries are likely to divert security and defense to protecting research and development plants, particularly from cyber-attacks.



A Post COVID-19 World is going to force mercantilists to engage more in international cooperation, while forcing liberal globalists to question ideological motives as the sole determinants of international cooperation. Modes of cooperation are more likely to be driven by the desire to survive therefore built on transactions based on basic needs. Contrary to Fukuyama's assertion that liberal democracy is the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." in that it has no other ideological competitor, (Fukuyama 1989: 2), this new order to emerge is more likely to be the end point of ideology itself. A new world where ideologies will no longer determine whether an international order ought to be designed or a prevailing one should be preserved. A semblance of order will exist in the international system but only because strands of various result-oriented modes of cooperation will prevail out of necessity rather than a grand design. Such a world order is more likely to operate on all three levels of international relations as put forward by Fred Halliday: inter-state, transnational and systemic (Halliday, 1990: 503).

In this new order we are likely to see the return of the state, and therefore a degree of mercantilism but one that is constrained in its mercantilism because it cannot shut out international cooperation, but nevertheless seeks to subvert established modes of cooperation in the international system. A state which would bypass the power centres of globalisation and the institutions which perpetuate these processes. In other words, this leads us to a new model of state or forms of state as Cox defines it, (Cox, 1981: 138) one which seeks to be self-sufficient from the subordination to globalist institutions which dominate its international political and economic relations through conditionality, but at the same time continues to trade globally. Such states will set their own parameters on how they interact with other actors in the global economy.

This new emerging state model will also be different to what Cox imagined as the eventual challengers to the liberal order. Cox predicted that an alternative structure in the international system could come from a neo-mercantilist industrial and national level corporatism at the core. In other words, this neo mercantilism would rise in the transatlantic core. According to Cox, another alternative could be 'counter-hegemonic' forces emerging from the periphery or what was referred to in more general terms as the 'third world'. (Cox, 1981: 150-151) But beyond challenging the transatlantic core based liberal order, these 'counter-hegemonic' populist movements would not have much to offer. What we are seeing now is quite different. Yes, there is a rising neo mercantilism in the core, but COVID-19 is going to force it to become more cooperative on the international level. As to the 'counter-hegemonic' forces, these are more likely to be the self-sufficient but global trader country model that I mentioned above. Therefore, the new order will not be based on the traditional core-periphery division. In fact, the core-periphery relationship will cease to exist. On a more optimistic note, this is likely to become a kinder, more benign system. Perhaps one that Wallerstein envisaged when he rejected the notion of a 'third world'. He stated as early as the 1990s that the liberal

order was in decline and was bound to be replaced by another, but like Cox, his theoretical framework was set within the structure of a core and periphery, with the added space he called semi periphery, referring to the rising powers and emerging economies (Wallerstein, 1982; 1995).

If any semblance of order is to emerge from this alternative needs-based system, it will be an order that grows bottom up through various strands of cooperation that are technical, short term and needs based. Eventually these strands of cooperation may grow to cooperation in higher politics and perhaps even a sense of international society with common bonds. This is an incremental approach based on the theory of functionalism. This is embodied in the work of Mitrany who prescribes linking of authority to a specific activity rather than a state's territory. International organisations become mere facilitators as they carry out administrative tasks, they do not prescribe a sense of 'oughtness' through values and norms, as envisaged by the neoliberals. Functionalism is non-political. It concentrates on 'common needs', "making frontiers meaningless through continuous development of common activities and interests across them." (Mitrany quoted in Aybet 2001: 17). Eventually a community of states or an international society might evolve, but as Mitrany maintains, states will be bound to this community "not through a written act of faith but through organic involvement." (Mitrany, 1966: 42). Therefore international relations theory after COVID-19 will be less concerned with preserving the world as it is, or prescribing the world as it should be, but will most probably try and explain the various non-political, non-ideological strands of international cooperation emerging out of needs not prescribed grand designs.

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