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Reassessing the Cold War and the Far-Right: Fascist Legacies and the Making of the Liberal International Order after 1945

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Abstract:	<p>This article intervenes in IR debates on the origins and character of the post-war liberal international order. Dominant theorisations of the US-led Western order rest on a shared assumption of its essentially post-fascist character based on the liberal-democratic properties of its constitutive members. This article challenges this prevailing view. It does so through a critical historical and theoretical exploration of the role of far-right ideo-political forces in the development of the liberal international order during the early Cold War period. Drawing on the concepts of 'uneven and combined development' and 'passive revolution' as alternative theoretical frames, the article focuses particular attention to the significance of former fascists in the workings and institutional fabric of a number of West European states, and the relationship between the US and NATO in far-right coup-plotting and violence that punctuated their national histories. Demonstrating these far-right 'contributions' to the making and evolution of the Cold War order, the article offers a reconceptualisation of liberal order construction and US hegemony that not only problematises existing accounts of Cold War geopolitics, but also demonstrates the structural interconnections between the far-right and liberal order-building projects that goes beyond the Cold War era.</p>

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Introduction

With the recent political ‘shocks’ of Donald Trump’s US presidential election and ‘Brexit’, alongside the broader rise of far-right movements across the Western world, it appears that some of the core foundations of the post-war liberal international order are at risk. Such developments have led to an outpouring of scholarly and journalistic commentary focusing on what appears to be an unprecedented moment in the history of said order (Anderson 2017; Krauthammer 2017). Many of these responses, however, have tended to overlook the longer-term significance and role of the far-right in the making and reproduction of the US-led international order – a lacuna that extends to its dominant theorisations in International Relations (IR), which emphasise its ‘post-fascist’ dimensions based on the liberal-democratic character of US hegemony (Bromley 2008; Cox 1987; Deudney and Ikenberry 1999; Ikenberry 2011, 2001; Ruggie 1982; Rupert 1995; Smith 1994).

This article seeks to challenge this depiction of the post-war liberal international order by highlighting the continuing significance of the far-right in the core liberal-democratic geopolitical zones at its heart after 1945. In particular, it draws attention to the role of far-right forces in the construction and maintenance of a distinct *domestic* anti-communist political order across a number of states that were integral to the making of the liberal international order. This emphasis on the mutual interconnections of domestic and international order construction not only underscores some neglected aspects of Cold War history, but also better accounts for the specific ideo-political properties of the post-1945 liberal order by identifying the agency of a ‘post-fascist’ far-right; something that most IR approaches have overlooked (but see Rupert 2015). Simply put, the assumption

that the far-right was a marginal factor in the (geo-)politics of the Cold War within ‘the West’¹ will be fundamentally challenged.

Our intervention follows on the heels of a number of scholars who have emphasised the coercive properties of US post-war order construction. Some of the most important revisionist contributions to the debate on the origins of the Cold War highlight the role of US coercion as a key driver of Soviet-American tensions (Kolko and Kolko 1972; McCormick 1995; LaFeber 1997; see also Leffler 1992), which reflected a ‘duality’ in the coercive means by which both superpowers realised their respective political objectives after the war. Further, many liberal IR accounts of the post-war order have been criticised for shortcomings in their definition of what types of state are recognised as liberal-democratic, as well as their failure to address the role of covert forms of coercion in US policy that have undermined and, in some cases, helped overthrow ‘leftist’ regimes in the Global South (Barkawi and Laffey 2001).

We draw on some of these arguments and, in many respects, share their perspectives on the centrality of coercion in US post-war order construction. However, by focusing on the *constitutive* dimension of the far-right on order-building within the liberal-capitalist ‘core’ (rather than the Global South), we aim to make a distinct contribution to this wider literature that is relevant to both an understanding of the specific properties of the post-war liberal order and the construction of liberal orders *in general* – one that also speaks to the contemporary context of a revitalised far-right noted above. In so doing, we outline a theorisation of how and why the far-right plays this constitutive role thereby addressing an important analytical lacuna in the literature.

Specifically, we seek to go beyond ‘instrumentalist’ or functionalist framings of the far-right that pepper many revisionist accounts. These accounts are instrumentalist insofar as they conceptualise the far-right as more or less *passive agents* strategically deployed and manipulated by political elites in moments of crisis toward pre-determined ends (but see Cumings 1990). They are functionalist in the sense of examining the role of the far-right almost exclusively in terms of their contribution to fulfilling the reproductive requirements or ‘needs’ of capital (cf. Davidson 2015). As such, existing approaches

¹ While there has been commentary on US support for right-wing dictatorships in the Global South (Schmitz 2006), this literature has tended to ignore the role of the far-right in the ‘Western theatre’ of the Cold War and its implications in *theorising* the liberal international order.

tend to understate the independent agency of the far-right as *active* and *autonomous* actors that operate in ways that are sometimes antagonistic to the ideo-political foundations of liberal order. In contrast, we theorise the far-right as an *organic* and *constitutive* element of liberal-capitalist social orders that are produced from *within* the contradictory workings of liberal political economy and which are particularly evident within the ‘para-political’ dimensions of the (re)production of the hegemony of liberal-capitalist orders. The ongoing organic tensions within liberalism as a political form, reflecting the narrowness of its normative foundations (Robinson 2016), limits the scope and depth of democratic forms of economic governance thereby providing openings for significant far-right agency. Our account therefore stresses the critical importance of the *active agency* of the far-right in the making of the post-war order.

Far-right forces are not only *permanently* reproduced within liberal social orders – and especially internationalising ones – but also realise a distinct nationalist and authoritarian ideo-political imaginary as a permanent and *legitimate* feature of liberal politics (Singh 2017). And whilst the far-right is contradictory and, in some respects, antagonistic (see Davidson 2015; Saull 2015a, 2015b) towards liberalism, it has also historically demonstrated a consistency in its support for private property rights – a defining element of liberalism. It is this ‘contradictory embrace’ emanating from the ‘strategic selectivity’ (Jessop, 1990) of the capitalist state that makes it much more penetrable by far-right ideo-political currents, and which provides it with a radicalising dynamic that offers an antidote to the forces of the radical left.

The discussion is organised in the following way. Section I examines some of the most prominent explanations within IR on liberal order-building, focusing in particular on G. John Ikenberry; the most important and influential exemplar of the liberal internationalist approach. The section teases out how the existing IR literature both defines ‘order’ and connects its construction with the social, ideological and institutional arrangements within the domestic polities of its constituent members. We identify some of the limitations of these existing approaches that are further developed in Section II where we discuss the structured relations between far-right forces and ideologies in the construction and pathologies of liberal orders more generally. Here an alternative theoretical framework for understanding the persistence of the far-right vis-à-vis liberal

(international) order-building is developed building upon the interconnected ideas of ‘hegemony’, ‘historical bloc’ and ‘passive revolution’.

Section III offers empirical analysis of the central strategic place of the far-right in the making and reproduction of the US-centred liberal international order after 1945. It focuses particular attention on how the recurrent emergence of far-right agents were aided and utilised by ‘Western’ state managers and the US in particular as bulwarks against left-wing political forces, projects for radical democratic change and alternative conceptions of liberal-*democratic* international orderings thus calling into question the ostensibly ‘democratic’ and ‘consensual’ credentials of the US-centred order. It does so, firstly, by highlighting the continued presence of the personnel of the fascist state – in the upper echelons of the military, bureaucracy and judiciary – within a number of post-war liberal states, who were themselves important shapers of state policymaking vis-à-vis international order-building within Ikenberry’s ‘open’ system of US hegemony. This not only demonstrates the limits of de-fascistisation and therefore the idea of a ‘post-fascist’ settlement, but also the persistence of far-right authoritarian impulses within various ‘Western’ polities that were integrated into the US-led order challenging the *extent* of the break from the era that preceded it. Secondly, it examines the tolerance and collusion between elements within some members of the liberal order – at the domestic and international levels (involving NATO and the US) – and far-right forces in using violence as a means to ensure the reproduction of an anti-communist political order. This saw support for and cover-up of far-right terrorist acts, most notably in Italy, that were framed as acts carried out by the radical left. Such incidents promoted a ‘politics of emergency’ in times of hegemonic crisis. The conclusion then teases out the theoretical implications of our empirical analysis in offering a more historically and sociologically grounded conception of US hegemony that elucidates the social content and ‘logic’ of post-WWII international order-building.

The Social Foundations of the Cold War Liberal International Order

The study of international order-building within IR forms a substantial body of literature (see, *inter alia*, Bull 1977; Clark 1989; Cox 1987; Hurrell 2007; Ikenberry, 2001). With specific reference to the Cold War geopolitical order and, in particular, the distinct

character of the political relations across the advanced capitalist world centred on the north Atlantic zone, a number of theoretical perspectives have sought to theorise the connections between these two forms of political space (Cox 1987; Deudney and Ikenberry 1999; Ikenberry 2001; 2011; Risse-Kappen 1995; Ruggie 1982; Rupert 1995; Van der Pijl 2014). Our primary focus here concentrates on the liberal-institutionalist account, arguably the most influential explanation of the distinct political character of the post-war liberal international order and their relation to other approaches where appropriate.

G. John Ikenberry's work (1989; 2001; 2011) on the liberal-democratic properties of American hegemony has provided the most sustained theoretical account of both the establishment of the US-centred liberal international order and why it has managed to weather the numerous crises that it has confronted in the post-Cold War epoch. Perhaps more than any other IR scholar, Ikenberry has drawn out the structural interconnections between the domestic political orders of the 'Western' powers, particularly the US, and the making and evolution of the post-WWII order. He has provided further empirical and theoretical substance to the 'generative grammar' of the post-war order by explicating 'the underlying principles of order and meaning that shape the manner of their formation and transformation', whilst demonstrating the ways in which the internationalisation of political authority came to represent a 'a fusion of power with legitimate social purpose' (Ruggie 1982: 380, 382). For these reasons, it is worth exploring the tensions and omissions in Ikenberry's influential account and its overlaps with more critical IR approaches.

US Hegemony and the Origins of the Post-WWII Liberal International Order

Central to Ikenberry's analysis of the development of the post-WWII US-led international order is an emphasis on the liberal-democratic constitution of the 'Western' powers involved. For Ikenberry, it was the specifically *democratic* character of those states involved in the development of the array of institutions and regimes facilitating and grounding the post-WWII order that accounts for these states' ability to achieve such historically unprecedented results in terms of the order's stability and durability, and the institutions' particularly strong 'binding' power. As Ikenberry notes (2001: 164),

‘European and American leaders argued quite explicitly that their willingness to establish binding ties with each other hinged on their shared democratic institutions. Democracy was both an end and a means’. Ikenberry thereby works with an explicit ‘domestic analogy’ in understanding international orders: the internal constitution of the parties (nation-states) to such an order largely determines the specific character the order takes.

Particularly significant was the politically ‘open’ and ‘reciprocal’ character of the American state and the distinctly liberal form of ‘hegemony’ that defined US power after 1945. US hegemony was much *less coercive* than often assumed within IR, and often *less successful* in imposing its own interests on its Western allies. It had a ‘distinctively liberal cast’, Daniel Deudney and Ikenberry note (1999: 185), ‘because it has been more consensual, cooperative, and integrative than it has been coercive’. Liberal agency – and, specifically, benign American ‘liberal hegemonic leadership’ – was thus central to the making of order (Ikenberry 2011: 4, 182-183, 217).

Ikenberry’s conception of US hegemony shares some broad affinities with neo-Marxist approaches which also emphasise its more consensual aspects embedded in the specific socio-economic characteristics of the post-war capitalist order. According to such perspectives, the US-centred post-WWII order was achieved through the formation of a new transnational ‘historic bloc’ concomitant to newly established ‘neo-liberal’ states in Western Europe and the US (Cox 1987; Gill and Law 1989; Rupert 1995). This new post-WWII bloc brought together leading ‘fractions of productive and financial capital’, alongside ‘elements in the state apparatuses, centrist political parties, and non-communist organised labour in the major capitalist nations’ who consciously aimed at establishing a ‘transatlantic political community’ (Gill and Law 1989: 478).

Whilst giving ontological primacy to the social relations of production and class agency such neo-Gramscian accounts nonetheless share Ikenberry’s emphasis on civil society as the space where the *ideological* basis of US hegemony was constructed and consolidated. Moreover, both accounts tend to focus on the internal properties of the constituent members of the post-WWII international order in assessing its character. In these ways, both conventional and neo-Gramscian IR largely converge around the idea that the making of the US-led post-WWII order witnessed the triumph of ‘liberal internationalist’ forces in the ‘Western alliance’ solidifying a geopolitical and world

economic order in their own image (cf. Cox 1987; Deudney and Ikenberry 1999; Gill and Law 1989; Ikenberry 2001; 2011; Risse-Kappen 1995; Ruggie 1982; Rupert 1995; Van der Pijl 2014).

Whilst there are important differences between these two accounts, both perspectives say little about the place of far-right forces in their respective historical accounts and, more importantly, omit any *conceptualisation* of the far-right in their theoretical schemas. This not only weakens their respective analyses, but also serves to misconstrue the character and evolution of the Cold War order more generally. In Ikenberry's analysis (2001), this historical-cum-theoretical lacuna stems in part on his insistence on separating the two post-war settlements and their historical or causal sequencing: the first between Washington and Moscow that created the Cold War and; the second concerning the construction of the US-led liberal international order. The problem is that this reverses the order of their actual occurrence and, in doing so, misconstrues the actual causal drives associated with each. This is because a form of 'Cold War' hostility towards the USSR had existed since 1917 and this embedded anti-communism was a key driver in determining political developments in Western Europe after WWII. And while these internal developments were connected to Soviet geopolitical activities they were not reducible to them (see Anievas 2014; Halperin 2004). Before turning our focus to the Cold War era, it is important to identify how our argument relates to wider conceptions of (international) liberal order and, in particular, the social and ideological constituents of that order.

The Terms of Liberal Order: Hegemony and the Far-Right

Viewed from a *longue durée* perspective, we can identify not only the connections between the far-right and the Cold War liberal order but also the *structural continuities* that define the ontology of liberalism as a political order. Liberal orders – from the nineteenth century to contemporary times – have maintained an ambivalent relationship to the politics and ideas of the far-right (Saul 2015a; Woodley 2010). Such ambivalences – that at certain moments become embraces – derive from the structural properties of liberal order.

The Geo-social contradictions of Liberal Modernity

The first is the recurrent phenomena produced from the destabilising ‘geo-social’ consequences of the uneven and combined nature of capitalist development and how this shapes the ideo-political conditions for liberal international order construction. The ‘social reality’ of uneven development challenges liberal assumptions about the complementarity of politics and economics. For the spatial expansion and reproduction of capitalism takes place across and within developmentally differentiated locales often defined by the presence of significant non-liberal political conditions. This *combined* nature of capitalist development means that the universalising pretensions of liberal internationalism (individual freedom, constitutional order and representative government as the ideal-typical political framing for the market economy) tend to come up against concrete social conditions that *problematise* such an arrangement (Saull *et al.* 2015).

It is because of the uneven and combined character of capitalist development that the ideo-political forces of the far-right can be seen as organic to and constitutive of liberal orderings. Emerging within the global crucible of capitalist development, the far-right articulates a distinct political response to the social instabilities and crises engendered by it: a politics defined by articulating a mythical presentation of the past that idealises it in racial and cultural terms thereby continuously reproducing the *past in the present* – a contradictory amalgam of ‘archaic’ and ‘contemporary’ forms (Trotsky 1977). As such, there remains the ever-present possibility (as revealed in the Brexit vote and Trump’s election) that far-right forces gain political support in contexts of major crises. This was how attempts at liberal international order construction played out under the aegis of British hegemony and how its combined character contributed to the resultant crises within it culminating in the First World War (cf. Anievas 2014).

The relevance of this point for explaining both the construction and political characteristics of the post-1945 international order is that these contradictions – which had driven the world to war again in 1939 – remained, to a significant degree, in place after the military defeat of fascist states. Thus, in the former fascist states of Germany, Italy and Japan,² the social-political conditions for constructing the bases of liberal orders

² There is some debate as to whether interwar Japan was fascist (cf. Hoston 1986; Mann 2004). Those who argue against an indigenous Japanese fascism often do so on basis of the experiences of fascist Italy and

were problematised because of the continuing political legacies of their uneven and combined development that the war had reconstituted rather than resolved. Yet, by this time, the primary ideo-political challenge came from a revitalised radical left. The crises and conflicts that defined the inter-war period, and which fatally undermined attempts to reconstruct a liberal international order, had not immediately dissipated. Instead, the challenge that now confronted US political strategists was the problem of constructing a liberal international order out of social and political conditions in some of its key geopolitical zones that were antagonistic to the very principles of said order. This was the primary dilemma faced by US policymakers after the war: the recurring problem of reconstructing and managing the contradictory dynamics of an international liberal order wherein its constituent parts were hardly conducive to it.

In moments of crisis, then, the political bases of liberal orders have often relied upon far-right mobilisations to help *secure* them as far-right ideologies provide an important ideo-political imaginary to compensate for the intense dislocations and sense of anomie characterising such conjunctures. In this respect, the structural dynamics of capitalist development generates far-right forces as a kind of coercive ‘reserve army’ that politicians and ruling class forces can take draw on in times of crisis, but can never fully control. This is not to suggest that far-right actors should be regarded as a pawn of ruling class interests parroting the crude Stalinist thesis on fascism or that the far-right is *functional* to reproducing liberal (international) orders.³ Rather, it is to recognise the political role played by far-right forces in helping thwart revolutionary challenges to liberal-capitalist orders, including the authoritarian and anti-democratic elements within the ‘deep’ state that tend to appear when the social regime of capital is most vulnerable. The far-right can do this by offering an *alternative ideological legitimation* of capitalist social orderings from that of liberalism. Some understanding of the architectonics of the

Nazi Germany, in effect holding-up European history as the normative model from which all other ‘cases’ must be judged. We reject this position and believe Japan was indeed fascist (Mimura 2011). Irrespective of this position, however, it is indisputable that interwar Japan was a far-right authoritarian regime and can therefore be included in our discussion of the impact of the *far-right* (which includes both fascist and non-fascist elements) on the post-WWII order. Moreover, Japan’s inclusion is all the more important given the country’s significance to the US-led liberal order.

³ Indeed, the far-right can be ultimately destructive of (international) liberal orders as dramatically demonstrated by the interwar period (Anievas 2014).

liberal state, its terms of order, and the strategic place of the far-right in its contradictory reproduction is therefore crucial.

Hegemonic Crisis, the Far-Right, and Passive Revolution

Here the question of hegemony – conceived by Gramsci as the dialectical fusion of consent and coercion, leadership and domination, legitimacy and corruption – becomes central. For the historical conditions giving rise to strong far-right movements are most often those in which the hegemony of the existing ruling order comes under duress – both materially with respect to economic crisis and in political-institutional terms concerning the ideology and mechanisms of political legitimacy. This is precisely the situation Gramsci commented on during the interwar years with the rise to power of fascist and Nazi movements, where the far-right was viewed as both a *challenge* and *possible solution* to reconsolidating capital's hegemony. In Italy and Germany, the principal political representatives of the bourgeoisie no longer provided an adequate solution to the crises of hegemony they faced and turned to far-right forces in 'anchoring' their 'hegemony within the people' (Neebe 1981: 160; cf. Abraham 1986; Eley 2013; Anievas 2014). Once in power, fascism was defined by an unstable 'dialectic of revolution/restoration' that Gramsci termed a 'passive revolution'. This was a form of revolution from above involving a 'molecular' process of transformation, 'progressively modify[ing] the pre-existing composition of forces' in the ruling classes' 'gradual but continuous absorption' of its "antithesis" (Gramsci 1971: 58, 109). For Gramsci, 'passive revolutions' were thus organically connected to the 'praxeological challenge' (Short 2015) of uneven development in all its national and international dimensions. The dialectic of 'revolution-restoration' simultaneously entailed the displacement and partial fulfilment of the revolutionary-inducing strains of the conjuncture resulting in the restructuring of capitalist political rule. In this sense, the notion of passive revolution is complementary to – if not *organically emergent* from – the process of uneven and combined development as it directs our attention to the differential nature of ruling class

ontologies which absorb antithetical class challenges in ways conditioned by and constitutive of ‘the international’ (Allinson and Anievas 2010; Morton 2007).⁴

The interwar period is of course the paradigmatic era of far-right ascendancy. It was the very expulsion of such fascist forces from Western European and Japanese politics after 1945 that many argue make the liberal-democratic settlement so unique. However, it is important to recall that hegemony is a highly dynamic state of affairs, always provisional and frequently unstable. It requires the active (and continuous) agency of the ruling classes and state to reproduce the conditions of its existence through mobilising subaltern (and dissenting) layers. It is the result of perpetual ‘conscious, planned struggle’ (Gramsci, 1971: 263). And far from terminating the ‘organic crisis’ of the interwar years, the immediate post-WWII period saw a recurrent state of punctuated and often acute crises of hegemony in many leading ‘liberal’ states that would form a part of the US-led international order (Eley 2002). Further, it was the particular way in which these crises were ‘resolved’ and the involvement of far-right forces in these processes (as we detail below) that significantly determined the precise political character of some of the key constituent states of the international order. In this way, the construction of the domestic social-political arrangements within a number of the core states of the Cold War geopolitical order in the early post-war years can be conceived as exemplars of passive revolution.

What our analysis highlights, then, is the long-standing structural weaknesses within liberalism both as an ideology and institutionalisation of politics that existing IR accounts of the post-war ‘Western order’ largely overlook. These weaknesses are revealed in the shifting relationship between the spheres of ‘economy’ and ‘state’ within liberal orders and the ambiguities regarding the political subjects recognised as acceptable to these orders, particularly with respect to the scope and consequences of democratic politics. This ambiguity has provided both a strength and vulnerability to liberal orders.

⁴ While IR scholars have deployed the concept of ‘passive revolution’ in examining processes of state formation and capitalist restructuring in the Global South and *pre*-WWII Europe (e.g. Cox 1987; Morton 2007; Hesketh 2017), very few have applied the concept to the post-1945 reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan.

The immediate post-war era saw, for a brief moment, an unprecedented sociopolitical conjuncture for constructing a democratically-centred (liberal) international order based on the extension of democratic structures through the advancing of working class interests – the ‘revolutionary context’ through which passive revolution responded to and was ultimately realised. With the defeat of fascism, growth of state planning and the strength of organised labour and left-wing parties committed to societal transformation, the outlines of a radically new settlement were clear (Eley 2002; Halperin 2004). That this did not emerge – or was significantly curtailed in its realisation – was in part because of the way in which the left was fractured and undermined by Soviet actions in Central-Eastern Europe (cf. Ikenberry 2001: 166). However, this explanation overlooks the internal ideo-political dynamics that played out through the late 1940s until the 1960s, the period when the US-led international order was consolidated.

It is here where we excavate the significance of far-right forces in the consolidation of the *type* of liberal international order that emerged. This order was premised on a *restriction* of democratic possibilities bequeathed by the war, marginalisation and ostracisation of the democratic left and the integration of the far-right into the ‘historical bloc’ within a number of West European states and Japan at the heart of the new international order.⁵

The Cold War Liberal Order and the Far-Right after 1945

Contextualising these connections between the far-right and liberal order provide us with an important historical backdrop with which to situate the Cold War. Our concern, then, is not to question the significance of the transformation of the international capitalist order under the aegis of US hegemony after 1945 but, rather, to identify and tease out some of the (hidden) continuities in the reproduction of that order with the politics and ideology of the far-right. We thereby seek to challenge the assumptions regarding the *degree* of rupture and transformation associated with the post-1945 liberal order from the past and identify the continuing presence and role of the far-right during the Cold War.

Fascist Legacies in the Post-War Liberal State and Society

⁵ On the US, see Rupert (2015); Seymour (2016).

As detailed above, prevailing conceptualisations of the post-war international order rest on the premise of a mutually reinforcing transformation at the domestic and international levels. These changes developed out of what Geoff Eley argues (2002: 288) was the high-point of the radical-democratic impulse that accompanied the liberation of Europe from fascism between 1942-43 and 1947. Here, the forces of the left – led in France and Italy by their respective communist parties – encapsulated the radical-revolutionary possibilities bequeathed by a liberation where the left was momentarily, in political and ideological terms, hegemonic. These changes not only reflected the temporary weakness and disorientation of the dominant classes but also the momentary banishment of the far-right from mainstream politics. With respect to prevailing accounts of the emergence of the post-war international order, it was these changes that provided evidence of the *democratic* dimensions of transformation upon which the international liberal-democratic order rested.

The democratic transformation heralded by the defeat of fascism was then directly connected to the broader forces of the left, including local communist parties and the PCF and PCI in particular. Further, the consolidation and deepening of the democratic possibilities after the war were to be determined by the (continuing) strength of the left and, in particular, the translation of this momentum into concrete sociopolitical and institutional change in the organisation and functioning of these states. What this suggests is that at the war's end there existed a possibility for the emergence of a *different form* of liberal-democratic order across Western Europe.

Over the 1945-9 period and after, a number of mutual and reinforcing developments came to produce the kind of liberal international order that Ikenberry (2001, 2011) seeks to account for and celebrate. At the international level, the dynamic was driven by responses to perceived Soviet aggressions, which reinvigorated the forces of the right across Western Europe and increased US intervention in shaping the character of the international architecture governing Western European and Japanese state relations. At the domestic level, the key developments included the rapid rehabilitation of the fascist right and the creation of new national hegemonic projects that included former fascists premised on a virulent anti-communism, which extended across the broader (non-communist) left. Within the space of three-to-four years, the possibility of a 'democratic

springtime' had given way to a narrowly conceived, far-right tainted liberal order at both the domestic and international levels. Such developments can be conceived as a form of 'passive revolution': on the one hand, there were organic changes in the structures of political economy across Western Europe, alongside an opening for some subaltern participation in the state (Cox 1987; Rupert 1995); on the other, the nature, scope and direction of such transformations were ultimately limited by the reconstitution of these states under US guidance fundamentally concerned with thwarting the radical-democratic possibilities contained within the immediate post-war conjuncture.

The spectre of this 'radical democratic possibility' was connected to how liberal elites viewed their local communist parties. Given the Stalinization of east-central Europe from the late 1940s, such suspicions regarding the authoritarian and Stalinist impulses of these parties were well-founded. However, as we detail below, these liberal suspicions extended well beyond communist parties to the broader socialist left and social democrats. These parties and the social forces that they represented maintained a commitment to working within the existing liberal political-institutional frameworks, and yet they were still regarded as subversive of the kind of liberal order that US and other Western elites wanted to establish after the war— up until the 1960s (and in some cases longer) —. The existence of a left/communist form of authoritarianism was not then the reason for the willingness of liberal and conservative forces to engage with the far-right and former fascists to isolate and contain the broader left (cf. Eley 2002; Bale 2017; Ferraresi 1996; Eisenberg 1996; Dower 1999). Indeed, the kind of suspicions that defined US policy towards leftists *in general* throughout the post-colonial world, and which fostered its collaboration with far-right forces, was evident in its geopolitical strategizing across the zones of the liberal-capitalist core.

The transformations at the domestic level across the liberal core — the *sine qua non* of the liberalism of the post-war era — were thus highly uneven and, after the initial waves of anti-fascist purges, saw the return of the personnel of fascist states in Germany, Japan and Italy and collaborators in France (and Greece) to positions of power. In West Germany, the attitude of the Western allies to the emergence of local anti-fascist committees (made up of social democrats and communists who had gone underground during the Nazi period) that had emerged as the *Wehrmacht* collapsed, to provide order,

food and shelter to refugees was to ignore⁶ them as sources for laying the foundations of a new kind of German state (Eley 2002: 297). Instead, the allies quickly turned to the remnants of the Nazi state to provide the basis for the new Germany (Kiatsky 2005: ix, 77).

As in other states tarnished by fascist government or occupation, liberation saw a purge of leading fascists and, in the German case, with Nazi responsibility for the holocaust, war crimes tribunals were instituted leading to the execution and/or imprisonment of leading Nazi figures.⁷ Yet, within the space of two years most had been allowed back to their posts. Out of the 53,000 state functionaries originally dismissed by the Western Allies due to their Nazi connections, only 1,000 were permanently excluded and, in the case of the judiciary, almost every single purged person was allowed back (Graf 1984: 167; see further, Boehling 1996; Herz 1982). As the Allies were moving to re-instate former Nazis they also moved to repress the left, which came to a head with the outlawing of the German Communist Party in August 1956.

The ideological creed of the new West German state was a visceral anti-communism which, arguably, could be regarded as the defining political orientation of post-war political and intellectual elites. This came close to replicating the hysterical paranoia of the German ruling class against the left over the history of the Weimar Republic (Abraham 1986; Anievas 2014: 142-162; Mann 2004: 177-206). Further, the repopulation of the state with former Nazis or what Adenauer called 'fellow travellers' helped determine the precise character of the liberal international order that emerged. Indeed, the possibility of remaking the (West) German state and with it the wider European order, was circumscribed by the necessity of bulwarking it with a defining anti-communist 'common sense' that served to *reinforce* the division of Europe. In short, the domestic ideo-political properties of the new West German state conditioned the role of West Germany in the US-led liberal international architecture that was created from the late 1940s. Indeed, without such 'conditioning' it is likely that West Germany would not

⁶ Indeed, in the spring of 1945 with Nazism defeated the Allies banned the indigenous and leftist-led anti-fascist movement in Germany consequentially destroying at birth the possibility of a radical and democratic Germany after the war (see Graf 1984: 166).

⁷ However, it was in Germany where the smallest numbers of former fascists were either executed or imprisoned after the war compared to the rest of Europe (see Deák 2000: 4; Judt 2010).

have been integrated into the US-led order or remained separated from its eastern counterpart.

Thus, there were political alternatives in post-war West Germany that were as hostile to the Cold War division of Europe and Soviet manoeuvrings in Central-Eastern Europe, as they were to the type of tainted political compromise that defined the *Bundesrepublik* throughout the early decades of the post-war era. The political alternative offered by the Social Democrats (SPD) under Kurt Schumacher's leadership was significantly different. Whilst ambivalent if not hostile to (West) German communists, the SPD was more seriously committed to de-nazification and, with it, a very different geopolitical orientation based on a de-militarised and neutral but united Germany. Such an outcome would have seriously undermined the *type* of liberal order that the US was committed to achieving after the war. It would have been liberal *and* democratic but it would not have rested on the form of anti-communism that dominated Ikenberry's liberal order (Judt, 2010: 100-128). It would have also rested on a very different political-security relationship with the US. For Germany's entrance into NATO, the placing of NATO troops on German soil, German rearmament and the nature of European integration all rested on the ostracisation of the German left which was facilitated by the incorporation of significant elements of the Nazi state apparatus into the administration and leadership of the new *Bundesrepublik*. Here we can see a direct connection between the specific configuration of the *domestic political constituents* of post-war West Germany with the character and direction of the *international order* that emerged.

Before the breakdown of the wartime alliance and the emergence of the post-1945 Cold War, the Western Allies had already, pre-emptively, moved to marginalise the left in Germany, foreclosing the possibilities of not only fulfilling a programme of comprehensive de-Nazification, but also a more extensive democratisation of state and society. They did this through reining in the scope and depth of the 'Four-D' programme. By 1948, three of the 'Ds' (de-nazification, de-cartelisation and democratisation) had been heavily diluted and with West Germany's entry into NATO in 1955, the final one effectively abandoned (Boehling 1996: 58-59; Eisenberg 1996: 121-165; Graf 1984: 167; Reich 1994: 246-261). These were several key factors inhibiting US policymakers' from carrying out the programme. 'Of these, the most overriding was', Carolyn Eisenberg

notes (1996: 164-165), 'the affinity of American businessmen for Germany's old economic elite and their unshakable conviction that only the experienced private owners and managers of capital were capable of restoring the country's productive apparatus...The other was a virulent anticommunism that flowed through many of the veins of Military Government'.

The decision to 'reverse course' in West Germany, like Japan and Italy, was also part of a broader 'global policy'. For the new aim of US policymaking was the 'reconstitution and flourishing of the German and Japanese industrial economies as engines of world growth' concomitant to their revival as anti-communist fortifications encircling the Soviet bacillus along its Western and Eastern frontiers (Cumings 1993: 37). The Truman administration's newly formulated doctrine of 'containment' meant, in Navy Secretary James Forrestal's words, putting 'Japan, Germany, and other affiliates of the Axis...back to work'.⁸ This could only be achieved, however, by marginalising and suppressing the left (and extending the 'democratic embrace' to the far-right) given its radically diverging domestic and geopolitical orientation.

During the post-war period, US foreign policymakers were faced with the strategic dilemma of politically re-organising a world economy languishing under the dual strains of an economically and militarily devastated capitalist 'core' matched by the uneven, but rapid, destabilising and crisis-ridden capitalist transformations wreaking havoc across vast swathes of the global 'periphery' opening up more and more scenarios for 'Soviet-like' solutions. As with societies where capitalist relations were internally weak, and liberal elites accommodated themselves to authoritarian states, so too internationally, the dominant liberal powers found themselves supporting authoritarian and far-right forces in the name of order (Rosenberg 1996: 12). This was what the US did in China prior to the 1949 revolution when US policy supported the reactionary authoritarian Nationalists (the Kuomintang) and the far-right dictatorship of Syngman Rhee in South Korea (Cumings 1990).

The chief *social substance* of American Cold War strategy was, then, not primarily the reordering of geopolitical anarchy under the auspices of rule-based international institutions, the pursuit of narrow US economic self-interests, or the

⁸ Diary entry, 3 March 1947, James V. Forrestal Papers, Princeton University.

promotion of *de facto* constitutional democracies. It was, rather, the ‘geopolitical management of combined development and its consequences on a world scale’. This was the case whether we look at US relations with the Global South, the bipolar contest with the Soviet Union, *or* the occupations and transformations of the defeated fascist powers, where the legacies of antecedent forms of combined development still necessitated sustained political intervention (Rosenberg 1996: 12; cf. Anievas 2014). In each case, the forces of the far-right exercised significant agency in their own right while being strategically engaged by US state managers as bulwarks against ‘communist subversion’.

It is therefore important not to dismiss the importance of the reverse course in West Germany for consideration of the social and ideological basis of the post-war liberal international order. For, as discussed below, a similar pattern was followed in other key ‘liberal’ states. Of course, the fact that former Nazi officials were now operating within a different political context ensured that the post-war German state was not fascist. However, there is evidence to indicate that the liberal-democratic character of the new West German state was heavily circumscribed by a constitutive hostility to the left. This ensured that reactionary and far-right impulses remained at the heart of the way in which the state viewed and responded to the left in general and not just communists. For example, one of the key anti-subversive laws of the new West German state that specifically targeted the left was drafted by former Nazi lawyers. This led to thousands of trials against leftists, in effect using the law to silence those who were willing to challenge the post-war anti-communist ‘consensus’ (Kühnl 1998: 266-268).

When compared with the treatment of former fascists and holocaust deniers who quickly re-organised themselves into ‘post-fascist’ parties and were allowed to participate in the political processes, the *Bundesrepublik’s* anti-communist pathology was central to its liberal-democratic shortcomings. We can explain the character of West German liberal democracy through the prism of Carl Schmitt’s critique of the Weimar Republic (Cristi 1998; Müller 2003) which was a spectre – as much as Nazism – that haunted West Germany politics in the first decades after the war. However, the key difference with Weimar – and hence the influence of Schmitt on its politics – was that whilst the KPD had been permitted to participate in democratic politics (i.e. the enemy was recognised as a ‘legitimate’ political participant) this was not the case after 1945. Further, whilst the

NSDAP was hostile to Weimar and ended up dissolving it, the ‘post-fascists’ of the *Bundesrepublik* were integrated into it as loyal anti-communists.

Parallel developments played out in post-war Japan, where US occupation forces set on a ‘reverse course’ in early 1947. The initial impetus for such a change was not the danger of communist military power or invasion. As with Western Europe, the threat to liberal order was *not* primarily a military one. Instead, US policymakers feared that economic collapse and revolutionary upheaval *inside* Japan could push the country into the Communist orbit. It was, then, a question of a crisis-ridden Japanese economy and the institutional weaknesses of its newly founded ‘liberal-democratic’ order (LaFeber 1997: 270-275; Leffler 1992: 253-258; Schaller 1985: 77-97).

Like West Germany, US policy entailed the rehabilitation of Japanese militarists, war criminals and the *zaibatsu* in an effort to fortify the new Japanese state against leftist subversives. The Allied occupation’s initial aims – democratization, de-monopolization, demilitarization and reparations – were all more or less abandoned as US policymakers moved to restore Japan’s natural economic function. This would ensure that the former Axis state could make a ‘proper contribution to the economic rehabilitation of the world economy’ and reclaim its place, as former President Herbert Hoover put it, as ‘a bulwark against the Communist invasion in Asia’ (quotes in Schaller 1985: 120, 93).⁹ To these ends, ‘conservative political forces within Japan joined with their American sponsors to rebuild the nation in ways that bore an uncanny resemblance to the prewar order’ which, despite the initial purge of war criminals and ultranationalist elements, left the spectrum of Japanese politics intact (Schaller 1985: 51, 48; Dower 1999: 525-525).

The initial purge predominately relied on Japanese administrators, acting to shield a great majority of potential offenders from prosecution. The old bureaucracy and business elite emerged relatively unscathed, and those business leaders affected continued to wield unofficial influence or transferred to new jobs that paralleled their former positions. By 1947, US occupation authorities had shifted away from eliminating far-right influence in Japanese politics and moved toward the eradication of Communist and liberal-left forces in the public and private sectors, resulting in the purging of

⁹ Hoover to Secretary Robert P. Patterson, 7 May 1947, Box 174, Herbert Hoover Papers, PPI, Hoover Presidential Library. See also, CIA, ‘The Strategic Importance of Japan’, 24 May 1948, General Records, FIOI: CIA-RDP78-01617A003200190001-5.

approximately 20,000 leftists and fellow-travellers. Though avowedly aimed at Communists, the purge typically targeted liberals. Similarly, despite the initial freedoms occupation authorities granted unions, Supreme Commander Douglas MacArthur began backtracking in February 1947 with the banning of a planned general strike and subsequent decrees outlawing government employees from striking and collective bargaining (Schaller 1985: 43-44, 68-69; LaFeber 1997: 264-265; Kaplan and Dubro 2012: 49). Alongside the 'Red Purge', Japanese politicians and wartime leaders previously prohibited from holding public office were 'depurged' with the lifting of restrictions for no less than 200,000 individuals by the occupation's end (Kaplan and Dubro 2012: 49). Consequently, the early 1950s saw the return of a vast number of formally purged right-wing politicians and military leaders to national and local politics, while the 'economy was turned back over to big capitalists and state bureaucrats' (Dower 1999: 525).

In these ways, the Allied occupation of Japan shared many similarities with West Germany. What distinguished the Japanese case, however, was the presence of significant far-right actors among the highest echelons of policymaking *within* the US occupation authority itself. Overseeing the occupation was General MacArthur, whose inner circle consisted of a motley assortment of 'cryptofascists and anti-Semites', including Mj. General Charles A. Willoughby, his intelligence chief – an 'unreconstructed fascist' who worked hand-in-glove with the forces of reaction against 'leftists and fellow-travellers' he saw lurking around every corner (Cumings 1990: 103, 102; LaFeber 1997: 264).

By any measure, Willoughby was an unusual choice for a leadership position within an occupation authority overseeing the democratic transition of a defeated fascist power. Claiming heritage from an 'unimpeachable' family in Wilhelmine Germany, Willoughby was a notorious racist and self-proclaimed 'militarist' (quoted in Mercado 2002: 196) who viewed the Soviet Union as representing the 'historical continuity of "Mongoloid-Pan-Slavism"'.¹⁰ MacArthur liked to refer to him as 'my little fascist', an appropriate moniker for an open admirer of Mussolini and Franco (the latter of which he later advised) who bragged about his connections to 'certain Junkers' and Nazi turned US

¹⁰ Willoughby to Allen Dulles, 17 March 1955, Willoughby Papers, MacArthur Memorial, Box 2; Willoughby to Senator Green, 30 April 1958, *ibid.*, Box 11.

anti-communist spymaster, Reinhard Gehlen (Cumings 1990: 102-104).¹¹ Described by one SCAP officer as ‘horribly involved with the right-wing’ (quoted in Kaplan and Dubro 2012: 45), Willoughby epitomised the ‘kind of militarist the Occupation was dedicated to destroying’ (Harries and Harries 1987: 222).

Under Willoughby’s stewardship, MacArthur’s ‘black reactionary’ intelligence arm, the G-2, became the most powerful agency inside GHQ Japan (Takemae 2003: 161-163). In time, he came to effectively control the civil intelligence section, making him the ‘second most powerful American in Japan’ (US occupation officer quoted in Takemae 2003: 164; Harries and Harries 1987: 220-227). Ostensibly established to hunt suspected militarists, Willoughby wielded his vast intelligence apparatus to ‘detect and suppress leftwing subversion’ and, over time, the G-2 became ‘almost exclusively devoted to that purpose’ (Harries and Harries 1987: 221).

To these ends, Willoughby tapped former Japanese military officers who had served on the Imperial General Staff, Military Intelligence and even the dreaded Special Higher (‘Thought’) Police. Most notably, Willoughby secretly recruited former Imperial Army Intelligence chief, Lt. General Arisue Seizo, to organise a clandestine Japanese intelligence group that would function as an auxiliary to US surveillance operations against suspected leftists and, it was hoped, form the basis for the future re-militarization of Japan.¹² Through Arisue, the G-2 worked with some Japan’s most infamous war criminals, including Colonels Hattori Takushirō and Tsuji Masanobu,¹³ in various covert operations within and outside Japan, while enlisting their support for Willoughby’s much anticipated anti-communist ‘shadow army’. This would lay the groundwork for Japan’s subsequent rearming that saw the national police turned into a 180,000-strong ‘National

¹¹ See Willoughby’s correspondence with Franco, *ibid.*, Box 1, Folder 7; Willoughby to Frank Wisner, 30 Oct 1955, *ibid.*, Box 2; Willoughby to Dean Rusk, 20 Oct 1961, *ibid.*, Box 10.

¹² CIA, ‘Seizu, Arisue’, August 1947, Special Collection, CREST: 519cd81b993294098d516285.

¹³ In July 1952, Hattori was involved in an aborted coup plot against Yoshida Shigeru due to the Prime Minister’s alleged hostility toward ‘depurgees and nationalists’. The plot was initiated by a Hattori-led ‘group of ex-purgees including former military officers’ who reportedly had the ‘backing of 500,000 persons throughout Japan’ (CIA, ‘Coup d’état Allegedly being Planned by Ex-Militarists and Ultrationalists’, 31 October 1952, Special Collection, CREST: 519cd81b993294098d516271). Despite Tsuji’s initial support for the plan, he convinced Hattori to postpone the coup so ‘long as the conservative Liberal Party was in power, leaving posterity with the irony of America’s staunchest political ally in Japan being protected by one of Japan’s most well-known alleged war criminals’ (Peterson 2006: 214-215).

Self-Defense Force' in 1954 (Dower 1999: 512; Harries and Harries 1987: 228-242; Peterson 2006: 199-207; Mercado 2002: 201-232).

In Arisue, Willoughby had apparently found his own Japanese Gehlen. Through their collaboration, the G-2 aided 'rightist thugs' and yakuza to attack and spy on leftist and unionists. Such parapolitical counter-subversive activities allegedly connected to Willoughby's intelligence apparatus included terrorist acts wrongly blamed on Communists and union leaders (e.g. the Matsukawa case of 1949), kidnappings and executions of prominent leftists and labour organisers, and the use of ultranationalist gangs to break-up strikes and generally terrorise the government's left-wing opponents (Mercado 2002: 192-193; Harries and Harries 1987: 225-226; Kaplan and Dubro 2012: 44-55). The Japanese 'shadow army' Willoughby created also participated in 'strategic planning during the Korean War', proving their 'worth in operations against communist guerrillas' on the Korean battlefield (Mercado 2002: 217, 228). Finally, Willoughby's clandestine operations in Japan's internal political affairs even 'helped precipitate the fall of the Ashida government, the last in which Socialists would participate for over four decades' (Takemae 2003: 165), with clear parallels to US policymakers' support for far-right forces in marginalising and intimidating the left in Italy and Greece.

Combined with the more general shift of SPAC policies against organised labour and the liberal-left, such machinations drove a deep wedge between US policymakers and Japanese progressives. This ensured both the consolidation of 'conservative political hegemony within Japan' and an anti-Soviet foreign policy orientation with successive conservative governments in the 1950s pursuing security policies that 'combined a program of limited rearmament with alliance with the United States'. Such foreign policies were vehemently contested by the 'neutralist' positions of the Japanese left, particularly the Japanese Socialist Party (Schaller 1985: 122; Oros 2008: 58, 99). Again, the ways in which the non-communist Japanese left of the immediate post-war era – a primary victim and opponent of fascism and militarism – were marginalised and suppressed replicated US priorities in West Germany (and Italy), highlighting the continuation of a restructured form of 'passive revolution' into the immediate post-war years (cf. Allinson and Anievas 2010). However much weight one gives to the G-2's clandestine contribution to the making of postwar Japanese, the net effect of the US-led

occupation was the re-construction of a far-right tainted, pathologically anti-communist sociopolitical order that solidified Japan's place as the regional lynchpin of America's emergent liberal-capitalist international order (see Cummings 1993; Schaller 1985).

Early post-war Italy further demonstrated similarities with West Germany and Japan regarding the continuation of a fascist presence within the state after liberation conditioning the sociopolitical and ideological character of the international order that it was a part. In Italy, however, the limits of the democratic possibilities bequeathed by the war and the extent of the 'post-fascist' far-right presence in Italian politics and state was even more significant in shaping the character of the liberal-democratic order. There were also two key differences in the Italian case which require comment.

First, in Germany (and Japan) de-Nazification was effectively carried through by the occupying Allied forces. By contrast, because of the partial liberation of Italy in 1943, the liberated zone in the South came under the jurisdiction of a new Royalist-led government which took the lead in effecting anti-fascist purges; this arrangement continued through to and after the full liberation of Italy in April 1945. The second key difference was the role played by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in Italy's liberation and its status as the largest, most well-organised political force in Italy at the time of liberation. It was the significance of the PCI in post-WWII Italian politics that so strongly influenced the far-right dimensions of Italy's so-called liberal-democratic order up until the late 1970s.

The significance of local Italian ownership of the purge of fascists from the state and other offices was that many of those overseeing it were either former fascists (such as Pietro Badoglio) or fascist sympathisers because of their fear of the PCI, such as Royalist forces and the Roman Catholic hierarchy (Domenico 1991). As a result, many fascists remained in office in the South after September 1943. The key divide in Italian politics immediately after the war was that whilst the left (and not just the PCI) wanted to re-found Italy as an explicitly post-fascist state, the right in the form of the Christian Democrat (CD) leader Alcide de Gasperi, regarded fascists as defeated opponents who needed to be re-integrated and not expelled from the political system (Domenico 1991; Woller 1998: 538). This view was shared by British and American policymakers providing a foretaste of the Cold War mentality that would soon become an explicit,

constitutive factor in Italy's post-war 'liberal-democratic' order. Consequently, a local Allied animus towards the Italian left was evident sometime *before* the onset of US-Soviet Cold War geopolitical hostility, contrary to Ikenberry's sequencing and separation of the 'two settlements' that founded the post-war liberal order.

American and British policymakers remained concerned above all to protect and cultivate elements within the traditional Italian political and economic elite to provide the back-bone for the new 'post-fascist' state. While the primary responsibility for the limits of the anti-fascist purge lay with the Italian right, US policies were also instrumental. The significance of this is that Anglo-American leaders were acutely aware of the domestic sources of the kind of international order that they wanted to establish after the war. And in the context of Italy, maintaining their longstanding suspicions and hostility towards the left, they focused on cultivating a domestic socio-economic and political dispensation conducive to that end in a way that replicated US objectives in (West) Germany and Japan, and which saw them tolerate and promote neo-fascist currents (cf. Domenico; Smith 1991; Woller 1998).

The importance of Italy to both the basis of Ikenberry's theoretical and empirical account of the making of the post-war international order is that the Italian case is suggestive of how a far-right infused post-war Italian political order was a *necessary* element in the broader construction of the US-led order. This is because the history of post-war Italian state formation, upon which its participation in US and Western-led international institutional structures and political orientations derived, rested on a domestic ideo-political settlement that necessitated an illiberal and anti-democratic compromise: one defined by the incorporation of the (post-)fascist right into the Italian state and expulsion of the left.¹⁴ In short, there would not have been a US-led liberal international order – or, at least, not one that included Italy – if the combined mechanisms of US covert intervention and the incorporation of the fascist right had not taken place. Illiberal currents were incorporated and illiberal means were then deployed to realise a 'liberal' *international* outcome.

¹⁴ Whilst relatively small in terms of its electoral support (averaging around 5% through to the 1980s), the Italian Social Movement (MSI), the post-war descendent of Mussolini's fascist party, played a key role through to the 1960s in propping up Christian Democrat (CD) governments (see Caciagli 1988: 19-20; Colarizi and Morlin, 1998: 472; Weinberg 1998: 562).

US policymakers took it upon themselves to become much more active in determining the nature of post-war Italy thus fusing – not separating – Ikenberry's two post-WWII settlements. By intervening in Italian domestic affairs in the manner that they did, the US, in effect, deployed the kind of tactics – for the same political ends – that became associated with its Cold War posture towards the (post-)colonial world after 1945 that saw it subvert and overthrow democratically-elected governments. They did so by actively working to curtail the possibilities for a (radical) democratic transformation after liberation through following the long-standing logic of anti-communism. Specifically, with its entrenched hostility towards the PCI, US policymakers sought to ensure that the PCI would not have access to the levers of state power throughout the Cold War in spite of it not only being the largest party in Italy, but also the primary organisation of anti-fascist resistance. Such an orientation, which also extended to the Socialist Party (PSI) until the early 1960s, severely compromised – if not fundamentally corroded – the democratic basis of Italy's political order and therefore the substance of the liberal international order more generally.

The key intervention here was US funding of the right and sponsorship of propaganda against the PCI and wider left in the 1948 national elections. The strategic significance of Italy in the Western alliance was stressed by US policymakers soon after WWII as they recognised 'Italy's crucial location in the Mediterranean as being extremely relevant both politically and militarily'. It was therefore considered 'essential to keep Italy from falling under communist control' (Ferraresi 1996: 76). The US pumped millions of dollars¹⁵ into Italy in support of the Christian Democrats and funded a range of civil society actors, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, to provoke fear across Italy over the possibility of a left victory in the elections. US policymakers also made clear that any funding for post-war reconstruction would be terminated if the PCI/left were victorious (Ledeen 1987: 56-57). Behind the scenes, key US decision-makers, such as George Kennan in a memo of March 1948, argued for the cancellation of the elections or the banning of the PCI and, if the left won, the deployment of US troops to 'protect Italian democracy' (*FRUS* 1974: 848-849).

¹⁵ Smith (1991: 35) claims that the CIA spent US\$1 million in the 1948 election and approximately, US\$65 million over the 1948-68 in keeping the left out of power (see further, Barnes 1982; Miller 1983).

US interventions in 1948 and subsequent decades¹⁶ essentially sought to destroy the potential of the PCI and wider left in forming a government, consequentially depriving a large part of Italian society from democratic representation and possibilities for further democratic change. In so doing, US policymakers actively engaged with and cultivated far-right and neo-fascist forces¹⁷ in both the private and public spheres as it did elsewhere in Europe and Japan. Such covert activities underscore the ‘parapolitical’ dimensions of US hegemonic agency that formed a crucial ingredient of US Cold War strategy underwriting these varied forms of ‘passive revolution’. The case for covert activities in the form of ‘political’ and ‘psychological warfare’ was made in an April 1948 memorandum of the Policy Planning Staff (PPS) drafted by George F. Kennan:

Political warfare is the logical application of Clausewitz’s doctrine in times of peace. In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objective. Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from overt actions as political alliances, economic measures (ERF), and ‘white’ propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of ‘friendly’ foreign elements, ‘black’ psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.¹⁸

The PPS memo represents a near ideal-type statement of the defining features of the parapolitical which may be conceived in terms of the relations between institutionalised state power and the political processes and arrangements operating outside and beyond the public state (Wilson 2012). The form of US intervention in the 1948 Italian elections was typical in this regard. However, US policymakers also agreed that, if necessary,

¹⁶ In the period of the so-called ‘strategy of tension’ – from the late 1960s through to the late 1970s – the US disbursement of funds to anti-communist groupings on the right also extended to the MSI under the direction of the US ambassador, Graham Martin (Platt and Leonardi 1978: 211-212). The significance of this at a time when elements of the MSI were implicated in acts of terrorism and coup-plotting should speak for itself.

¹⁷ Under US pressure De Gasperi decided to dissolve the coalition-unity government involving the left in May 1947 effectively expelling the PCI from government. This was replaced by a minority Christian Democrat government which had to rely on support from the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) in the following months (Miller 1983: 40). US intelligence officials also maintained close relations with a ‘number of small but violently anti-communist paramilitary groups dispersed throughout northern Italy’ led by ‘disgraced former army officers who had once served loyally under Mussolini’ (Ventresca 2004: 81).

¹⁸ PPS Memo, ‘The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare’, 30 April 1948, RG59, Box 28, Folder 11A, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

military power would be deployed to thwart the left from coming to power (Miller 1983: 47-51; Smith 1991: 17-36; Leffler 1992: 195-196). In a memorandum of 8 March 1948 (NSC 1/3), the National Security Council advised that '[i]n the event of that the Communists obtain domination of the Italian government by legal means', the US should provide the 'anti-communist Italian underground with financial and military assistance' while undertaking a 'limited mobilization' of US military forces and further strengthening its military position in the Mediterranean (*FRUS* 1974: 779).

As the above cases demonstrate, the reconstitution of West European and Japanese state-society relations after 1945 along more liberal-capitalist lines simultaneously entailed both: the structural absorption (and *limiting of*) more radical social forces and democratic demands into new state-society relations and; the (re-)appropriation and incorporation of rearticulated far-right forces and ideo-political currents into these same structures. In these ways, the post-WWII transformation of these social orders underwent a peculiar form of 'passive revolution' that amalgamated disparate liberal-progressive and conservative-regressive forces into a single historical bloc articulated through an unprecedentedly dynamic productive base and shared 'common sense' of virulent anti-communism. And, in times of hegemonic crisis, it was the regressive-reactionary elements of this dynamic amalgamation that would emerge as—or be called upon to be—the *subterranean anchor* of liberal-capitalist hegemony that fundamentally conditioned the resultant geopolitical order.

NATO, the Liberal State and Far-Right Violence

The significance of the far-right in conditioning the domestic bases of post-war order-building also extended to the role of far-right inspired violence and terrorism in the politics of a number of liberal states after the war and the connections between NATO as a bastion of the post-war liberal international security architecture and its support for far-right authoritarian regimes in Spain, Portugal and Greece. The maintenance of the distinct socio-political settlement within a number of constituent states that made up the liberal international order saw it tolerate and acquiesce to far-right inspired terrorist violence and coup-plotting in a number of Western European liberal democracies after 1945 that helped ensure such a pro-US political dispensation. At the same time, NATO played a

crucial role in assisting the continuance and stability of a number of far-right regimes in Portugal and Greece – after the so-called ‘Colonels’ Coup’ in 1967 – while the US cultivated links with the Francoist dictatorship from the early 1950s onwards.

Whilst these connections did not *always* lend themselves to the facilitation of far-right inspired violence, terrorism and coup-plotting they did so in those national locales and moments when the basic anti-communist consensus *appeared* to be in jeopardy: in other words, in times of hegemonic crisis. However, in contrast to the immediate post-war years, in all of the cases referred to below there was very little prospect of these states ‘going communist’ or forging geopolitical connections with the USSR. Rather, what they exposed was the possibility of creating an *alternative* liberal-democratic order independent and, in some respects, subversive of the US-led one that emerged after 1947. Consequently, they reveal the continuities in US global ‘leadership’ that were more common in the post-colonial world as reflected in overt and covert interventions in support of conservative and far-right forces. They also reveal the very fragile foundations of liberal hegemony in these states and how the democratic possibilities within them – and the possibility of forging a different kind of international order – had not been fully suppressed in the immediate post-war years. In these constituents of the liberal international order there existed a distinctly ‘counter-revolutionary’ strand within the corpus of the post-war liberal order that evoke the Caesarism of Schmitt’s ‘commissarial dictatorship’ as the necessary strategy, in moments of hegemonic crisis, for the preservation of the liberal separation of the political and economic (McCormick 1999).

Soon after the end of WWII, the US and the UK laid the foundations for a covert network of armed operatives who would be ‘activated’ if and when a communist government came to power and/or the Red Army invaded Western Europe (Bale 2017; Ganser 2004; Willan 1991). This ‘*Gladio*’ (or Sword) network existed across Western Europe and saw British and American covert agencies (MI6 and the CIA) work with local secret services and covert forces to provide an extensive network of anti-communist insurgents. The full story on the network’s activities has yet to be written and, given its connection with the deep-imperial state, may never be. However, what does seem clear is that some of these *Gladio* operatives were ‘activated’ in a number of liberal democratic states during the Cold War, through their involvement in terrorist acts against the left and,

in particular, to discredit the left and provoke a sense of crisis; what was known in Italy from the mid-1960s to late-1970s as the ‘strategy of tension’.

In Italy, the *Gladio* network colluded in terrorist plots with far-right forces within and without the state. Far-right militants, many of whom were members or associates of the MSI, conspired with sections of the Italian secret state to intimidate the left through assassinations and bombings. This far-right state-terrorist axis also worked to destabilise liberal democracy and provide cover for an increasing authoritarianism from the late 1960s, leading ultimately to an ‘emergency politics’ based on the suspension of the democratic process (Bale 2017; Ferraresi 1996; Ganser 2004; Kiatsky 2005).

Important to note is how this relationship between far-right activists, the Italian secret state US security agencies, blossomed in moments of perceived crisis for Italy’s dominant social interests and political elites: that is, when the left looked like it may secure access to governmental power and potentially pose a challenge to the post-war anti-communist settlement. The first crisis and collusion between the Italian far-right and elements within the state came in the early-mid 1960s with the coup plot known as ‘*Plano Solo*’ of 1964 (Faini 2016; Ferraresi 1996: 74-83). The immediate circumstances were the instability of Christian Democratic governments to remain in office and a concern over the party’s dependence on the votes of MSI deputies. The 1963 elections had seen significant gains for the combined left parties along with growing demands from within the left-wing of the CD to allow the Socialist Party into government as a basis for ensuring more stable majorities and reducing the need to rely on MSI votes. The prospect of the representatives of the left entering government provoked excited worries in Italian conservative circles, particularly the business association *Confindustria* (Ferraresi 1998: 603). In this context, coup-plotting developed around the *Carabinieri* General, Giovanni de Lorenzo, and other senior figures within the Italian security state as well as MSI-associated militants. The Plan was also supported by the President of the Republic, Antonio Segni (Faini 2016).¹⁹ The aim was to intern the leading figures of the left to

¹⁹ Interestingly, on the eve of the Italian President’s visit to Washington in mid-January 1964, CIA officials reported that Segni believed that the participation of the PCI in the ‘government represents a “dangerous” innovation which will work to the advantage of the Communists and undermine the economy’. They noted how Segni ‘had made a strenuous behind-the-scenes effort to prevent the formation of the Moro government’ and, if the opportunity presented itself, would ‘not hesitate to use his influence – both as President and as Chairman of the National Defense Council – to try to topple Motto’ (CIA, ‘Weekly

prevent the PSI from entering government (Chiarini 1991: 33; Ferraresi 1996: 78-80). As it was, the coup was aborted at the last minute but not before the PSI had decided – no doubt aware of the pressures from the right and the ‘deep state’ – to withdraw their more radical ministers and objectives from the newly formed government thus reassuring the right and US policymakers (Ferraresi 1998: 605; Ganser 2004: 71-72).

There was a further coup-plot involving a similar coalition of elements in 1970 (Bale 1994: 250-511; Ganser 2004: 76-77; Kiatsky 2005: 118-119; Willan 1991). Here again such plotting was connected to a sense of ruling class crisis and fear triggered by the wave of sustained and widespread worker unrest, the so-called ‘hot autumn’ of 1969-70 (Lumley 1991: 9-46, 167-270). This saw a series of strikes and factory occupations across northern Italy that challenged the post-war ‘capitalist consensus’ in capital-labour relations that concerned not only Italian industrialists but state managers as well (and the US). In both cases, the US embassy was aware of the coup-plots but did nothing to inform governmental authorities or intervene to stop them (Bale 1994: 381-386; Kiatsky 2005: 118-119).

Coup-plotting was one strategy to intimidate the left, but it was far-right-inspired terrorism through the 1970s that became the dominant extra-parliamentary strategy to coerce the left – and democratic forces more broadly – and provoke a crisis in the liberal-democratic order, requiring an authoritarian response – the so-called ‘strategy of tension’. As before, the context of the possibility of the left gaining access to state power provided the immediate political circumstances for this strategy of violence. Specifically, it was the so-called ‘historic compromise’ orchestrated by the PCI leader, Enrico Berlinguer, between the PCI and Christian Democracy that helped provoke far-right terrorism.²⁰

MSI-connected far-right militants helped to produce a period of crisis that brought Italy very close to ‘emergency politics’. The goal of a *coup d'état* may have not been realised, but the crisis helped destroy the possibility of the historic compromise thereby preserving the democratic limits of both the Italian and wider liberal international order.

Summary’, 3 January 1964, General Records, CIA-RDP79-00927A004300060001-0). Whether US officials were involved or aware of explicit coup-plotting is, however, highly debated (cf. Faini 2016; Ferraresi 1996; Ganser 2004).

²⁰ The key issue here was the explicit commitment of the PCI – as part of the broader revisionist doctrine of ‘Eurocommunism’ – to working within and defending parliamentary democracy in the face of the ‘strategy of tension’.

In effect, the far-right was allowed to carry out its attacks as the security services abrogated their constitutional responsibilities, while also *actively* assisting such far-right attacks through the resulting propaganda that blamed the radical left for many of the atrocities.²¹ It seems clear that some agents of the state were actively involved in planning and carrying out such attacks thereby preparing the ground for the authoritarian resolution to ‘save’ liberal democracy by terminating its operation (cf. Bale 2017; Blum 2003; Ganser 2004; Willan 1991). Some of the key personnel involved in the terrorism and coup-plotting that bedevilled Italian politics through the 1960s and 70s were not only state officials but also had connections with NATO and US agencies. And whilst no evidence has been produced that *directly* implicates US or NATO officials in any of the events discussed, there is evidence that these officials were aware of some of the developments in Italy and took no action to prevent them (Bale 1994; Ferraresi 1996; 1998; Ganser 2004).²² The significance of the connections between US agencies and officials with sources of far-right violence and coup-plotting in Italy connects to NATO’s willingness to embrace far-right authoritarian regimes and its continued acceptance and implicit support for the far-right military dictatorship in Greece between 1967 and 1974.

With the emergence of an escalating challenge to this authoritarian-liberal order, far-right forces within the state re-asserted themselves with the so-called ‘Colonel’s coup’ in April 1967. What is telling about this case is how it bears similarity with the right’s response to the PCI’s offer of the historic compromise, even though there is little evidence to suggest that the existing socio-political order was at risk from a radical democratic insurgency. Indeed, most works on the origins of the coup have pointed to a crisis within the internal politics of the ruling regime and a paranoid fear of the possibilities of Greece becoming a properly functioning pluralistic democracy – even without a large communist party akin to the PCI (Clogg and Yannopoulos 1972; Woodhouse 1985).

The coup was triggered in response to the prospect of a centre-left government coming to power in elections which contained leading figures that openly questioned

²¹ This was exemplified by the August 1980 bombing of Bologna railway station that claimed 85 lives and the assassination of CD leader, Aldo Moro in May 1978 by far-right and security state *agents provocateurs* within the Red Brigades (Blum 2003: 106-108; Ganser 2004: 79-80; Willan 1991: 214-231).

²² A number of enquiries in Italy after the Cold War have also implicated one of the principal figures of Cold War Italian Christian Democracy, Giulio Andreotti, in these plots (Bale 1994; Ferraresi 1998).

Greece's continued membership of NATO and the wider conservative bases of the regime. Fearful of the possible outcomes of liberal *democracy* in Greece, US state managers acceded to far-right plotting. The US embassy was well aware of the plot and did nothing to stop it. And while the US and other NATO allies went through the ritual condemnation of the overturning of constitutional order this did not result in Greece's suspension from NATO nor any significant material consequences for the junta after a polite period of public condemnation had lapsed (Konstantina 2009; Miller 2009: 119-126).

The collusion between elements within the liberal state apparatus with far-right forces illustrates how these forces were *necessary* elements in the constitution and maintenance of the international order through much of the Cold War. Such instances demonstrate the limits of the liberal-democratic character of this order and the deliberate strategies of the US and its allies to subvert – where necessary – the rule of democratic politics in the interests of the liberal-*capitalist* socio-economic order. This necessitated the thwarting of radical democratic transformations from the left or the facilitation of a political atmosphere conducive to an 'emergency' authoritarian politics. As we have seen, the 'parapolitical' dimension of US policymakers' order-building project, wherein political intervention traversed the supposed divide between institutionalised state power and civil society, was a critical aspect of American hegemonic agency. It represents the point at which the coercive and 'illegitimate' characteristics of hegemony come to the fore which, in the US case, finds deep roots in the long history of counter-subversive practices against (real and perceived) enemies from within and without (cf. Seymour 2016).

In these ways, the liberal *international* order as codified through NATO and the broader anti-communist consensus fuelling international cooperation was also associated with a domestic politics that tolerated and cultivated militant far-right forces. The implications of this for conceptualisations of the Cold War are significant, particularly regarding the prevailing assumption that the US-led Cold War order operated across two distinct geopolitical zones and political modes – the liberal-democratic heartland and 'third world'. For the role of the far-right in the organisation and operations of some Western states in response to radical social change (the type of politics dominating much

of the post-colonial world after 1945) is suggestive of a more mediated, uneven and shifting separation between the two zones which – in key moments – saw the logic and *modus operandi* of US counter-revolutionary policy across the Global South play out in parts of the liberal heartland in Western Europe.

Conclusions

As shown, the US-led liberal international order in ‘the West’ after 1945 was constituted by a significant far-right ideological and sociopolitical presence. There is nothing necessarily contradictory about the role of the far-right in the constitution and reproduction of liberal-capitalist orders premised on the primacy of private property rights and strict political-legal limits regarding the scope and working of democratic institutions. As such, the varied and important roles that the far-right played in the politics of some of the key states making up the post-war order – combined with the tolerance and, in many cases, encouragement of such sociopolitical forces by the US as an element in its hegemonic strategy – seriously questions prevailing theorisations.

The theoretical upshot of the preceding analysis is four-fold. Firstly, while acknowledging the many discontinuities between the interwar (1919-1939) and post-WWII international orders, our examination nonetheless suggests that there were more similarities than has often been recognised by most IR accounts: particularly in regards to the pervasive influence of anti-communism and the utilisation of far-right forces as bulwarks against ‘communist’ subversion and other projects for radical democratic change. In the early post-WWII years, this resulted in a particular form of ‘passive revolution’ wherein radical social forces and political demands from below were molecularly absorbed from above in ways conditioned by and constitutive of ‘the international’.²³ The Cold War order – like much of the history of modern international

²³ Conceptualizing early Cold War history as a historically-specific instantiation of passive revolution also opens up analysis to the ways by which *illiberal* methods and regimes could – in certain conjunctures – eventually produce *liberal* outcomes. While registering a general process of ‘revolution from below’, the outcome of a passive revolution is neither pre-determined nor uniform. Instead, the ‘organic and conjunctural movements within the structures of passive revolution’ are ‘ultimately conditioned’ by both the ‘relations of forces’ between contending classes and their differentially situated positions within the wider international context. Passive revolution is, then, not generically anti-liberal, but indicative of the processes through which radical subaltern demands are sublimated and transmuted from above. Explaining the outcome of any particular passive revolution thereby demands concrete analysis highlighting the ‘very

relations – was thereby instilled with a distinct social logic and moral purpose (the defence of liberal capitalism from radical-left subversion). This was, then, very much concerned with the (geo)political management of social change in domestic orders emanating from the uneven and combined character of capitalist development more generally.

Secondly, our argument suggests that we need to reconceptualise US hegemony in a way that is more open to the variegated social bases of liberal politics that goes beyond the rather narrowly-framed understanding of liberal order articulated by Ikenberry and others. The composition of sociopolitical forces constitutive of the post-WWII order persistently encompassed agents and ideological currents outside and often antithetical to liberal *democracy* in ways that were – paradoxical or not – integral to that order's development. In this sense, it makes more sense to conceptualise the post-war 'historical bloc' spearheading the US-led international liberal order after WWII as representing a broader social penumbra (including elements of the far-right) that orbited around a 'hardcore' of liberal social forces proper. And, in times of hegemonic crisis, it was these auxiliary non-liberal layers that were strategically deployed in defending and stabilising the domestic-international liberal-*capitalist* order.

Gramsci's category of the historical bloc is a particularly apposite framework for understanding the *partial* convergence of interests and positions of liberal-internationalist and far-right forces entwined in this *complexio oppositorum* facilitating the rise and expansion US hegemonic power after 1945. For Gramsci, an historical bloc comprised a conjuncturally-conditioned dialectical unity of 'structures and superstructures': 'that is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures' taken in their concrete articulation of 'the ensemble of the social relations of production' (Gramsci 1988: 192). Multiple ideological tendencies and different iterations of hegemonic projects can exist within a single bloc. Significant to its development is, then, the extent to which these assemblages of social forces cohere together in organising, structuring, and reproducing a historically-particular set of productive relations – and, just as importantly, potentially acting to challenge and transform these relations (Thomas 2009: 100).

contradictions of revolution-restoration and the role of popular masses in shaping the content and form of politics' (Morton 2010: 330, 329). We thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing us on this point.

Drawing attention to the necessarily contradictory features of the concept, its ‘scissions’ and aspects of struggles, ‘furnishes a mechanism for the development in time of the bloc itself’ (Boothman 2000: 125).

Thus, the incorporation of far-right elements into the Cold War historical bloc should not be confused with their ideological or political uniformity with the dominant liberal-internationalist forces. These forces were, at time times, highly antagonistic to the ideological dispensations and particular policies of the leading Atlantic liberal states, above all, the US. At the same time, they were also crucial in constructing and reproducing the anti-communist social order facilitating the global expansion of US hegemonic power.

Thirdly, with respect to neo-Gramscian arguments, the crucial point is that always and everywhere the relationship between coercion and consent in hegemonic projects is *conjuncturally-conditioned*: i.e. in times of crisis, the coercive aspect tends to come to the fore. Throughout much of the Cold War, state-sponsored violence and terrorism by far-right agents remained prevalent in consolidating and reproducing ‘liberal-democratic’ orders both domestically and internationally. Far from representing an opening-up of democratic possibilities, as conceived by Ikenberry and others, US hegemony was founded upon the active and persistent *limiting* of acceptable democratic options: i.e. the curtailing of left-wing parties and exclusion of more radical democratic possibilities.

Hence, fourthly, (capitalist) hegemony should be conceived as structuring the field of legitimate political options. It is intrinsically *undemocratic* as it limits both the range of available political strategies and ideologies and therefore also the depth of acceptable democratic change. In this respect, the US-led Cold War order shares affinities with the kind of ‘authoritarian liberalism’ central to the thought of many interwar German ordo-liberals influenced by the thinking of Carl Schmitt, such as Alexander Rüstow and Wilhem Röpke, who viewed the concentrated force of the state as vital to sustaining and defending the rule of law, private property and market freedom against radical democratic subversions (Bonefeld 2017).

The hegemony of historically-particular social orders are always defined against other – indeed Other – social systems and ideologies. The ‘pluralism’ of the liberal order established after WWII was thus always a *bounded pluralism* in which some political

actors and ideologies were deemed illegitimate or unacceptable to the extant sociopolitical order, even if we accept – as we should – the scope within liberalism for extending the reach of what is acceptable. It therefore makes more sense to speak of the post-WWII order as an ‘authoritarian-liberal international order’ as the liberal-capitalist aspects always superseded the democratic, while the legitimising field of the system was fundamentally premised on the maintenance of capitalist relations.

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