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## The coming multi-order world

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### ABSTRACT

The article shows that the current international system is changing towards a completely new form of international system, conceptualized as a multi-order system. The suggestion for a multi-order world stands in contrast to three current narratives about the future global order expressed through a multipolar narrative; a multi-partner narrative and a multi-culture narrative. The article demonstrates that although each narrative points to a plausible future, neither fully captures what lies ahead. Using English School concepts such as order, international society, international system and primary and secondary institutions, the article reveals a conception of the coming international system as a system consisting of several different 'orders' (or international societies) nested within an overall international system. In the coming 'multi-order world', the liberal order will continue, and may even be strengthened internally, but its global reach will be a thing of the past. Moreover, the challenge in a multi-order world will be to forge new forms of relationships between composite and diverse actors across complex lines of division and convergence. Scholars and policy-makers should note that the coming multi-order world will be radically different, requiring new thinking and new institutions and the acceptance of diversity in both power and principle.

The international system appears to be in flux and the liberal international order that was established after the Second World War in peril. Most agree that global power is shifting as new powers rise and old ones re-assert themselves and that the arrival of new actors such as *Daesh* (ISIS) suggest that the values underpinning the existing order are not shared by all. At the same time strategic forecasting point consistently to major change in political structures, demographics, technology, resources, economics and the environment, which are likely to further question the existing order and to place increased demands on its institutional capacities to meet common challenges.<sup>1</sup> Yet,

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despite the compelling evidence that major change is taking place and will accelerate in the years to come placing the existing international order and its institutions under pressure, there is little agreement on what kind of international order is in the making or indeed how best to meet the many emerging challenges.

The transformation of the existing international order has been debated for some time in the scholarly literature. There is a significant, and growing literature on the crisis of liberal order, great power management and the role to be played by the current hegemon – the United States.<sup>2</sup> At the 2015 Munich Security Conference, it also became apparent that the worry expressed in the scholarly literature had percolated up to the policy level as key decision-makers voiced their concerns about new dangers and cracks in the international order.<sup>3</sup> The conference theme, ‘Collapsing Order, Reluctant Guardians’ expressed in a poignant manner the dangers facing the existing order and the weaknesses in the institutions underpinning it, and, most importantly, it revealed a growing awareness amongst the policy elite of the challenges to the principles on which the order has rested since the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, following the terrorist attacks in Paris, the lockdown of Brussels, the downing of a Russian passenger plane and the shootings in Tunisia and California as well as the very visible refugee crisis and the pernicious humanitarian disaster in Syria, the concern has clearly spread to the public level, which is bound to have (domestic) political consequences that probably will not enhance the prospects for finding common solutions.

There is a now widespread agreement that major change is in the making and that the international order of the past seven decades is in question. However, it is not clear what might be done to rescue it or – if rescue fails – what might replace the current order. In fact the more the future of the international order – and by implication the role of the United States as the main sponsor of the order – is discussed in the accumulating literature, the more it seems that our understanding of the key question to be addressed – how order is produced and maintained – is incomplete and conceptually weak and that we as a result have not fully anticipated the coming international order.

This article seeks a better understanding of the changes taking place and of what kind of international order is emerging and how to best ensure a peaceful transition to a new global order characterized by diversity in power, principles and institutions. The article seeks to contribute to an already crowded field by offering a theoretical and conceptual account of the changes taking place and of what might emerge as a result of the current changes. To do so requires probing into what is meant by order and to take a deep look at its constitutive components to identify which components of the current order should be, or can be preserved, and which ones need to be reformed or replaced. Moreover, it is necessary to consider what kind of institutions

are likely to be able to facilitate continued cooperation in a strategic environment where traditional approaches appear to be faltering. To help in this effort, I revisit English School theory, in particular Hedley Bull's concepts of order, institutions, international system and international society.<sup>5</sup>

The article is divided into five main sections, starting with a brief outline of three competing narratives on what kind of global order is in the making. Although each narrative contributes with valuable insights, neither is able to offer a complete picture of what kind of international order may result from the current changes, because neither considers fully how – and where – order is constituted and maintained. In the second section, the article turns to a conceptual enquiry into what is meant by order and how and where order is produced and reproduced. I utilize insights from English School theory to differentiate between order as a *condition* characterized by the achievement of three fundamental goals related to life, truth and property and order as an *object* constituted through a set of activities and practices linked to a specific set of values and institutions. The latter is what is often described as 'the international order', but confusingly it is also functionally equivalent to Bull's key concept – 'international society'. The problem is that the concepts 'order', 'the international order' and 'international society' are difficult to separate, and that the focus in the current debate on 'the international order' appears to actually be about changes in the 'international system' – albeit without a clear distinction being offered between system, society and order. I argue that a first step towards clarity on the current process of transformation is a conceptually founded understanding of the distinction between order produced by the international system and order that is produced by international society.<sup>6</sup>

In the third section, I develop an ideal-typical international order allowing me to focus on the components and the constitution of 'international orders' – or international societies. I argue that all orders consist of four constitutive parts and that it is through the constellation and character of all four components that the specific character of 'the international order' is forged. In the fourth section, I turn to the character of the international system and its relationship with international society and how the character of orders or societies within the system influence the system. In the fifth section, I demonstrate that the current characteristics of the international system are different from the past international systems of multipolarity, bipolarity and unipolarity and that the next international system is likely to consist of several 'orders' with multiple overlapping and diverging characteristics nested within an overall international system in which a complex network of 'inter-order' relationships will determine the character of the coming 'multi-order world'. The article concludes that the challenge ahead will be to safeguard the liberal international order, whilst also forging many different and new forms of relationships to manage the coming multi-order world.

## Narratives of emerging order

The literature on the changing strategic environment and emerging global order is extensive and a full engagement with it is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it is possible to roughly divide the existing literature on the emerging global order into three broad narratives – which I have labelled as a multipolar future, a multi-partner future and a multi-cultural future. All three narratives have in common that they focus primarily on the role and future prospect of the current liberal international order and they all anticipate a more diverse international system composed of new and emerging (great) powers. However, they differ on important issues, especially on how order is produced and maintained which leads them to very different interpretations on the future prospects for the current liberal order and on the role to be played by the current leader of that order – the United States. A little polemically one could say that the multipolar narrative harks back to the past, the multi-partner narrative seeks to extend the present into the future and that the multi-cultural narrative looks to a profoundly different future.

### *A multipolar future*

The first narrative is probably the most commonly articulated narrative in the media and in policy circles and it is backed up by a substantial scholarly literature. It suggests that we are currently witnessing a return to the kind of balance of power politics that characterized the multipolar system of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The narrative starts from the premise that as new powers rise, the unipolar moment<sup>7</sup> is over and will be replaced with global multipolarity<sup>8</sup> in which the relationship between the United States and China is likely to be by far the most important.<sup>9</sup> The narrative emphasizes material capabilities, especially military and economic power, stressing that military power rests on economic strength, which leads to the persuasive argument that as rising powers increase their economic strength, they are likely to also increase their military power.<sup>10</sup> Given the importance of economic power and its link to military power, the rise of China and China's status as the second largest economy therefore receives a great deal of attention.<sup>11</sup>

The narrative is rooted in the realist tradition, which emphasizes the pursuit of the national interest and material capabilities<sup>12</sup> and which sees anarchy and the balance of power as the key ordering principles in an international system that is largely assumed to be moving towards multipolarity. Proponents of the narrative argue that balance of power politics continues to offer a serviceable mechanism for maintaining tolerable levels of order during times of accelerated change.<sup>13</sup> However, although proponents of the

narrative all emphasize balance-of-power politics and the importance of national interests and although they all see a version of multipolarity unfolding, they differ in their recommendations on how the United States should respond to the altered strategic environment, and by implication, on how they view the prospects of the existing liberal order.<sup>14</sup>

The narrative is split on the question of whether the United States should balance against the rise of competing powers by maintaining its commitment to existing allies, whilst seeking to prevent rising regional powers such as Russia and China from establishing regional spheres of interest, or if the United States should take advantage of its beneficial geographic position and resource self-sufficiency and pursue a strategy based on offshore balancing.<sup>15</sup> In the former, the pre-eminent objective of the United States should be to maintain – perhaps even to increase – its power and to balance against rising states in all the traditional ways. In a recent Council of Foreign Relations report, Robert Blackwill, Henry Kissinger and Ashley Tellis argue that Washington needs a new grand strategy towards China that centres on balancing China by revitalizing the American economy, by strengthening the American military, expanding Asian trade networks, controlling China's access to advanced weaponry and military technology whilst implementing effective cyber policies, reinforcing Indo-Pacific partnerships and energizing high-level diplomacy with Beijing.<sup>16</sup> Depending on the extent of such a policy, it is not far off being a policy of primacy, where the power balance would favour the United States and it certainly advocates the view that 'superpowers do not get to retire'.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, those who favour offshore balancing argue that the United States should disengage from its extensive military commitments, and that the policy of liberal hegemony and active engagement pursued since the end of the Cold War has proved to be an expensive and counterproductive grand strategy, which has made the United States the centre of political attention, produced anti-Americanism, and precipitated balancing against the United States.<sup>18</sup> With the changes currently underway in the international system, the grand strategy of liberal hegemony, is likely to be even more expensive and even more counterproductive. Proponents of offshore balancing therefore argue in favour of restraint and that the United States should make use of its beneficial geographic position and strong naval capacity to focus on its own defence and its own society.<sup>19</sup> Ian Bremmer presents the case as 'putting an end to our prohibitively expensive superhero foreign policy' and 'instead of throwing money at other people's problems' start to 'invest more money more wisely in American education, rebuild our infrastructure, care for our veterans and all those who need help here at home'.<sup>20</sup> Such a policy would no doubt be politically persuasive amongst a public that after two exhaustive wars has grown tired of shouldering the cost of 'policing the world'. Not surprisingly therefore, the policy is gaining

ground and certainly has appeal at the public level. The strategy rests on the belief that it makes no sense to take on unnecessary burdens or to allow allies to free-ride on the generosity of the United States and that in any case, only a few areas of the globe are of strategic importance to the United States.<sup>21</sup> However, although offshore balancing is very different from the balancing against China strategy, both visions of the future international order are part of the same narrative, as they both see the emerging strategic environment as one of multipolarity and a return to past practices of balance of power politics and as they both reject that the fundamental nature of international politics has altered in any significant way.<sup>22</sup>

### ***A multi-partner future***

The second narrative accepts that the rise of new powers will affect the coming international order but it disputes that the rise of other powers will result in a return to traditional power politics. The narrative is most closely associated with liberal internationalism – in particular the form of liberal hegemony advocated prominently by G. John Ikenberry in *Liberal Leviathan*.<sup>23</sup> In policy circles the narrative has most clearly been articulated when then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton argued that the international order of the 21st century would be a ‘cooperative architecture’ in a ‘multi-partner world’ rather than a ‘multipolar world’.<sup>24</sup>

Proponents of the multi-partner narrative stress that America remains an enduring power and it maintains that the United States share more interests with other powers than the multipolar narrative suggests.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless – and rather surprisingly – the multi-partner narrative shares considerable common ground with those in the multipolar narrative arguing in favour of balancing against China. This is because both maintain that the United States cannot withdraw from its global responsibilities and because both assume the continuation of American leadership and active engagement. However, the similarity between the two is lessening as the ‘primacy balancers’ continue to emphasize balance of power and American hegemony as the key ordering principles, whereas the multi-partner proponents acknowledge that the ordering principle in the coming international order cannot be liberal hegemony, but must increasingly be based on partnership diplomacy.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the multi-partner narrative emphasizes the importance of institutions, rules and multilateralism as essential for maintaining international order. For this reason they attach considerable importance to the institutional framework established in the aftermath of the Second World War although they acknowledge the need for reform of the existing institutional architecture.

The multi-partner narrative accepts that change is taking place at a rapid rate and they accept that many (Western) multilateral institutions are in

crisis, but they remain optimistic that a reformed version of the current order can be maintained in an altered strategic environment and that the soft power of the order's founding (liberal) ideas will continue to constitute magnetism to emerging democratic powers. Proponents of the narrative such as John Ikenberry and Bruce Jones argue that the United States will remain the leader of the order for the foreseeable future, although the United States will have to adapt its leadership to the new realities.<sup>27</sup> The crisis of liberal order is not a crisis of liberal internationalism, but is rather a crisis of authority brought on by the successful rise of new powers – in many cases achieved through liberal order – which are now eroding the existing governance arrangements of the order. More states are now seeking voice and authority in the operation of the system, which means that the ordering principle of hegemony must now be changed – partnerships, soft power and reform of the (old) institutions is the way forward for maintaining liberal order in the future.<sup>28</sup>

The multi-partner narrative is certainly more optimistic than the multipolar narrative. It bases its optimism on the belief that the current liberal order is highly resilient, able to adapt and open and easy to be joined by new rising powers that wish to align with the current liberal order.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, proponents of the multi-partner narrative reject that liberal internationalism is culturally specific to the West, but argue that it is simply a way of organizing the world.<sup>30</sup> The 'multi-partner narrative' therefore seeks to extend the present into the future although it also accepts the necessity of adapting and repairing those aspects of liberal order that are currently acknowledged to be in crisis and which have clearly failed to deliver on the liberal promise of freedom and prosperity.

### ***A multi-cultural future***

The third narrative is much more diverse and multifaceted than the two previous narratives. The narrative is difficult to pinpoint exactly because it anticipates a world that is marked by diverse regional sub-systems and which is at once globalized, diversified and localized.<sup>31</sup> It is not possible to locate the narrative in a particular theoretical approach except that the proponents of the narrative are more sensitive to history and cultural specificities and view liberalism and liberal order as a product of social and economic conditions that were unique to Europe and to the 'new world' initially populated by peoples of primarily European descent. Common to the proponents of the narrative is a more historical and cultural approach seeking to understand the developmental trajectories and social and economic forces and emphasizing the importance of culturally specific identities and the resultant different views on political legitimacy, the nature of sovereignty, the rules of international trade and the relationship between state and society.<sup>32</sup>



One of the most prominent examples of the multi-cultural narrative is Charles Kupchan's 'No One's World'. Kupchan argues that the West is losing not only its material primacy as new powers rise, but also its ideological dominance.<sup>33</sup> In Kupchan's view Asia is likely to be the main beneficiary of the ongoing global changes, but even so it is doubtful that any country, region or model will dominate the next world. The emergent international system will be populated by numerous centres at different stages on their way to multiple versions of modernity and so will belong to no one in particular.<sup>34</sup> Kupchan argues that the development of the Western liberal order is the result of a specific journey to modernity, which has resulted in three defining features: liberal democracy, industrial capitalism and secular nationalism.<sup>35</sup> The problem is that these defining attributes of the West cannot be assumed to be the defining attributes of developing regions and rising powers, which will have major implications for order-making at the global level. The challenge in 'no ones world' will be to establish a global consensus on the fundamental terms of a new order and to manage the peaceful transformation towards it – yet doing so will have to take place across culturally dividing lines.<sup>36</sup>

Amitav Acharya also sees a world in which Western hegemony is at an end and dominance by any single power is over.<sup>37</sup> Acharya suggests that the American-led order is in the process of being replaced with a 'multiplex world' – a world of diversity and complexity, a decentred architecture of order management featuring old and new powers with a greater role for regional governance linked together by networks and institutions.<sup>38</sup> The multiplex position implies two possible approaches to order: a global concert model and a regional world model.<sup>39</sup> The concert model assumes that the great powers will have a special responsibility in the management of international order, where the United States will continue to play a critical role albeit sharing its power and authority. The regional model assumes a greater role for new regionalism utilizing regional institutions such as the EU and ASEAN to manage international challenges such as climate change, humanitarian assistance, intervention and financial cooperation. However, for the model to work, cooperation at the regional level must be complementary to the UN system, which in turn necessitates reform of the global institutions.<sup>40</sup> If managed correctly Acharya argues that regions could acquire the role as building blocs of world order.<sup>41</sup>

Where Kupchan and Acharya emphasize emerging differences, Buzan and Lawson point out that at the same time as power admittedly is becoming more diffuse the degree of ideological difference amongst the leading powers is shrinking, as nearly all states now adhere to a form of capitalism.<sup>42</sup> However, despite the growing convergence in the economic sphere, they acknowledge the existence of a wide span of governance structures, suggesting that the challenge ahead is how to manage relations between diverse modes of

capitalist governance in a system they describe as ‘de-centred globalism’ in which no single power – or cluster of powers – is pre-eminent.<sup>43</sup> Buzan and Lawson stress four principles of decentred globalism; global non-hegemony; responsible great powers; regionalization alongside globalization; and that shared fates mean common security. Provided that these four principles can be adhered to, which the authors acknowledge is not without question, a new international society<sup>44</sup> based on the principles of decentred globalism could offer the prospect of managing competition between integrated but diverse models of political economy.<sup>45</sup>

What the different proponents in the multi-cultural narrative have in common is that they all foresee the replacement of American/Western hegemony with a more de-centred or polycentric system and acceptance that the United States in particular and the West more generally will need to get used to the fact that the vision of the universalization of liberal values is wishful thinking. They all see an emerging global order characterized by diversity and diffusion of power, of crisscrossing and overlapping multiple forms of relationships and of many different forms of domestic governance and organizational practices. The multi-cultural narrative agrees with the multi-partner narrative that the challenge ahead will be to facilitate global cooperation across dividing lines to address collective security problems such as climate change, crime, trade, migration and arms control.<sup>46</sup> But they do not share the optimism that such cooperation can be forged according to Western principles, nor that rising powers – either democratic or autocratic – can be enticed into the current liberal order. Liberal order, they maintain, is a culturally specific construct and not ‘just’ a way of organizing the world. The order-making principles in the multi-cultural narrative are similar to the order-making principles in the multi-partner narrative, but with the important difference that they do not anticipate the degree of Western leadership the multi-partner narrative seems to rely on, and they acknowledge to a much greater degree the importance of regional institutional frameworks and culturally specific governance arrangements whilst questioning whether the existing institutional architecture can muster a workable level of legitimacy across the growing diversity.

Although each of the three narratives capture important qualities of the current changes and challenges, the problem of anticipating what lies ahead in global order is that although each narrative points to plausible futures, neither fully captures the complexity of order-making in a rapidly changing world. Without a conceptual understanding of order and how order is produced and reproduced each of the three narratives will remain ‘opinions’ on what lies ahead, which essentially require a choice between different ordering principles without first having spelt out how order is produced. In the following the article will turn to the more conceptual question of how to understand order and how it is constituted and maintained.

## International order and international society

Hedley Bull wrote an entire book about order in world politics, which to this day remains perhaps the most authoritative statement on the topic, although it also left many important questions of relevance for this article unclear or unanswered.<sup>47</sup> Bull's contribution to our understanding of order was nevertheless groundbreaking and his concept international society and the role played by primary institutions in facilitating order may offer the current debate on the changes in the liberal international order/international system additional clarity and nuance.

To Bull order is a particular kind of social pattern of human activity to facilitate the achievement of three elementary and universal goals of social life related to life, truth and property. A recurrent theme in Bull's work is that without some minimum realization of security against violence, a shared acceptance of the sanctity of promises and of the stability of the possession of property, order in international politics would not be possible.<sup>48</sup> English School theory assumes a sense of common interest in these elementary goals of social life<sup>49</sup> and the establishment of rules to ensure behaviour that encourages the realization of the goals and institutions that make these rules effective.<sup>50</sup> The institutions that are emphasized by Bull as essential for producing and maintaining order are the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war and great powers, although other institutions might also be relevant. It is through these primary institutions that shared practices and international organizations and regimes (secondary institutions) emerge which may contribute towards the realization of the three elementary goals of social life and hence to produce order. It is this shared understanding and acceptance of shared rules and practices that now appear to be in question.

One of the most important contributions of Bull, and the English School more generally, is the proposition that order may be found at three different levels: the international system; international society and world society.<sup>51</sup> In the classic English School distinction, the international system is described as 'when two or more states have sufficient contact between them and have sufficient impact on one another's decisions to cause them to behave – at least in some measure – as parts of a whole'.<sup>52</sup> A society of states on the other hand exists

when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.<sup>53</sup>

Barry Buzan offers a more concise definition of international society as 'the institutionalization of shared interests and identity amongst states and the

creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions amongst them'.<sup>54</sup> Whether Bull's or Buzan's understanding of international society is preferred, it seems that the liberal international order is a textbook example of an international society. In that sense the *condition* of order as the achievement of the three fundamental goals is to be found through the *object* as in *the international order*.

Although English School thinking is built around the triad of 'international system', 'international society' and 'world society', it is clear that Bull thought that order would most likely be produced at the international society level, and that the place to look for how order is produced is in the shared interests and identity, norms, rules and institutions of the international society/order. This is indeed a logical consequence of his definition of order, which placed considerable importance on the role of rules and institutions – neither of which figure in the definition of an international system. However, with the expansion of the liberal order to a near global reach and as a result of the long reign of liberal order's common rules and institutions such as sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, balance of power, great power management and war – as well as the complex system of derivative and secondary institutions that has been established over the years, it has become difficult to make a clear distinction between institutions that can be attributed to the liberal international order/society or institutions that are systemic attributes. Clearly if Bull's definition of system is accepted, the institutions that play such a prominent role in international politics are a part of the international society – the liberal international order – rather than systemic attributes related to bipolarity, unipolarity or multipolarity.

The article will now turn to look more closely at the constitutive elements of international societies and at the relationship between international society and international system and how the two have developed and been deeply intertwined over the past two centuries. Doing so requires first a development of an ideal-type international society/international order.

### **Ideal-types of international orders**

The three narratives outlined at the start of this article each identify different forms of change and different challenges to what is essentially the same international order in the same strategic context or international system. Yet, although each narrative provides important observations and each point to plausible futures, none of the three narratives seem to be describing the same phenomenon. Of course different interpretations of the same phenomenon is entirely possible given the complexity of the issues and the wealth of empirical data available for interpretation and may simply reflect different political and theoretical standpoints. However, it is also possible that each narrative have a valid point but that much like the blind men trying to

describe an elephant by touching different parts of it, they are 'feeling' different parts of an overall process of change that is difficult to grasp in its entirety. In this section, the article will therefore look at the individual constitutive parts by setting up an ideal-typical form of international society.<sup>55</sup> Having an ideal-type international society should provide a starting point for a better understanding of the many forms of change that seem to be taking place in the current liberal international order – and perhaps in the international system – and a better idea of where those changes may lead.

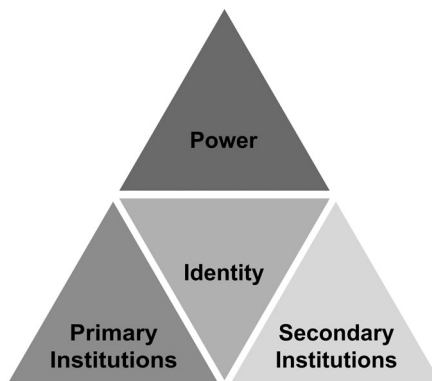
Bull's understanding of order and international society was the result of conversations in the British Committee stretching back to the early 1960s.<sup>56</sup> From this long conversation many different nuances appear and disappear and it is sometimes difficult to get a clear picture of the precise argument. Moreover contemporary English School theory is at the beginning of new debates about types of international societies and debates about some of the constitutive parts of international society such as the relationship between system and society, the definition of primary institutions and the identification of new ones, the importance of identity and the possibility of typologies of international societies.<sup>57</sup> Much work still needs to be done and space within the confines of a short article do not allow for the depth of enquiry that a full engagement with the issues at hand would require. What follows is therefore a brief sketch and an invitation to further research on the possibilities emerging from the starting point of the ideal-typical international society/order developed here.

In its most basic form an international society – or an international order – may be understood as a cluster (or club) of sovereign states or nations with shared values, norms and interest, expressed through a number of institutions both primary ones that are informal and evolved (rather than designed) and performed through fundamental and durable shared practices and secondary ones that are formal and designed and which perform specific administrative and regulative functions.<sup>58</sup> The primary institutions have traditionally included balance of power, diplomacy, international law, great power management and war, but the number of institutions that could be included is potentially infinite. Moreover it is entirely possible to imagine an international society/order with very few or under-developed secondary institutions, which would simply indicate an international society with a low level of constitutionalism. The level of constitutionalism in the current international order is a relative recent addition and specific to the American-led order. In addition to these considerations it seems clear that power and sovereignty must be afforded a privileged position in the constitution of international society.<sup>59</sup> Sovereignty is constitutive of a society comprising states and power is likely to play a major role both in the internal management of relations within the international society and in its external relations with other actors or orders in the system. Finally, it seems that the internal cohesion of an

international society is dependent on a shared identity, which will be expressed partly in shared norms and values and partly in similarity in domestic governance arrangements, cultural similarities and such like.

With these considerations in mind and building on the analysis from the previous section, an ideal-typical international society can be thought of as a cluster of sovereign states (usually) converging around a leading state, where the society will be defined by power and identity and by its primary and secondary institutions. [Figure 1](#) is a graphical representation of such an ideal-typical international society or international order.

- *The power component* is derived from the material capabilities and resources available in the order – perhaps but not necessarily provided by the order’s leading state. Power in a function of the ability of the order (or its leading state) to provide public goods and meet common challenges. The power component also includes soft power derived from non-material factors such as internal cohesion through a stable identity and shared interests and magnetism through attractiveness and legitimacy. Moreover, the power component will also be a function of the strength and effectiveness of the order’s primary and secondary institutions.
- *The identity component* is derived from the order’s self-understanding, core values and vision expressed through shared norms and social practice. The identity may be rooted in religion, culture, ethnicity or ideology or other strong identity signifiers. The identity is also likely to be reflected in the internal domestic governance arrangements.
- *The primary institution component* is characterized by a number of durable and recognized patterns of shared practices rooted in the values held commonly by the members of the order and embodying a mix of norms, rules and principles.<sup>60</sup> The primary institutions can be the institutions identified by Bull such as diplomacy, international law and the conduct of war, but



**Figure 1.** The ideal-type international society.

might also be durable and recognized patterns of shared practices that are related to the identity of the order.

- *The secondary institution component* is characterized by an institutional architecture designed to manage relations between states within the international society and provide an organizational setting for meeting common challenges and for providing public goods within the order and in the wider system. The institutional architecture may display a high or low level of constitutionalism either through many formal rules-based organizations or through less formal relationships.

The character of an international society and its external and internal resilience is constituted through each of the four components. Change can occur in any one of the four component parts, but change in one component is likely to transplant to other components as all four are inter-linked and have at least a degree of mutual constitutiveness. The possibility for different combinations and different characteristics in each of the four constitutive parts seems to offer a wide scope for variation. Indeed, it may well be that each of the three narratives introduced in this article have merely focused on change and challenges in different components of the liberal international order as change may be taking place across all four constitutive parts.

The central question to ask when assessing if a cluster of states can be said to be an international society has to be if the participating states share a common interest in maintaining the order. Such a shared interest is likely to be more robust if they also share similar internal/domestic settings and when participating state benefit from staying a member. The resilience of the international order will therefore depend on how much the members of the international order have in common and how much they want to be members of the order. The substance of the international order will depend on the identity and dominant values, principles and practices defining the order.<sup>61</sup> For most of the past 200 years liberal order has been the only international society, only interrupted with the Soviet order providing an alternative during the Cold War. However, other forms of order based on different values and entailing different primary and secondary institutions are possible as seen in the past and in the current suggestions for a Sinitic order, Putin's attempt at establishing a Eurasian order and the proclamation by *Daesh* of a Caliphate. Each of these are likely to have the same four constitutive parts albeit that their content is likely to be very different from the constitutive parts of liberal order.

The possibility of different international societies clearly begs the question of how different orders might coexist and it raises the question of the relationship between system and society and what kind of dynamics are likely between different international orders rather than between individual states.

## The relationship between system and society

Bull's definitions of 'international system' and 'international society' seem at first sight straightforward. Yet the relationship between the two is not clear and it is not easy to see where system ends and society begins. What separated 'society' from 'system' in Bull's writings was that 'system' referred merely to contact between states and the impact of one state on another, whereas international society also involved common interests and values and common rules and institutions.<sup>62</sup> As we have seen, order produced through international society is associated with the participating states having a sense of common interest and they are following established ordering practices associated with commonly held values. Order at the system level, on the other hand, appears from Bull's definition to be limited to physical interaction and strategic calculation about the effects of interaction.<sup>63</sup> However, although this distinction seems valid, in practice it is problematic even to the point that Alan James<sup>64</sup> convincingly concluded more than twenty years ago that the international system is a meaningless idea as interaction without some degree of social content is, if not impossible, of little importance.<sup>65</sup>

The distinction between system and society and the usefulness of the concept 'international system' is one of the contested issues in English School theory.<sup>66</sup> Whilst system and society overlapped in both substance and geographic scope, the distinction between system and society was of little consequence. However, in a situation where liberal order may no longer have a global reach and may no longer be the only international society, the question of which values, norms and institutions belong in the liberal international society and which belong in the international system becomes more important. Moreover, the question implies that international system and international society co-exist and have a relationship that so far has remained under explored.

The position adopted in this article is that it is difficult to imagine an international system that is not characterized by at least a minimum degree of social relations and that an international system therefore is likely to have some social attributes that are likely to be similar to those in an international society. It is probable that the social relations and institutions at the international system level will be thin in comparison to those at the international society level. However, as suggested by Alexander Wendt, even thin social relations produce different 'cultures of anarchy'.<sup>67</sup> This can have important effects on the overall character of the international system. Indeed this view seems to be in line with Bull who suggested that interactions in an international system might take the form of cooperation, conflict or indifference.<sup>68</sup>

The impossibility of an international system without some social relations and without some systems-wide institutional structures might be taken to mean that the concept has no value or that system and society simply

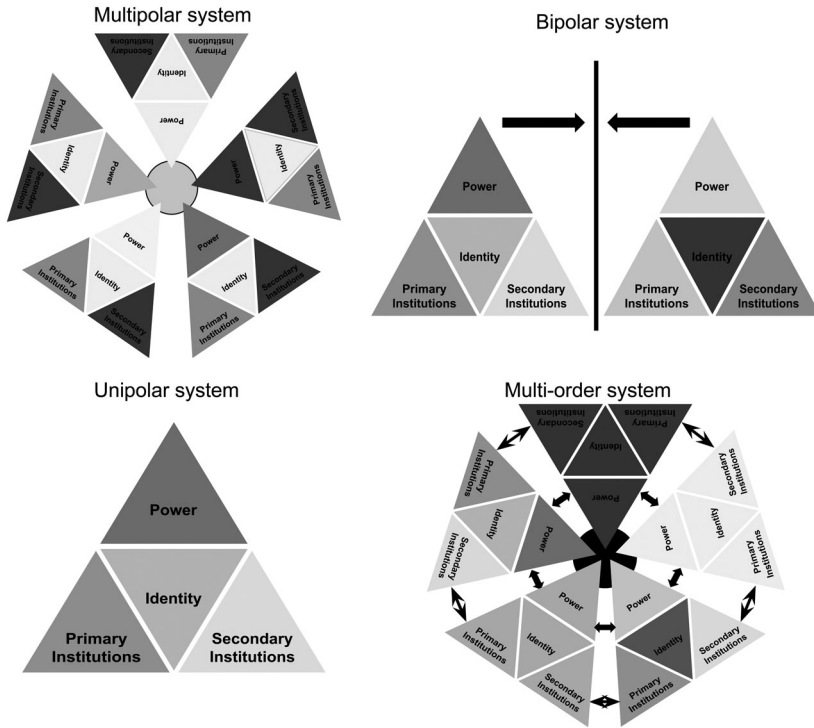


represent two ends of a continuum between thin and thick varieties of the four component parts identified above. However, this is not the view proposed here. The concept 'international system' remains useful to denote overall 'systemic' characteristics such as polarity and although systemic change is rare, it does occasionally take place and when it does is likely to result in transformational change and to have significant repercussions at the level of international society. In addition – and perhaps most importantly – a 'system' is qualitatively different from a 'society'. An international system will always be global in scope whereas international societies potentially come in all shapes and sizes where the current (near) global scope of the American-led liberal order, must be assumed to be the exception rather than the rule. Being part of the international system is simply not a choice that any state can make, but is an inescapable fact. Moreover, the international system remains anarchical albeit that anarchy may be what states make of it, and that there certainly is scope for different cultures of anarchy and different levels of cooperation and institutionalization within an anarchic international system. In international societies on the other hand – especially in the case of the current *American-led* liberal order – anarchy might be the formal ordering principle, but in reality it is tempered by other ordering principles through potentially much thicker primary institutions and through the possibility of a substantial degree of hegemony in the internal management of the international society. Whilst this may not always be the case, the possibility for a thick institutional order is much more likely in an international society than in an international system.

The existence of both a system and perhaps several international societies suggest that international societies are nested within an overall international system. To be sure this suggestion sits uncomfortably with Bull's view that global order (as a condition) would be incompatible with 'a welter of competing principles of universal political organization'.<sup>69</sup> Yet, history offers plenty of examples of co-existing international orders – most recently during the Cold War. However, it does place considerable demands on policy-makers to forge a form of systemic order that is cooperative rather than conflictual and to aim for as high a degree of constitutionalism through the establishment of global primary and secondary institutions as global ordering principles. In the following the article will turn to a (brief) historical overview of how different forms of international systems have varied across time – not just in terms of their polarity, which is what traditional international relations theory has focused on – but also in terms of the composition of different constellations of international orders.

### **Varieties of international systems and orders**

I have suggested in this article that global order should be thought of as multi-layered consisting of an international system layer and an international society



**Figure 2.** Varieties of international systems.

layer. To see why such a characterization is relevant, it is necessary to take an, albeit brief, look at past orders and international systems. Figure 2 is an attempt to illustrate the different forms of past international systems and the constellation of the four identified international society components within them over the past two centuries.<sup>70</sup> The different shades in the ‘triangles within triangles’ suggest differences or similarities in the four constitutive components: power, identity, primary institutions and secondary institutions. The figure shows that the *international system* over the course of the last two centuries has undergone transformation only three times, where the third transformation from unipolarity to what I would suggest might be called a multi-order system is not yet complete. With the analysis also including the *international society* level a more nuanced representation becomes visible and the differences between past orders and the emerging one move into view.

### **The multipolar system**

It is widely agreed that the international system from the late 18th century was a multipolar system until its prolonged process of transformation during the first half of the 20th century ushered in a new bipolar system. Exhausted from

war, the European powers were usurped by the two – at that time rising powers – the United States and the Soviet Union. The multipolar system was global, although only by virtue of the colonial reach of the European powers, which allowed them to impose their own model on the rest of the world. By the middle of the 19th century, Europe was the core region of a global-scale political economy and imperial international society.<sup>71</sup> This meant that the international system and the international society overlapped to such a degree that it became difficult to distinguish one from the other. The *system* was multipolar because it consisted of more than two great powers whose influence extended globally, whilst the international society was characterized by a shared European identity, by the use of the primary institutions; balance of power, great power management and diplomacy, employed through the secondary institution; the Concert system.

It is apparent that the international society in the multipolar system underwent important change during the 19th century. The shared European identity was challenged by budding national identities and although diplomacy and great power management were the most prevalent primary institutions from the time of the Concert of Vienna, once nationalism gave rise to German and Italian unification, these gradually gave way to the balance of power and war as the dominant primary institutions. Where the early part of the multipolar system remained peaceful because the differences in the power components were mitigated through great power management and diplomacy, once these practices faded and differences in identity started to appear, the limited level of constitutionalism in the embryonic secondary institutions meant that the 19th-century international society became managed through balance of power, which eventually caused it to break down.

Although it is possible to talk of a European international society, it was not a society that was characterized by thick primary and secondary institutions and the shared identity between the members of the society was founded on relatively weak foundations and certainly not supported by having similar domestic governance arrangements. The development of each of the four constitutive components of the order was characterized by serious setbacks such as the failed revolutions in the mid 19th century and the rise of nationalism, the slow development of secondary institutions and in particular the rise of Fascism and Nazism, which ultimately contributed to the collapse of the order.

### ***The bipolar system***

The bipolar world was also a multilayered system consisting of an overall international system and two international societies. In the strategic environment of the Cold War, the two international societies were largely self-

contained and more commonly referred to as 'blocs'. The system was bipolar because it had only two major powers.<sup>72</sup> Both of these were so much more powerful than all others that they became known as superpowers. Relations between the two superpowers were conditioned by opposing identities rooted in ideology and on a power struggle evidenced in extensive alliances and a continuous build-up in military strength. The primary and secondary institutions for order-making between the two superpowers were, however, limited in scope and were employed in an unconstructive manner. For example, the balance of power became known as the balance of terror and diplomatic relations were used for espionage, propaganda and subversion, or were obstructed through the use of veto in the UN. The many secondary institutions developed during this period were primarily geared towards order-making *within* the two orders rather than *between* them. Only following the close call of the Cuban missile crisis were limited secondary institutions established to bridge the division between the two 'blocs' through the establishment of more direct diplomatic relations, the 'hot-line' and a series of arms control negotiations.

Apart from the negative order-making at the systemic level, the two superpowers were simultaneously the leading power within their respective 'bloc' or international society. Within each international society a distinctive identity and power base developed along with extensive, but wholly separate primary and secondary institutions. In the American-led order the primary institutions were mainly cooperation, multilateralism and negotiation, expressed through the Western secondary institutions such as the Bretton Woods system, NATO and a number of bilateral relationships in South East Asia. In the Soviet-led order a similar process took place although the primary institutions were based on centralized decision-making and collective action, expressed through secondary institutions such as the Comecon and the Warsaw Pact and various bilateral relationships with client states in the Third World. In the American-led order, a major effort was undertaken to change the previous identity based on nationalism, colonialism and a European identity, to a 'Western' identity based on free trade, rule of law, capitalism and 'freedom'.<sup>73</sup> A similar process, based on socialism took place in the Soviet-led order, but to change the shared identity to one of socialist states. In both international societies, the leading power exercised considerable influence over the members of their respective international society through the bargain of offering security protection and a variety of economic incentives in return for political acquiesce and acceptance of the principal power's leadership.

With hindsight it seems clear that the identity and the primary and secondary institutions of the Soviet-led order were weaker than those of the American-led order, perhaps because the internal power management in the Soviet-led order was based on subjugation rather than negotiation, which affected the

order's magnetism and legitimacy. Once the internal cohesion of the order could no longer be maintained through subjugation, the order collapsed and most of its member states sought membership of the American-led international order.

### ***The unipolar system***

The system that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet-led order was unipolar at the systemic level because it contained only one hegemonic power. Such a system is widely assumed to be short-lived as it is anticipated that an alternative great power sooner or later will appear on the horizon to challenge the hegemon. I do not agree that unipolarity is inherently short-lived, provided that it is supported with a stable universalized international society. However, this is precisely the point – maintaining a global universalized liberal international society appears to be, as Charles Kupchan expresses it – wishful thinking!<sup>74</sup>

The unipolar system seemed nevertheless for a while to be supported by a universal liberal international society. Francis Fukuyama boldly proclaimed 'the end of history' and the triumph of liberalism as the 'final form of human government'.<sup>75</sup> The claim seemed at first vindicated by a wave of democratization processes and in an unprecedented level of global cooperation such as in the liberation of Kuwait. However, beneath the surface all was not well in the four constitutive parts of the liberal international society and with the arrival of George W. Bush in the Oval Office, things took a turn for the worse. The Bush Administration took unipolarity and American hegemony as an opportunity to ride rough shot over long-standing primary institutions such as multilateralism and the established practice of negotiation and it 'disrespected' the cherished secondary institutions that were seen by many of the key members of the liberal order as the cornerstones of the order.<sup>76</sup> The perceived intransigence of the Bush Administration sent shockwaves around the liberal order and had detrimental effects on the multilateral institutions that for so long had been regarded as its cornerstone.<sup>77</sup>

It soon became clear that the problems were not limited to the internal cohesion of the liberal order, but that some states and non-state actors rejected it altogether. This was of course most forcefully and tragically displayed in the attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001. It has since become evident that the appeal of the liberal international order and the legitimacy of its secondary institutions is not universal and that a growing number of states – even some democratic states – are hesitant about membership of liberal order. The acceptance of Western power and institutions by non-Western states or colonies was apparently only skin deep as a necessary price to have paid for decolonization.<sup>78</sup> With alternative

international orders emerging, the cost–benefit calculations of states that do not really share the fundamental principles rooted in a Western identity therefore looks set to change. This seems to be precisely the kind of calculations that some states – such as Turkey, Brazil, India, Russia and others have engaged in recently.

### **The multi-order system**

Following the conceptual framework developed in this article, it can be seen that the new emerging system is fundamentally different from the three previous international systems. It is ‘multi-order’ because the *primary dynamics are likely to be within and between different orders, rather than between multiple sovereign states*. With inspiration from the suggestion by Barry Buzan that societies of states are ‘second-order societies’ because its members are not individuals but collective entities, the emerging system appears to be a ‘second-order system’ because its members are not individual states but collective entities comprising states.<sup>79</sup> In a second-order system, relationships are likely to be inter-organizational, transnational or supranational in character, increasingly taking place within regional or order-specific secondary institutions (some of which may be supranational) or between non-state actors or in many different public–private partnerships. New forms of relationships *between* orders are likely to emerge, such as between the EU and ASEAN, EU and African Union and the importance of international organizations across different orders such as, for example, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation are likely to grow in importance. The many different connecting arrows in [Figure 2](#) between the different orders in the multi-order system signify the many complex new as well as traditional relationships that are likely to characterize a multi-order system. Neither of these relationships or the dynamics they are likely to produce corresponds with the previous multipolar system.

The coming system is more correctly characterized as multi-order rather than multipolar because of its ‘second-order nature’ composed by clusters of states with differences across all component parts. The multipolar order shared a European identity, which although growing nationalisms gradually undermined it, nevertheless remained the dominant identity of the great powers until that identity was replaced by a Western identity. As shown in [Figure 2](#), the multipolar system displayed a degree of similarity in all component parts of international society except the power component, but in the multi-order world there is no such similarity in any of the component parts. It must be expected that such across the board differences between composite units in the system will have significant effects on the dynamics of the system and call for new primary and secondary institutions for managing complex and composite relationships.

On the surface, it would appear that such a constellation might result in a system composed of different regions as suggested by Acharya. However, although regions and regionally based primary and secondary institutions almost certainly will become more prevalent, this is only in so far that the region coincides with the identity signifiers of international orders. In fact, as pointed out by Buzan, rising interaction capacity renders geographic proximity of less importance, which logically means that regions should be weakening.<sup>80</sup> It certainly means that distance will no longer be a hindrance for participating in specific identity-based orders. Australian participation in the Eurovision song contest may only be the beginning of such trans-hemispherical identity-based order membership. In the new system membership of orders is therefore more easily attainable for states sharing common identity signifiers, but separated by distance. In that sense therefore *identity, rather than region, is likely to be the major defining feature of new orders.*

As suggested in the multi-cultural narrative, the new system will indeed be characterized by plurality of power and identity. However, the picture is 'messy' because strong identity signifiers may characterize some orders, which, however, may be weak in terms of material capabilities and resources and which may additionally display low levels of constitutionalism in their primary and secondary institutions. This is, for example, what seems to characterize an emerging international society based on a (radicalized) Muslim identity. Alternatively orders based on Asian or Latin American identities, would be based on considerable material capabilities and resources and a developing level of constitutionalism in both primary and secondary institutions, but a less strongly articulated identity and much less internal cohesion. Finally the budding African identity is clearly accompanied with efforts to establish a specific African institutional architecture to facilitate cooperation at the regional level and with the ambition that Africa may increasingly be able to take care of Africa's problems. However, the shared vision is hampered by a low level of constitutionalism in both primary and secondary institutions and in domestic governance arrangements. In all of these examples however, it is the emerging sense of a specific identity couple with a wish to break free from what is increasingly perceived to be Western dominance that seems to be driving the move towards a loosening in the foothold of the current liberal international order.

The developments outlined here are as yet only in the making. However, the signs seem strong enough to warrant the label multi-order system. Moreover, the label multi-order system does not reject the suggestions from the third narrative that the system will be more regional, de-centred and influenced by the convergence of economic principles through different forms of capitalism, and characterized by increased divergence in political ideology and religious belief and diverse forms of domestic governance structures. Whichever label is used however, it is certain that new forms of statecraft

are needed to ensure a peaceful transition to the new system and to manage it once fully in place. In particular the emerging system will need new ‘institutions of connectivity’ as connectors between the different orders and for maintaining or developing order-based and system-based primary and secondary institutions that can both support the universal goals of social life related to life, truth and property.

### **Challenges of the coming multi-order world**

The analysis of this article has produced a picture of the coming international order and international system that is very different from the three narratives that were introduced at the beginning of the article. Rather than a choice between the three narratives, it seems that the policy-makers in the coming multi-order world may be facing all the changes and challenges that were outlined by the three competing narratives – plus the challenges associated with a changed international system, where interaction will be between composite actors in addition to the already complex relationships between states. Changes are happening both at the international system level and at the international order level and reformed and strengthened order-making institutions will be needed for both levels. New tools of statecraft will be needed for a system where traditional primary institutions may have to contend with dealing with composite actors such as competing orders rather than with traditional state-to-state diplomacy. Moreover at the international order level – that is the internal dynamics of the liberal international order – changes are underfoot in all four constitutive parts of the order, including weakening of internal cohesion, and changes in the traditional primary and secondary institutions. It is indeed not surprising that the ongoing changes have been experienced as unsettling and have been characterized as ‘compounding complexity’.<sup>81</sup>

The task ahead is a tough one, where the details are still to be worked out and where much strategic planning will have to rely on projected change rather than change that has actually happened. Doing so is always a political challenge. Three steps are needed in the short term to address the current challenges and to prepare for a peaceful transition to the coming multi-order world. The first and most immediate priority must be to prepare for the coming multi-order world by taking steps to strengthen the core of liberal order, paying attention to all four constitutive parts of the order with special attention to re-establishing internal cohesion and reforming the existing primary and secondary institutions. Clearly this priority suggests that retrenchment and offshore balancing as suggested by some proponents of the multipolar narrative should be resisted despite the short term advantages such a strategy might bring and despite its undoubted domestic political appeal. Secondly, narratives about the future and the conduct of foreign



policy must now be based on acceptance that liberal values will not be universalized, but that other orders will emerge that are likely to hold different values. On this count the multi-cultural narrative holds significant value. Policies must be adjusted accordingly especially in the multi-partner narrative, which should maintain its focus on establishing new forms of relationships across dividing lines, but be better at working with partners on a more equal basis without the (not so hidden) agenda of partners eventually ‘coming around’ to liberal ways. Thirdly, the need to think about ‘post-Western’ systemic governance arrangement is now urgent. There is a need to work towards establishing new global/systemic primary and secondary institutions that are suitable for operating in the new multi-order system – in particular institutions that are able to facilitate cooperation across dividing lines between composite actors to meet the many collective security challenges that strategic foresight analyses have shown to be waiting in the not very distant future.

The good news is that the multi-order world is not yet a reality and that there is still time to prepare for it. The lesson from Hedley Bull and the English School is that order is produced both at the international society level and the international system level and that life, truth and property is best secured through shared rules, norms and institutions backed up by an appropriate mix of soft and hard power. Moreover with a clearer idea of what kind of international system is in the making, scholars and policy-makers alike are much better equipped for constructing the right policies designed for a new multi-cultural future where power is more evenly distributed rather than harking back to a system that ended in tears with two world wars or believing that the remarkable cultural diversity of our globalized world really will fit into just one idea about how to organize society and achieve the good life.

## Notes

1. See, for example, National Security Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (Washington, DC, 2012); NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, *Strategic Foresight Analysis, 2013 Report* (Norfolk, VA, 2013) or UK Ministry of Defence, Strategic Trends Programme, *Global Strategic Trends – Out to 1945*, Fifth Edition (London, May 2014).
2. The literature is vast and fast growing. Books that have inspired the writing of this article include, but is not limited to Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008); James Steinberg and Michael E. O’Hanlon, *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009); Robert Kagan, *The World America Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013); Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (London: Penguin Books, 2014); Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the*

Word: *The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (London: Penguin Press, 2009); Barry R. Posen, *Restraint – A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Bruce Jones, *Still Ours to Lead* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2014); Charles Kupchan, *No One's World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

3. Wolfgang Ischinger, *Collapsing Order, Reluctant Guardians?* (Munich Security Report 2015, January, 2015).
4. Briefing – Munich Security Conference 2015, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 549.006, February 2015.
5. The article does not aim to break new theoretical ground or to position itself with any particular ‘faction’ within the English School. The article draws primarily on Hedley Bull’s, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan, 1977) to apply key concepts and ideas to help us to make better sense of an extremely complicated field.
6. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of the article for clarifying this point.
7. Charles Krauthammer, ‘The Unipolar Moment’, *Foreign Affairs, America and the World 1990 Issue*.
8. David Blagden, ‘Global Multipolarity, European Security and Implications for UK Grand Strategy: Back to the Future, Once Again’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (2015), pp.333–50.
9. See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer, ‘China’s Unpeaceful Rise’, *Current History* (April 2006), pp.105, 690, Research Library, pp.160–2. See also Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (note 2).
10. Posen, *Restraint* (note 2).
11. See, for example, Hugh White, ‘Alliances and Order in the Asian Century’, in William Tow and Brendan Taylor (eds), *Bilateralism, Multilateralism and Asia-Pacific Security: Contending Cooperation* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.157–68.
12. Robert Kagan, ‘Superpowers Don’t Get to Retire’, *New Republic*, 26 May 2014.
13. Aharon Klieman (ed.), *Great Powers and Geopolitics: International Affairs in a Rebalancing World* (Heidelberg: Springer Press, 2015).
14. See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer, ‘America Unhinged’, *The National Interest*, No. 129 (January/February 2014), p.30.
15. Proponents of offshore balancing include amongst others Stephen Walt, Christopher Layne, John Mearsheimer, Barry Posen, Andrew Bacewicz, and Ian Bremmer.
16. See Robert D. Blackwell, Henry Kissinger, and Ashley J. Tellis, ‘Revisiting U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China’, *Council of Foreign Relations*, April 2015.
17. Robert Kagan, ‘Superpowers Don’t Get to Retire’, *New Republic*, 27 May 2014.
18. Posen, *Restraint* (note 2), p.165.
19. Stephen Walt, ‘A Bandwagon for Offshore Balancing’, *Foreign Policy*, 1 December 2011.
20. Ian Bremmer, *Superpower: Three Choices for America’s Role in the World* (London: Penguin Random House, 2015), p.201.
21. Walt, ‘A Bandwagon for Offshore Balancing’ (note 19).
22. Blagden, ‘Global Multipolarity’ (note 8), p.334.
23. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan* (note 2).

24. Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton, *Foreign Policy Address at the Council of Foreign Relations* (Washington, DC, 15 June 2009).
25. Jones, *Still Ours to Lead* (note 2), p.2.
26. This point is arrived at from a number of confidential interviews with staff in the Obama Administration. Interviews conducted in Washington, DC, in the spring of 2014.
27. Jones, *Still Ours to Lead* (note 2), p.5.
28. G. John Ikenberry, 'The Future of Liberal Order', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2015), pp.450–5.
29. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan* (note 2).
30. Ikenberry, 'The Future of Liberal Order' (note 28), p.454.
31. *Ibid.*, p.450.
32. Kupchan, *No One's World* (note 2), p.7.
33. *Ibid.*, p.2.
34. *Ibid.*, p.3.
35. *Ibid.*, p.7.
36. *Ibid.*, p.5.
37. Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), p.4.
38. *Ibid.*, p.8.
39. *Ibid.*, p.108.
40. *Ibid.*, p.112.
41. *Ibid.*, p.109.
42. Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.72.
43. *Ibid.*, p.72.
44. Buzan and Lawson laments that although the discipline of International Relations share some terminology with the policy world, this does not extend to the term international society. As will be made clear later, I share this regret and by suggesting that international order as an object is functionally equivalent to international society, hope to contribute to moving the concept into the policy domain.
45. Buzan and Lawson, *The Global Transformation* (note 42), p.303.
46. Barry Buzan, 'How Regions Were Made, and the Legacies for World Politics: An English School Reconnaissance', in T.V. Paul (ed.), *International Relations Theory and Regional Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.22–46, p.46.
47. The following analysis relies primarily on Bull's, *The Anarchical Society* (note 5). There is of course a wealth of more recent English School literature, which could equally well have been utilized, but as I find that Bull's analysis provides the conceptual ground that is needed for the argument of this article, and as the article is not per se about the English School, I have judged Bull's classic work as sufficient.
48. *Ibid.*, p.4. See also R.J. Vincent, 'Order in International Politics', in J.D.B. Miller and R.J. Vincent (eds.), *Order and Violence – Hedley Bull and International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 38–64; Carsten Holbraad, 'Conclusion: Hedley Bull and International Relations', in J.D.B. Miller and R.J. Vincent, *Order and Violence – Hedley Bull and International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 186–204.
49. Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (note 5), p.51.
50. *Ibid.*, p.63.

51. World society relates to the totality of global social interaction ‘among mankind as a whole’ with individuals and non-state organizations as the focus, whereas international society relates to the social interaction between states. As suggested by Barry Buzan in *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014) ‘world society’ has played only a marginal role in English School theorizing. Although I in no way endorse the marginalization of the theoretical importance of ‘world society’, this article deals only with the relationship between international system and international society because it seeks to better understand the current shifts in international politics, which do not at present seem to be moving in the direction of a world society.
52. Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (note 5), p.9.
53. *Ibid.*, p.13.
54. Buzan, ‘How Regions Were Made’ (note 46), p.36.
55. In the following, I will be using the terms international society and (international) order interchangeably. The difference seems to be merely rhetorical where international society is associated with the English School, but international order is the term commonly used by the policy community.
56. Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society* (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press, 1998), p.183.
57. For an overview of the new debates in English School theory, see Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School* (note 51), chapter 10.
58. This definition of primary and secondary institutions is taken from Buzan *From International to World Society?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), p.167 and p.Xviii.
59. Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (note 5), p.63 and Dunne, *Inventing International Society* (note 56), p.106.
60. Buzan, *From International to World Society?* (note 58), p.181.
61. Stanley Hoffmann, ‘Foreword: Revisiting the Anarchical Society’, pp.vii–xiv, in Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (note 5), p.ix.
62. Stanley Hoffmann, ‘International Society’, p.22 in Miller and Vincent, *Order and Violence* (note 48), pp.13–37.
63. Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School* (note 51), p.171.
64. Alan James, ‘System or Society’, *Review of International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1993), pp.269–88.
65. Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School* (note 51), p.171.
66. *Ibid.*, p.171.
67. Alexander Wendt, ‘Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics’, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (1992), pp.391–425.
68. Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (note 5), p.10.
69. *Ibid.*, p.135.
70. The period under investigation is rich in historical detail, which, however, has not been possible to be reflected in the text for reasons of space.
71. Buzan, ‘How Regions Were Made’ (note 46), p.28.
72. The non-aligned movement constituted an attempt to establish an alternative, but it was never successful in establishing itself as an actual international society.
73. The word ‘democracy’ was carefully avoided as some members of the order were absolutely not democracies.

74. That Western democracies will have to scale back their aspirations of universalizing the liberal order is a pervasive theme in the Transatlantic Academy Report, Trine Flockhart, Charles Kupchan, Christina Lin, Bartłomiej Nowak, Patrick Quirk and Lanxin Xiang, *Liberal Order in a Post-Western World* (Washington, DC: Transatlantic Academy, April 2014). The term 'wishful thinking' was used on several occasions when presenting the report.
75. Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, No. 16, pp.3–18.
76. John Peterson, 'America as a European Power: The End of Empire by Integration?', *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (2004), pp.613–29.
77. Michael Cox, 'Beyond the West: Terrors in Transatlantica', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2005), pp.203–33.
78. Buzan, 'How Regions Were Made' (note 46), p.32.
79. Barry Buzan refers to first- and second-order societies in much of his work, but a clear distinction and definition can be found in Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School* (note 51), p.15.
80. Buzan, 'How Regions Were Made' (note 46), p.23.
81. Julieane Smith and Jacob Stokes, *Strategy and Statecraft: An Agenda for the United States in an Era of Compounding Complexity* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, June, 2014).

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### Notes on contributor

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