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The Corruption of International Society?

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Much thinking in the West in the last fifty years has been concerned less with understanding this society [international society] *and the conditions of its preservation than with dismantling or even abolishing it. One of its institutions has been national armaments; and one of the preoccupations of Western thinking has been disarmament, the attempt to do away with or drastically curtail them. Yet if armaments are an integral part of the whole system of international relations, and stand or fall with it, there are serious objections to the notions both of the possibility and the desirability of disarmament* (Bull, 1959: 41).

Hedley Bull, one of the leading figures of the so-called English School (ES) approach to International Relations (IR), believed that war and armaments were a central cog in the wheel that was international society, and that war contributed directly to the production of international order (1959). This was a position he further developed in his landmark book *The Anarchical Society* (1977), as well as in *The Control of the Arms Race* (1965). He was committed to the idea that disarmament would, in his words, 'corrupt' international society and 'bring to an end such acceptance as there is of international law and diplomatic orthodoxy' (Bull, 1959: 47, 49). In this article, I shall explore the extent to which practitioners - actual diplomats - agreed with this assessment. This is the article's central question. I shall do so specifically in relation to the most ambitious programme of disarmament yet proposed by states, namely general and complete disarmament (GCD).[1] The logic is that GCD will offer fertile terrain for diplomats to voice their potential objections to the society-corrupting consequences of that programme. Based on Bolton's (2016) short but insightful history of GCD, two key moments have been selected for analysis.

The *first* moment was when the Soviet Union introduced the idea of GCD in 1927 and the subsequent sustained debate of it in the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference 1927-28. The Soviet Union reintroduced the concept at the actual World

Disarmament Conference in 1932. However, at that time it was dismissed without much debate. The *second* moment was the UN General Assembly's acceptance of the idea of GCD in 1959. This moment includes Khrushchev's re-launch of the idea in his speech to the assembly on 18 September and the extensive debate of it over some 17 meetings of the assembly's First Committee, tasked with disarmament and international security.

The purpose and value of this analysis is to learn more about the workings of international society. Following Bull, GCD probably represents the most radical challenge to the traditional conception of that society and its institutions. The only challenge of similar magnitude would appear to be the creation of a universal state or world government, fundamentally removing anarchy from the 'anarchical society'. GCD should thus be of central concern to ES scholars interested in the functioning of international society, as well as all other IR scholars who accept that international relations are partly or predominantly *social* relations.[2] Moreover, the analysis should go some way towards satisfying those scholars who have expressed the need for a more grounded focus on practitioners' concrete experience of, and articulations of, international society and its institutions (e.g. Wilson, 2012), as well as those calling for more research on practitioners as sources of international thought (e.g. Keene, 2017: 352; 2014: 398-400).[3]

So, I will analyse international society and GCD from the perspective of the practitioners: the actual diplomats and statesmen who debated GCD in international fora in 1927-28 and 1959. It is their *public* thoughts, assumptions, presuppositions, arguments and expressed ethical beliefs which are the objects of this investigation. The analysis will not tell us whether actors, at heart, deemed GCD realistic or whether they approached it with a genuine commitment to finding a path to its realisation. No doubt, for some it was a pipe dream, to borrow Wheeler-Bennett's phrase (1935). Moreover, the great advocate and scholar-practitioner of disarmament, Alva Myrdal (1977), held that GCD was mainly a pawn in a propaganda game played by the superpowers. Yet, whether genuinely or not, all states and their representatives chose (or were forced to by public opinion) to engage with the GCD idea, and to think through how it, in principle at least, could be related to the international society they found themselves living in. That is the important body of international thought I seek to unearth below and relate to Bull's provocative corruption question.

The article will be structured as follows. The first section will elaborate the international society corruption argument in more detail. The account will not be limited to Bull, but include a wider reading of ES scholarship to provide a richer understanding of the corruption argument. In the course of outlining this argument, the section will also discuss what is generally meant by international society and its institutions in the ES tradition. The next section identifies the article's research design: how to investigate the potential presence of the corruption argument in practitioner thought. This will entail the identification of the grounded inside-perspective favoured by many ES scholars and the article's alignment with this scholarship. The remaining sections will then analyse each of the two 'moments' identified above: 1927-28 and 1959. The analysis will show intriguing elements of the corruption argument in practitioner thought. In the conclusion, I will summarise the findings and reflect on the possible paths forward for research on this topic.

The International Society Corruption Argument

The basic elements of Bull's corruption argument were introduced above. In this section, I will provide a more detailed exposition of the foundation and central pillars of this argument, drawing not just on Bull, but a wider set of ES scholars. This will include an account of what could be termed the '*raison d'être*' of international society and the central roles played by the institutions of war and armaments. This is not to suggest that all ES scholars are united in their views on these issues.[4] Rather, the purpose is to paint a more multifaceted picture of the corruption argument in *theory*, so we can obtain a better understanding of the extent to which the argument resonates with *practice*: the expressed international thought of practitioners.

Let me begin with the classic ES definition of international society:

A *society of states* (or international society) 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 (Bull, 1977: 13).

According to ES thought, and certainly that of Bull, a central common interest of the modern group of states is to secure political pluralism, and the continued existence of the society of separate sovereign states, against the potential tyranny of a universal state or empire or world government (the latter are at times used interchangeably in ES scholarship). Jackson (2000: vii, 372-3) has termed this an ethics of 'negative liberty for territorial groups' and also calls

non-intervention a *grundnorm* in international society. It is worth stressing that Bull did not appear to be opposed in principle to world government. For example, as he put it in an early collection of ES essays, it 'is not my purpose to…argue against the desirability or feasibility of a universal state' (2019[1966]: 60). However, Bull was concerned that world government, if it came about, would not necessarily provide a desirable alternative to international society - put people in a better position to pursue each person's or community's version of the 'good life'.[5] Furthermore, it was his view that if disarmament were pursued on a comprehensive basis, it would lead to either 1) the erosion of those institutions that had traditionally made international society work; or 2) a slippery slope towards world government. I shall now spell out these arguments in more detail.

A central assumption of the ES perspective on international relations is that institutions make international society work. It is through the institutions of international society that states pursue and realise common interests, including preventing the potential tyranny of a universal state. Crucially, these are *social* institutions, involving practices, ideas, norms and rules (Holsti, 2004). They are *not* institutions in the formal sense of (international) organisations with written charters, physical bureaucracies and headquarters. Such social institutions thus comprise tacit and explicit agreements about how states' joint and separate conduct are supposed to be arranged. In *The Anarchical Society* (1977), Bull discussed how five such institutions help states achieve common interests: the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war and the great powers. The general minimisation of violence in international society – a common interest – is, for example, promoted through the application of diplomacy, the balance of power and conventions regarding the conduct of war. The provocative flipside of this argument, which can often be hard for non-ES scholars to appreciate, is that war and the balance of power can also be used, through violence, in the common interest to secure international society against a state pursuing imperial conquest or a world empire. Bull (1965: 39) explicitly held that the chief purpose of the balance of power is not to preserve peace (and hence minimisation of violence), but to prevent a universal empire.

It is in this thinking that the corruption argument should be located. According to Bull, war as a social institution is absolutely central to the working of international society. As he stated in the *The Control of the Arms Race* (1965: 36):

The possession by sovereign powers of armaments and armed forces is not something extraneous to the structure of international society, something whose presence or absence does not affect other of its parts: it is, along with alliances, diplomacy and war, among its most central institutions.

Take armed forces and war away, and you are left with something unrecognisable, which in the final analysis will compromise the other elements of this social system and, so his argument goes, lead to the creation of a universal state:

If nations were defenceless, there could hardly be a political order worthy of the name unless there were an armed, central authority: the abolition of national military power appears to entail the concentration of military power in a universal authority (Bull, 1965: 36).

Let me now try to unpack these two arguments about institutions and the problems of a universal state based on Bull and other ES scholarship.

Some of the most accomplished readers of Bull appear in agreement that he considered war to be a central, if not quintessential, component of international society (Suganami, 1989: 15; Ayson, 2017: 111). Other contemporary ES scholars come out in support of Bull's overall position on war (Jackson, 2000: 382). Knudsen (2019: 30-1), drawing on Navari, holds that war, together with five other what he terms 'fundamental institutions' are 'integrative' of international society, meaning that without them international society would not work as a social system. Knudsen (2019: 28) furthermore explains how the balance of power, ultimately premised on war, makes diplomatic and legal equality possible. And Bull was also very clear about some of the roles performed by war. As he stressed in one essay: 'in the perspective of international society war is a means of enforcing international law, of preserving the balance of power, and, arguably, of promoting changes in the law generally regarded as just' (Bull, 1973: 119-20). Unfortunately, Bull was less clear when it came to directly addressing how exactly disarmament would challenge the institutions of international society, beyond stressing the centrality of war for this society. Here it is helpful to engage in some interpretation and supplement his analysis with that of other ES scholars.

As I noted in the introduction to this article, Bull thought that disarmament would have a negative impact on diplomacy and international law in particular. Yet he did not elaborate much on why that was. Following Knudsen, and the general direction of Bull's argument, it would seem that this was because disarmament would remove the very preconditions of these

institutions if disarmament took away war, and with it, the balance of power. The fear, it seems, was of an eventual descent into a brutish form of anarchy with no respect for diplomatic representatives, no scope for negotiation and certainly no expectation that legal agreements would be honoured. Sheehan (1996: 200) has perhaps provided the clearest statement of this Grotian idea, namely that a great power managed balance of power provided a permissive political environment, 'thereby enabling "social" aspects of the international system to operate, such as international law, mediation, a balance of interests and dignities, and the pursuit of limited foreign policy objectives'. Watson (1992: 202) also, historically, viewed international law and diplomacy working as institutions 'Within the overarching framework of the balance of power', and believed that diplomacy was most necessary and flourished best in a balance of power system (Watson, 1982: 17). What we can take away from these observations is the idea of the mutual dependence of the institutions of international society, a position most likely shared by Bull. GCD would take us into uncharted territory and international society would have to be reengineered from the bottom up: GCD 'would imply such a radical transformation of the present structure of international politics as to require us to think out the whole basis of relations among states afresh if we were to make it intelligible' (Bull, 1977: 226).

So these are some of the main problems related to disarmament, war and the other institutions of international society in ES thought. Let me now turn to the second of Bull's concerns, namely that disarmament would put international society on a slippery slope towards world government and the negative consequences thereof. The move to a world government or world authority on the back of disarmament was a distinct possibility Bull identified in both the *The Control of the Arms Race* (1965: 36) and *The Anarchical Society* (1977: 226). Bull did allow for the possibility that a world government would potentially be better equipped to manage violence, but also seemed to hold that the principle of (negative) liberty, i.e. sovereignty, was more important. In addition, he noted that there was no guarantee that an order based on containing separate political communities in one polity would persevere, citing the example of the partition of India in 1947 (Bull, 2019[1966]: 70). He moreover suggested that world government would imply tyranny based on the logic that so many wars had been fought to prevent the creation of a universal state, and that even the supposedly peace-loving UN would be smeared with the guilt that always accompanies the exercise of real coercive power (1959: 50). In another essay, he identified the concern of third world

states that a more centralised political system formed around the UN would be captured by the present great powers (Bull, 1987: 199).

Having thus explicated the complexity of Bull's corruption argument in theory, I shall now turn to how it can be investigated in practice.

Research Approach

The question of this article is whether the international society corruption argument can be discovered in practitioner international thought. With this question, the article is aligned with a strong strand of ES scholarship which seeks to unearth and understand the inside-perspective of the participants in the great game of 'Let's play sovereign states' (Manning, 1962: 132). The foremost contemporary proponent of this perspective is probably Robert Jackson (2000: 93): 'the classical approach involves paying attention to what statespeople and other important international players are doing, and saying, which includes scrutiny of their pronouncements and those of others with whom they are dealing'. It is about getting into, to an extent, the minds of what Jackson calls the perhaps 20.000 'statespeople' (diplomats and others involved with foreign relations in an official state capacity) who practically make the international society social system tick on any given day (Jackson, 2000: 134). Furthermore, according to Jackson (2000: 93), 'Discerning this…, often implicit, ideational context of international justifications is the most important theoretical understanding to be derived from the interrogative process. That is because it discloses the real, or lived, normative world of the people involved'. Hence the classical approach is also importantly about trying to identify the lived experience and understanding of international society as it comes through in practitioner thought, including the so-called institutions of international society.[6] It is ultimately this *practice* that ES scholars attempt to distil into *theory.[7]*

Individual practitioners (diplomats and statesmen) may not be aware of some of these institutions as outlined by Bull and others. Practitioners may also explicitly deny the existence of some institutions or possess radically idiosyncratic notions of what those institutions actually mean. However, as core participants in international society, diplomats and statesmen are immersed in these collective and intersubjective webs of beliefs, whether fully conscious of them or not, and are likely to have to respond to them in one form or

another in the course of carrying out their duties.[8] This will be the core focus of my investigation: how the international thought of the diplomats and statesmen with respect to GCD engages with the institutions of international society and the corruption argument. Do the practitioners activate, prioritise or challenge some of the ideas encompassed by the institutions of international society? Most pertinently, do they, like Bull, argue that GCD will corrupt international society and pose a challenge to its fundamental institutions? Do they view GCD as a slippery slope towards world government?

To achieve this, I will disaggregate the public statements made by practitioners in the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference (in the late 1920s) and in the UN General Assembly (in the late 1950s), and set out their discrete ideas about GCD, international society and its institutions. The study should therefore also be of interest to those concerned with the history of international ideas in general (Armitage, 2014) and international ideas about war in particular (Ceadel, 1987; Bartelson, 2018). The article will be based on primary sources in the form of the official minutes of the different debates identified above in relation to the two moments. This particular study will not investigate the views expressed outside the public sphere, say, in internal government documents, minutes, memoirs and private records such as diaries. These are important sources for a fuller understanding of the lived experience of international society, and I return to the potential of such further inquiries in the conclusion. However, the present study will be restricted to the official record in the form of the actual public deliberations in the 1920s and 1950s.

The First Moment: The Emergence of GCD in 1927-28

The representative of the Soviet Union introduced the proposal for general and complete disarmament at the fourth session of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference (PCDC) in 1927. The proposal essentially entailed the abolition of all armed forces (land, sea and air) by all states, and the associated political, legislative and economic infrastructure, over the course of one year. Alternatively, if this proved too radical for the other members of the commission, the Soviet Union was prepared to consider a gradual realisation of the goal in stages over a total of four years (PCDC, 1928a, 1st meeting: 10). The proposal was eventually rejected by the majority of states in the preparatory commission, and in a slightly modified form by the World Disarmament Conference in 1932. I shall now analyse the public reasoning involved and the links made to international society by the

practitioners, and the extent to which they thought the proposal would corrupt international society.

It is important to explain some of the historical context to appreciate the development of this debate. For a more comprehensive account of the issue of disarmament in the interwar-period, see Webster (2004, 2005 and 2006), as well as his careful and pioneering study of the PCDC (2018). The momentum behind the PCDC came from the Locarno Treaties and the sense of optimism they had created in Europe as they paved the way for Germany's admission to the League of Nations and an increased normalisation of international relations. Those developments also created high expectations as Germany now wanted the victorious states in the world war to deliver on their promises of disarmament in connection with the Versailles peace settlement and as set out in article 8 of the covenant. Moreover, the PCDC was significant because non-League members the United States and the Soviet Union were invited and had decided to join the deliberations. In reading the debate, it is important to recognise at least two aspects, which did not receive a lot of direct attention in the debate, but which featured prominently in the wider discussions of disarmament in this period. The first aspect was the attempt to renounce war as a legitimate state policy, which was eventually codified in the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928. The Soviet Union joined the pact as part of its attempt to improve relations with the West, of which participation in the PCDC is also an example (Jacobson, 1994: 245-7). The second aspect was the different proposals for the creation of some kind of international police force to maintain the peace. These proposals were present in the 1920s and grew in prominence, partly due to the advocacy of individuals such as philanthropist David Davies who in 1930 published his tome *The Problem of the Twentieth Century.* Notably, France introduced such a proposal at the World Disarmament Conference in 1932 (Holman, 2010). With these observations, I shall now turn to the analysis of the debate in the PCDC and the Soviet proposal for GCD.

In the presentation of the proposal in 1927, the Soviet representative did not explicitly talk about international society or the character of this society, but he did clearly express certain views about relations within states, relations between states and the link to capitalism: 'under the capitalist system no grounds exist for counting upon the removal of the causes giving rise to armed conflicts. Militarism and navalism are essentially natural consequences of the capitalist system' (PCDC, 1928a, 1st meeting: 9). This suggested that the root cause of the problem of war could not be removed, not without the overthrow of the capitalist system

itself. But the means by which the problem was actualised - armed forces - could be eliminated, according to the Soviet representative. He further argued that the other states might not share this analysis of the cause of the problem. However, he held that even 'responsible statesmen in capitalist countries' shared the fears about the 'imminence of war'. The difference between them and the Soviet Union was thus not one of 'aims', but of 'methods' (PCDC, 1928a, 1st meeting: 11-12). So, to paraphrase the Soviet representative, international society was fundamentally corrupt because it was capitalist, but it could be temporarily improved upon by abolishing armed forces.

The Challenge to International Law and Diplomacy

It was the representative of Greece who most forcefully came out against the Soviet position in a manner that seemed to mirror Bull's observations to a large extent, and he will therefore be quoted at length:

> There is no human group or society which has not some force at its command. The difference between the various human societies is that some of them are organised and their force is therefore centralised, while others are not organised and their force lies in the hands of their members. There are no States whose members are such angelic beings that they do not need any force at their command. The most civilised States always have some force for the maintenance of public order, and it cannot be otherwise in the League of Nations. In order that States may agree to reduce the force which they have at present, there must be an international organisation with sufficient force at its disposal to maintain order and thus to save its members from having to perform that duty for themselves. It is this law which history has taught us from the time that human society has existed, that has been introduced in the formula which you know as Article 8 of the Covenant. It is that formula which we are now trying, after eight years of serious labour, to introduce into international agreement (PCDC, 1928a, 2nd meeting: 16).

According to the Greek representative, international law and order would thus become impossible if the proposal of the Soviet Union were translated into reality. The French representative expressed a very similar view, while also emphasising the disadvantageous position this would produce for small states:

> Supposing you had total disarmament, if there were no international organisation taking charge of security, if you had no international force to ensure the maintenance of this security, if you had no international law such as we are endeavouring to lay down here, a powerful and populous nation with great resources would always have the means of imposing its will, when it wished to do so, on a small nation - equally disarmed, but less populous and less well equipped to resist an attack which might be made upon it (PCDC, 1928a, 2nd meeting: 14).

Neither of these two representatives touched upon the potential corrupting influence on diplomacy, which was a concern raised by Bull. But they appeared to be of one mind when it

came to the GCD proposal's potential for creating generally disorderly relations between states. And the Greek representative, during the fifth session the following year, did express doubt about the adequacy of diplomacy or non-military means in a disarmed world without some mechanism for collective sanctions. Focusing on a section of the Soviet draft proposal which called for always using other means than military to compel rule-breakers to fall in line, he dryly noted that it did 'not go beyond the stage of hoping' (PCDC, 1928b, 6th meeting: 265).

Other representatives equally questioned the adequacy of non-violent measures. For example, the representative of Finland, actively using terms such as 'international community' and 'community of nations', did not believe that potential exclusion from that community would be enough to rein in recalcitrant members (PCDC, 1928b, 6th meeting: 263). This seemed to be a prescient observation in light of the history of the League of Nations in the 1930s. Moreover, the representative of the Netherlands argued that the problem went beyond the threat posed by states. As he put it, 'total disarmament would place nations at the mercy of brigands, pirates, adventurers and revolutionaries' (PCDC, 1928b, 5th meeting: 255). To this list could be added those political communities that were not part of international society, and which the British representative alluded to when he tactfully spoke of 'troublesome neighbours' that were perhaps not 'on the highest level of social organisation' (PCDC, 1928b, 3rd meeting: 247).

The Balance of Power and War

Other institutions of international society were also introduced into the debate. The Dutch representative spoke at some length about the balance of power:

> …there is no denying that the world of to-day rests largely upon the existing balance of power, and this balance would be upset by the proposals now before us. States which to-day do not count among the strongest would suddenly become formidable Powers owing either to the size of the police force which they would be allowed to maintain, or to the resources of every kind at their disposal. Even though we do not admire the system – perhaps it would be better to say, the fact – of the balance of power, we are not necessarily led to the conclusion that it should be replaced by another equilibrium, or rather by a disequilibrium (PCDC, 1928b, 5th meeting: 256).

The Dutch representative seemed somewhat torn between the interpretation that this was a human-made and human-directed social system, on the one hand, or whether it was an exogenous fact of states' current interactions on the other.[9] However, he certainly possessed clear beliefs about the consequences of the existence of this system, and moreover that it

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could potentially be changed, corrupted. Not surprisingly, the Soviet representative appeared to have arrived at the very opposite conclusion earlier in the debate when he talked disparagingly about how the

> …the system of regional guarantee pacts based on mutual assistance, as proposed by the Committee, may end in something perilously akin to the pre-war system of alliances and other military and political combinations. That very system, which was one of the causes of the great world war, itself may be a menace to peace…The Soviet delegation regards complete and speedy disarmament as the most solid guarantee of security for all countries and all peoples, and the most effective means of preventing war (PCDC, 1928b, 2nd meeting: 234).

In this statement, the pre-war system of balance of power based on military alliances was framed as one cause of the disorder represented by the great world war.

War was, broadly speaking, considered an evil by most, if not all, the participants in their public statements. The Soviet representative perhaps went furthest again when he talked about 'abolishing one evil - one of the greatest, it is true - the Moloch of war' (PCDC, 1928b, 7th meeting: 272). However, the views varied considerably in the commission as to what to do with this institution of international society. The Soviet representative tried to bait the US into supporting the Soviet position on GCD by making reference to the US's proposal for the prohibition of war (PCDC, 1928b, 3rd meeting: 241), to which the US representative replied that no such link should be made: the renouncement of war as an instrument of national policy did not logically entail the untimely abandonment of armaments (PCDC, 1928b, 5th meeting: 258). The members of the commission certainly wanted to limit war and limit armaments, but war or force could not be eliminated under the present conditions. The Greek representative even went one step further and turned his earlier comments about order and society into reflections about crime and punishment, again aiming a spotlight at the society-corrupting implications of the Soviet proposal:

> Are there not criminals in the community of nations as there are in smaller societies? Are there not criminal States against which it is necessary to organise preventive and punitive measures in the interests of humanity? And as long as there is not an international police responsible for this duty of preventing and punishing international crimes, States will be obliged to make good the deficiency with their national armaments (PCDC, 1928b, 8th meeting: 283).

Where there was society/community, there had to be war/force. With this, the Greek representative appeared to adopt a stronger position than Bull. To Bull, disarmament was a corrupting influence on international society. To the Greek representative, and possibly some

of his practitioner colleagues, the GCD proposal challenged a natural societal necessity: force was the precondition of law.

The Tyranny of World Government?

Interestingly, the participants in the debate had little to say about the world government concerns formulated by Bull. Indeed, the representative from Turkey seemed to be the only one to touch directly on the topic, and he actually spoke about it in positive terms when he mentioned 'a federation consisting of all civilised countries' (PCDC, 1928b, 3rd meeting: 238). He was nevertheless not convinced that that this advanced state of affairs could be achieved at present and that the commission should therefore be satisfied with a less ambitious goal. The representative of Argentine perhaps came closest to siding with Bull's position when he in general terms argued against 'military intervention which might encroach upon the dignity or sovereignty of the nations' in the context of pursuing disarmament (PCDC, 1928b, 7th meeting: 267).

With these observations I now move on to analyse how the GCD proposal was engaged with by the practitioners when it was reintroduced by the Soviet Union in the UN General Assembly in 1959, and subsequently accepted in principle following a lengthy debate. Had the concerns regarding the society-corrupting influence of GCD abated? That is the central question I will try to explore below.

The Second Moment: The Acceptance of GCD in 1959

The second time GCD was placed on the agenda of international society was in 1959, again on the initiative of the Soviet Union. This time GCD was accepted in principle by the UN General Assembly in a resolution co-sponsored by all the members of the First Committee, including the US. In this period, we are dealing with a richer tapestry of public reasoning, simply due to the increased number of states which were members of the UN and the sheer volume of meetings and deliberations. I shall cover both the initial speech by Khrushchev, setting out the Soviet proposal, as well as the 17 meetings of the First Committee dedicated to debating the idea.

The debate about GCD reflected a very different historical context compared to the late 1920s. Technologically, the major change was of course the invention of nuclear weapons

and advanced delivery vehicles such as long-distance bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles and missile-armed submarines. Politically, the Soviet Union was no longer located on the revolutionary fringe of international society, but had moved to the very centre: in terms of material power and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. A second major political change was the unfolding process of decolonisation that brought new member states into the UN and linked disarmament to the emerging issue of development. Finally, disarmament had arguably moved down the international policy agenda compared to the first moment analysed above. Disarmament had to a large degree been the very *raison d'être* of the League of Nations and constituted one of the key issues between Germany and the Western states in the interwar period. Partly due to the failure of those disarmament efforts, the UN generally took a more cautious approach to the issue as noted by Krause (2018: 384).

Khrushchev's Speech to the UN General Assembly in September 1959

The Soviet leader, Khrushchev, reintroduced the proposal for GCD in his speech to the General Assembly on 18 September 1959. The proposal was very similar to the earlier one from the late 1920s. It also operated with a stage process lasting four years (the initial proposal of completing the process in one year had been taken out). It permitted the retaining of some internal security forces and had provisions for an international control organ. A few additional items had been added to the list of things that should be abolished: nuclear weapons, missiles and foreign bases (UNGA, 1959, 799th meeting: 36-7).

Khrushchev did not argue that GCD would corrupt international society. Rather, according to him, GCD would improve it. Generally speaking, he presented a much more positive perspective on international society compared to the one the Soviet Union had put forward in the late 1920s, without invoking the actual term 'international society'. He struck a more conciliatory tone with respect to capitalism and social conflict, stressing the principles of peaceful coexistence and cooperation, and forcefully maintaining that the Cold War could and should be brought to an end (UNGA, 1959, 799th meeting: 31-2). A disarmed world, one could surmise, would thus be one where diplomacy and international law would naturally thrive. However, this view was not shared by a significant number of states in the First Committee, as I shall now discuss in the following section. While all states in the committee eventually accepted GCD as the ultimate objective of the UN's disarmament efforts through an official resolution, many of them held that international society, and notably the UN, would have to undergo substantial reform if it were to be preserved in a disarmed world.

The Challenge to Diplomacy and International Law

Bull clearly thought that disarmament posed a challenge to the institution of diplomacy. Nevertheless, similar to the 1920s, it is difficult to identify any practitioners who explicitly embraced this view in the First Committee. International law was a different matter altogether. On this topic, there was extensive debate and the corruption perspective was evident. Interestingly, the representative of Greece[10] largely echoed his state's position from the 1920s:

The purpose of effective international control of disarmament was to prevent violations and to detect and punish them. The problem was to determine who was to take punitive action. A central military authority would have to be established to assume that responsibility and to protect the lawful members of the international community against violators by imposing law and order (UNGAFC, 1959, 1030th meeting: 20).

Crime and punishment, law and order were thus the keywords for the representative of Greece, and in this he was supported by a number of his practitioner colleagues. The representative of Japan, for example, spoke about 'the organization of an institution to preserve international police order and to impose the rule of law' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1032nd meeting: 33). The representative of Belgium stressed that 'the United Nations should have a police force at its disposal in the same way as a national police force was a necessity in countries in which the citizens were not armed' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1035th meeting: 30).

The organisation of an international police or military force was indeed a central topic, no doubt partly at the instigation of the representative of the US who brought up this question in his opening statement (UNGAFC, 1959, 1027th meeting: 10). Opinions varied considerably. A significant number of representatives came out and spoke in favour of the creation of a new force (US, Argentina, Greece, France, Italy, Japan, Peru, Colombia, Turkey, Belgium, Pakistan, Guatemala, Denmark, Saudi Arabia, Uruguay and Tunisia). The representative of Ceylon believed it was premature to debate the question before disarmament had actually been achieved (UNGAFC, 1959, 1041st meeting: 80). Other representatives also contributed to the debate about the organisational aspects of creating and using such an international force. The representative of India, for example, argued vigorously against a force made up of national units for a number of reasons, including the problem of mixed loyalties and issues

related to command and control (UNGAFC, 1959, 1042nd meeting: 86). Some representatives argued that the provisions were already there in the UN Charter, while yet other representatives held that reform of the existing UN security machinery, including the Security Council and the veto power, was necessary to establish a viable force (Liberia, Peru, Turkey, China and Spain).

The socialist representatives were notably silent on the issue of an international force, returning again and again to their default position, in this instance expressed by Czechoslovakia, that 'Disputes would be settled round the conference table' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1027th meeting: 11). When touching specifically on the role of the UN, the Soviet representative stressed the 'patient searching for fair solutions acceptable for all sides', rather than 'the formal counting of votes', directly citing Khrushchev's speech to the General Assembly (UNGAFC, 1959, 1033rd meeting: 39). It was also in that very speech that Khrushchev had stressed the lasting relevance of the veto power and great power responsibility:

special responsibility for maintaining peace was entrusted to the great powers…The veto principle makes it incumbent upon the great Powers...to reach a unanimous decision which will ensure the effective maintenance of peace. It is better to strive for unanimous decision by the great powers than to decide international issues by force of arms (UNGA, 1959, 799th meeting: 38).

Summing up the debate on international law and GCD, many practitioners still appeared to hold, like in the 1920s, that force was a precondition for the establishment of law and order. However, now, in 1959, that argument was not couched as a corruption-argument, but rather as a reform-argument. All states ended up co-sponsoring the resolution on GCD, and hence, logically, it would not be appropriate to undermine that project by presenting it as incompatible with international society. Instead, practitioners seemed to stress the necessary reform and evolution of international society, so that law would continue to be safeguarded in a disarmed world. Bull's corruption concerns were thus mirrored in the expressed public reasoning of the practitioners with interesting nuances, and hence a fundamental continuity established with the arguably most prominent body of thought present in the 1920s debate.

Great Power Management and GCD

The practitioners also engaged with other institutions of international society, notably great power management. This institution had been more or less absent in the 1920s debate, with

only a few perfunctory references. The Belgian representative had seemed to invoke the idea of the special responsibility of the great powers when he quoted a statement by Lord Robert Cecil[11] from 1926:

'the little powers cannot disarm the world. That must be done by the Great Powers'; and he added: 'Though I do not want to put the Great Powers in control of this matter, I am quite certain that, without their assent, you will not do anything' (PCDC, 1928b, 6th meeting: 260).

Other delegates, the Polish and the Cuban, also made brief direct references to the great powers in the 1920s debate, the Cuban representative seemingly including the Soviet Union in this category, while the Soviet Union itself spoke disparagingly of the great powers (PCDC, 1928a, 1st meeting: 11; PCDC, 1928b, 6th meeting: 261; 10th meeting: 300).[12] However, in 1959, references to the great powers were ubiquitous. The term was used as a seemingly standard expression by more than 30 states, suggesting the acceptance of some degree of common intersubjective understanding. Several state representatives (Ethiopia, Indonesia, Lebanon and Ecuador) spoke of four great powers. They did not explicitly name any of these, but the intersubjective recognition of their identity appeared indicated when the representative of Indonesia referred to the four great powers that had agreed to set up the ten-power disarmament committee (UNGAFC, 1959, 1037th meeting: 58), and when the representative of Italy talked about the 'principle of unanimity of the great Powers' in the UN Charter (UNGAFC, 1959, 1031st meeting: 28). Then the great four logically had to be France, the Soviet Union, the UK and the US.

A brief note on the ten-power disarmament committee or the Ten Nation Committee on Disarmament, as it is usually referred to today. It came about as an agreement between the 'Big Four' earlier in 1959, and included, besides the four great powers, three additional members from each of the two military blocs. At this point in time - the First Committee debate in the fall of 1959 - the agreement had been endorsed by the main UN disarmament body, the Disarmament Commission. The ten-power disarmament committee later evolved into the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament, including eight non-aligned states, and later still into the Conference on Disarmament in the 1980s.

Interestingly, of the four implied great powers, the Soviet Union was the only one to actually invoke the 'great power' term in the debate, which obviously built on Khrushchev's earlier statement to the General Assembly quoted above. The Soviet representative used the term in

his opening statement and returned to it in his closing statement when he said that, unlike the 1920s, the Soviet Union now 'ranked among the great Powers and was no longer alone in the socialist Camp' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1042nd meeting: 87). The Soviet representative also stood out amongst the four in formulating special rights and responsibilities, asserting that it was 'the Powers with the largest armed forces, which bore primary responsibility for international security' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1026th meeting: 7). Neither France, the UK nor the US commented directly on this issue in the course of the debate. At most, an indirect reference could be attributed to France when the French representative held that 'considerations of realism had dictated the size of the new disarmament committee' and that it had the support of all the members of the First Committee (UNGAFC, 1959, 1030th meeting: 22). Seeing that the ten-power disarmament committee was made up of the four great powers and their key allies from each military bloc, and that the UN membership had agreed to transfer negotiations to this exclusive great power-led forum, this can only be read as an indirect recognition of special rights and responsibilities.

Some states did, however, voice concerns about this arrangement in the course of the debate. The representative of Nepal stated that his country 'regretted that the question of disarmament appeared to have been temporarily taken out of the hands of the United Nations' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1041st meeting: 81). The country had always favoured the delegation of the problem to a select group of states. Yet 'it would have preferred to see some of the uncommitted countries in various parts of the world - and not merely the two great military blocs - represented in the ten-Power committee' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1041st meeting: 81). The representative of Yugoslavia similarly argued that 'the United Nations - as an organizational framework for disarmament discussions - must not be "by-passed" by the great Powers' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1031st meeting: 26). And the representative of Ceylon held that 'The Organization's [the UN] Disarmament Commission should not be allowed to go into "cold storage"' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1041st meeting: 79-80).

On the wider issue of great power responsibility (and special rights), interventions in the debate were more limited. The representative of Lebanon insisted that the great powers 'must not fail in their responsibility towards mankind' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1038th meeting: 63). The representative of Peru contended 'that, according to a large section of world opinion, the question of disarmament was a matter for the great Powers alone' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1033rd meeting: 37) - a position he did not agree with. The representative of Burma was the most

outspoken and critical, saying that 'Since the end of the Second World War, neither the Soviet Union nor the West had assumed a really responsible position on the question of disarmament' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1040th meeting: 72). Here he, of course, used the broader term 'the West', but it was in the context of discussing the present resolution in the committee, which he said had been 'presented jointly by the great powers'.

Taken together, the combined deliberations on the great powers in the First Committee appeared to indicate that the great powers were certainly seen, by their representatives and by the representatives of the membership of international society at large, as playing a special role - although the Western great power representatives, at the level of concrete discourse, seemed less inclined to embrace this role. All members of the committee did formally accept the arrangement whereby the GCD disarmament negotiations were transferred to a great power-led exclusive forum (the ten-power committee). Engagement with the institution of great power management was thus much more visible and sustained in the articulated international theory of the practitioners in this period compared to the 1920s, which is a very interesting finding.

Moreover, great power management was, by and large, accepted as a positive force for attaining the GCD goal; it was not articulated as a hindrance or an obstacle – nor was it discussed as an institution that would be corrupted in a disarmed world. Even the critical representative of Burma held that the great powers should take on more responsibility, not less. This is another difference between the 1920s and 1959: in the earlier period, the Soviet Union had been very critical of the 'pre-war system of alliances and other military and political combinations', although its representative did not explicitly identify great power management as an element of this system. In 1959, this ambiguity was no longer there. The Soviet Union clearly identified itself as a great power and saw this role as integral to the realisation of the GCD project. A different story emerges in relation to the balance of power.

The Balance of Power and GCD
The balance of power was certainly also central to the GCD debate in the First Committee. More than 10 states used the term directly, and an additional 7 states appeared to use semantic variations. A majority of those states spoke about it positively and as something that should be preserved in the course of pursuing disarmament (UK, France, Yugoslavia, Italy, Netherlands, Colombia, Turkey, United Arab Republic, Pakistan, Lebanon, Austria, Spain,

Federation of Malaya). And the representative of Colombia explicitly tied the institution to the great powers when he spoke of the need 'to prevent a dangerous imbalance in the defensive capacity of the great Powers during the disarmament process' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1033rd meeting: 40).

Notably, however, the Soviet Union and its allies in eastern Europe were not amongst those states adopting a positive view. The sole exception was the representative of Poland who arguably managed to semantically transform the very concept: 'Only through general and complete disarmament…could that ideal balance of power be achieved in which no state would need to fear the superiority of any other' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1041st meeting: 80). The Soviet Union itself presented the balance of power as kind of non-problem:

Many States reserved their position with regard to partial disarmament measures, fearing that such measures would apply to the types of armaments in which they excelled and so upset the balance of power. The USSR programme obviated the possibility of any State obtaining a military advantage (UNGAFC, 1959, 1033rd meeting: 39).

Another one of its allies, Czechoslovakia, went further: its representative stated that 'The theory of the so-called balance in armaments had proved harmful to the cause of peace' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1027th meeting: 10). The representatives of Iraq and Indonesia were equally critical, the former calling the balance of power a 'myth…discredited' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1038th meeting: 64), and the latter saying that 'What was necessary was to grow out of the habit of thinking in old-fashioned terms of a balance of power' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1037th meeting: 59). The most elaborate version of this critical perspective was presented by the representative of India and it is therefore worth quoting at length:

Earlier attempts to prevent war had failed because they had been based on the principle of the balance of power and self-defence which had even now been invoked as a result of an erroneous interpretation of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. War could not be used for establishing peace. Self-defence would operate only in an armed world where nations were living in temporary peace as a result of some kind of uncomfortable agreement. It was now realized that, if another war occurred, peace discussions could never be opened again. Accordingly, the desired objective was not the balanced limitation of armaments. The balanced limitation of armaments was only a means towards total disarmament as real peace could only come about in a world in which there existed no national armed forces for so-called national security' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1042nd meeting: 86).

This intervention seemed to suggest the need for a fundamental change in how the problem of war was addressed and thought about, moving the emphasis from the egocentric and atomistic *national* security to the community-focused and collective *international* security,

which the representative evidently thought was already present in the UN Charter. In an earlier intervention, the representative of Ecuador could be interpreted as laying out the consequences of adopting this view:

Law would have to become the supreme guide of life, and the balance of power between nations would have to be based on a constitutional regime, in which the nationalist aggressiveness that had characterized international life for centuries would play no part (UNGAFC, 1959, 1040ᵗʰ meeting: 73).

The institution of the balance of power was thus much more contested in the First Committee compared to the institution of great power management. For the detractors of the balance of power, this was a crucial institution that needed to be overturned - an archaic habit of international thought to be abandoned - in order to bring about the desired change in the overall social system. Facing the detractors was the group of states who seemed to view the balance of power as indispensable in the short to medium term, and reserved opinion on what was to replace it. Quite a few of those states, though, were also to be found in the camp arguing for the eventual creation of some kind of international military or police force.

The Tyranny of World Government?

What about the almost absent discussion of world government in the 1920s? Was that mirrored in the 1950s debate? No, because one state, Spain, did explicitly warn that the creation of an international force might 'convert the world Organization [the UN] into a world government'. He went on to state that this would 'provoke a jockeying for power and would pervert the spirit of the United Nations' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1040ᵗʰ meeting: 71). In language closely recalling the concerns of Bull, the representative of Spain moreover argued that the UN would have to 'guard against using its international force to intervene in the internal affairs of States on the decision of a majority which might well be partial'. In this connection, he also stressed 'the newly independent nations which would not tolerate a neo-colonial paternalism' (UNGAFC, 1959, 1040ᵗʰ meeting: 72). Other representatives (Lebanon and Saudi Arabia) were less forthright, but did nevertheless also touch upon the partiality of the UN as presently structured and how this might be carried into a reformed future (UNGAFC, 1959, 1038ᵗʰ meeting: 63; 1039ᵗʰ meeting: 67). Yet other states touched upon concerns related to sovereignty. The representative of Greece did so in connection with decisions made by an international authority and with respect to the intrusive control measures required by GCD (UNGAFC, 1959, 1030ᵗʰ meeting: 19). The representative of Guatemala was in agreement with the latter point (UNGAFC, 1959, 1040ᵗʰ meeting: 75). And

then the representative of Ecuador formulated what seemed to be a quintessential pluralist argument:

Given the wide differences in political outlook in the world, it would be a long time before men were willing to submit to the judgement of an international body charged with enforcing justice and law; for the present, it would be sufficient if they could be taught tolerance and made to realize that the desire to install a given economic or social system did not justify resort to the use of force between nations (UNGAFC, 1959, 1040th meeting: 76).

In this period, it is therefore clear that world government corruption arguments were embraced by some practitioners, and there was evidently substantial resonance between the general concerns raised by Bull and the public ideas expressed by some practitioners in the First Committee.

Conclusion

Let me begin by restating the basic question at the heart of this article: did the practitioners, like Bull, argue that GCD would corrupt international society, pose a challenge to international law and diplomacy in particular and take international society on a dangerous path towards world government? The purpose of asking that question was to learn more about the workings of international society and the grounded understanding of that society through the public reasoning of practitioners; the actual diplomats and statesmen who engaged in the concrete GCD deliberations. The purpose was not to 'test' whether Bull was right or wrong in any fundamental sense. Neither should this article be read as a normative endorsement of Bull's views nor that of other ES scholars. His hypothesis was used here as a heuristic device to gain a better understanding of the public international thought or theory expressed by the practitioners. So, did the practitioners argue that GCD would corrupt international society?

The findings regarding diplomacy were limited. The practitioners did not address the topic explicitly and at most a challenge could be inferred from some of their observations regarding other consequences of the GCD proposal. By contrast, international law was a richly debated topic in both the 1920s and in 1959. Mainly Western and Latin American diplomats, rhetorically led by representatives of Greece, were central to the formulation of a corruption argument in both periods, linking the preservation of law and order to the existence of capable military or police forces, either organised centrally by international

society, as in an international police force, or in a decentralised manner by the member states as was the traditional practice. This suggests a basic continuity in practitioner thought between the first and second moments. However, there were also some clear differences between the two moments when considering other institutions of international society such as great power management and the balance of power. First, both of these institutions were much more intensely debated in 1959 compared to 1927-28. Second, while there appeared to be fairly substantial consensus around the pursuit of great power management, the balance of power was subject to significant contestation. And then there was world government, which was only very superficially debated in the 1920s, but which featured prominently in the 1950s, with several representatives formulating arguments that were similar to those of Bull.

All of this public thought paints an abundantly nuanced picture of how practitioners related to GCD in the two moments, and the extent of their explicit engagement with the institutions of international society as these institutions have been described by successive generations of ES scholars. This suggests that the debates at the UN/League of Nations and the topic of GCD indeed offer fruitful terrain for exploring practitioner thought on international society, its institutions and corrupting influences. Put simply, we learn a lot about the practical workings of international society through this prism. A next step could be to further unpack this thinking in the First Committee over a longer time period and/or turn our attention to the UN General Assembly special sessions on disarmament in 1978, 1982 and 1988 or the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament. One could also go back to the interwar period and explore the work of the Disarmament Section of the League of Nations and how it positioned itself vis-à-vis GCD in 1927-8 and later in relation to the World Disarmament Conference in 1932. Another very promising project could be to look at the internal reasoning of practitioners within their respective states: did US practitioners, for example, express concern about the corruption of international society when they debated GCD confidentially within the White House or the State Department? Yet another path could be to look at contemporary debates about intervention and Responsibility to Protect, and how these may have influenced practitioners' ideas about the link between disarmament, sovereignty and world government - is international society on a new path towards corruption in the eyes of its direct participants?

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[1] GCD was such a radical proposal compared to what came before. Earlier discussions of disarmament at the level of states had merely focused on limitations, reductions and regulation, not wholesale abolition. On the Hague Conferences 1899 and 1907 and Article 8 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, see e.g. Tate (1942), Morris (1971), Webster (2005), Keefer (2006), Stevenson (2006) and Abbenhuis (2019).

[2] Intriguingly, despite a voluminous literature on disarmament in general, the specific idea of GCD has so far, it seems, not been the subject of independent and sustained study. Although see United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (2016) for a recent exception. For an earlier attempt, drawing on systems-analysis, see Curnow et al. (1976).

[3] Studies do exist of the history of international thought in relation to disarmament, arms control and the evolution of strategic thinking in general, and particularly in the United States. See e.g. Kaplan (1983), Trachtenberg (1989), Sims (1990), Kuklick (2006) and Munster and Sylvest (2016). However, less attention has been paid to the history of the ideas put forward by diplomats in the course of the actual international disarmament deliberations, and no conscious attempt seems to have been made to relate these ideas to the institutions of international society, which I shall say more about below.

[4] For comprehensive overviews of this approach to IR, see Buzan (2014) and Navari (2021).

[5] For more on this scepticism, and Bull's potential defence of the status quo, see Ayson's (2012: 54-5) excellent biography, as well as Falk's (2017: 42) essay on Bull's thought. Interestingly, Bull adopted a similar position with respect to GCD. He was sceptical of the proposals, but held that they should not be dismissed *a priori* (Bull, 1965: 143). Wight, by contrast, influenced by his strong Christian beliefs, appeared to be principally opposed to a world state, comparing it at one point to the 'empire of Antichrist' and at another point even seemed to prefer the great evil of nuclear war to prevent the establishment of a world state (Hall, 2006: 107-10).

[6] For complementary perspectives, see Wilson (2012) and Keene (2017: 352; 2014: 398-400). For a thorough treatment of ES methods, see Navari (2009).

[7] For an elucidation of the theoretical and methodological complexity of the ES understanding of practice, see Navari (2011) and Floyd (2021).

[8] I am influenced here by Hall and Bevir's (2014: 828) understanding of webs of beliefs in international thought as being similar to 'inheritances that people might nurture, squander, build upon, or even reject'. For the purposes of this article, it is not necessary to go into the complex ES debates about institutions, their ontological status and how to categorise and investigate them, using different methods. The present article operates with the grounded perspective associated with, amongst others, Jackson and Wilson. For the larger institutional debate, see e.g. Schouenborg (2011), Wilson (2012), Friedner Parrat (2017) and Schouenborg and Taeuber (2021). It should also be noted that Bevir and Hall (2020), in a recent special issue, have attempted to further promote the interpretivist approach within the ES. However, I believe they overdraw the distinction between interpretivist and structuralist approaches in ES scholarship. I agree with Navari (2020) that the structuralist position also involves interpretation, and that it is complementary, rather than opposed, to the more granular perspective that

comes out of the grounded study of agents in a particular context such as the one that is attempted in the present article.

[9] Seeing that this is an article engaging with Bull's thought, it is worth noting that he actually formulated concepts to capture both of these types of balances: 'fortuitous' and 'contrived' (Bull, 1977: 100).

[10] This was a new representative though, Mr. Palamas.

[11] The towering British figure in interwar disarmament debates. See Johnson (2016) for an excellent biography.

[12] It should be noted that the term 'great power' was used on other occasions by participants in the PCDC, and that the term was common in the wider public debate in this period. See, for example, Gibson quoted in Wheeler-Bennett (1973[1932]: 69).