

The international dynamics of counter-peace

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Abstract

Peace processes and international order are interdependent: while the latter provides the normative framework for the former, peacemaking tools and their underlying ideology also maintain international order. They indicate its viability and legitimacy partly by meeting local claims as well as through the maintenance of geopolitical balances. In the emerging multipolar order, the international peace architecture (IPA), dominated by the liberal international order (LIO), is contested through counter-peace processes. These processes contest the nature of the state, state-society relations and increasingly international order itself. This paper investigates the tactics and strategies of regional actors and great powers, where they engage in peace and order related activities or interventions. Given the weakness and inconsistency of the IPA and the LIO, such contestation leads to challenges to international order itself, often at the expense of the claims of social movements and civil society networks.

Keywords

Counter-peace, blockages to peace, failed peacemaking, international peace architecture, multipolar order

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Introduction

Localised peacemaking has implications for international order and its legitimacy, as can be seen over the last 30 years, and in particular since 9/11. The unipolar liberal international order after 1989 has been based on sovereignty, reshuffled power hierarchies and economic inequality, but less so than its historical predecessors (such as imperial, colonial, monarchic, totalitarian and fascist orders). Within the constraints of ideological hegemony, the post-Soviet unipolar order allowed for a multilateral approach. However, the liberal peace, liberal international order (LIO) and multilateralism were dominated by Western states.

While the related and more expansive international peace architecture (IPA) that has developed, particularly since WW2 (Richmond, 2022), had largely been limited to maintaining the Westphalian order during the Cold War (e.g. through diplomacy, mediation, peacekeeping), post-Cold War unipolarity allowed its interventionary toolbox to expand. New instruments were added, such as liberal peacebuilding, statebuilding and development, and traditional interventionary practices were enlarged (Chandler, 2010, 2017; Paris, 2004). This created an intricate web of mutually reinforcing interventions aimed at maintaining and expanding the LIO.

However, this architecture represented a hegemonic, Eurocentric, northern-focused, framework (Doyle, 1983; Paris, 2004). Its inherent hypocrisy, which was rapidly identified and critiqued ‘from below’ (Poulligny, 2006), has undermined its legitimacy around the world. It has been of limited effectiveness, and it has lacked political will (Krasner, 1999; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati, 2013; Pugh, 2004). Paradoxically, it may have constrained development, justice and sustainability in many conflict-affected regions, as laid out in critical scholarship and among social movements and networks engaged in peace and war in International Relations (IR) (Vinhagen, 2015).

International order is increasingly divided between reactionary nationalism and liberalism (de Orellana and Michelsen, 2019), and any pretence of a normative order is under attack via ‘extra-legal’ versions of sovereignty (Paris, 2020) in which war and violence retain political functions and utility. These attacks represent an old story of ideological and norm-contestation in IR driven by a rationality of state domination in domestic, regional and imperial spheres. They ensure that progress towards justice and sustainability beyond rationalities of power and territoriality remains obstructed. The implications for peacemaking are substantial. Indeed, these internal inconsistencies provide a platform for further, morbid dynamics to emerge.

This paper builds on previous research, which elaborated three stable patterns of internal blockages that have been obstructing peace processes across the globe (Pogodda, Richmond and Visoka, 2022) and in increasingly systematic ways. Drawing on the counter-revolutions literature, we have described these as ‘counter-peace’ patterns, defined as emerging from tactical and ‘proto-systemic processes that connect spoilers across all scales (local, regional, national, transnational), while also exploiting structural blockages to peace and unintended consequences of peace interventions’ (Pogodda, Richmond and Visoka, 2022). Similar to the concept of counter-revolution, ‘counter-peace’ does not necessarily manifest itself as the opposite of peace (i.e. war), but characterises a range of strategies that are designed to obstruct, derail and reverse peace and reform processes.

This range also includes watered-down peace and reform processes, in which the hierarchies, inequalities and forms of marginalisation at the heart of the conflict are preserved and where stability depends on continuous pacification. Counter-peace indicates parasitic processes in which spoilers subvert peace interventions that are supported by the IPA to erode their emancipatory potential.

This paper investigates the international connections between spoilers, their ideologies, as well as their capacity to combine tactics into strategies and disseminate them within revanchist or revisionist¹ networks. To do so, this research deploys insights and methods relevant to critical, post-colonial and feminist approaches concerned with the relationship between order, justice, rights and peace across a range of disciplinary areas related to peacemaking (Richmond, Pogodda and Ramović, 2016: 1–17). First, the paper outlines how failures of the IPA have allowed competing approaches to emerge. Subsequently, our analysis turns to the dynamics of counter-peace in theoretical and practical terms (as both local tactics and international strategies), drawing on a number of related cases. It then explains why counter-peace tactics have the tendency to escalate into systematic strategic and ideological forces. Finally, it draws out some implications for peacemaking and international order.

The failure of the IPA and emerging alternatives

Underlying multilateralism and globalisation was a hope that unipolarity might be tempered by the principles of the IPA as laid down in the UN Charter (i.e. respect for sovereignty, human rights, multilateral consensus-building and the foregrounding of diplomacy to resolve conflicts). In reality, however, the demise of ideological or geopolitical competition allowed the United States to entrench liberal and later neoliberal ideology in the IPA. The international framework and its norms shaped domestic frameworks (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998), which in turn were supposed to legitimate the LIO and its peacemaking apparatus. The intellectual and practical engagements of peace in IR were understood to be aligned across levels of analysis and scales, in an elegant, cosmopolitan order, to resolve what Arnold Toynbee had long ago called the ‘master-problem’ of the era (Ikenberry, 2020: 154).

Contradictions and hypocrisy set in quickly after 1989, especially in view of the substantial advances in critical scholarship about peace during this period (Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1995, 1998). Early and substantial success for landmark peace agreements such as the Oslo Accords, the Ta’if Agreement and the Dayton Peace Accords in Bosnia-Herzegovina might have sent positive signals about the LIO. Their subsequent stalemate and deterioration, by contrast, indicated a lack of unity and political will on the part of the West (Belloni, 2020), and exposed the limitations of liberal peacemaking. It became clear that powerful local actors which stand to lose privileges in a peace process may shift into a diplomatic counterinsurgency mode against peace and reform – or in Phillipe Leroux-Martin’s (2014) words,

This is how losses at war are recuperated at the negotiating table and how concessions in peace treaties are neutralized through resistance in the implementation phase. (p. 208)

This illustrates how peace processes can be subverted and ties in with globally and regionally revisionist frameworks in IR. In contexts such as Afghanistan and Iraq, United States' statebuilding and counter-insurgency have undermined the legitimacy of liberal peacebuilding (Dodge, 2021). In the Sahel region, United Nations (UN) stabilisation missions have fed into 'counter-insurgency governance', geared towards perpetual war (Charbonneau, 2021). Meanwhile, the BRICS, principally Russia and China, but also by other countries such as Turkey, have become involved in peace processes or order maintenance. They have done so to restrain and counter-balance hegemony, project power and maintain regional spheres of influence or control, as the West has also tried to do outside of and through the IPA in recent times.

Authoritarian conflict management (Lewis et al., 2018), 'illiberal peacebuilding' (Soares de Oliveira, 2011) and, from earlier work, 'spoilers' and 'devious objectives' (Newman and Richmond, 2006; Stedman, 1997) have been conceptualised in this vein. Debates on so-called 'Chinese peacebuilding' and its salience around the global South indicate the propensity for counter-networks to intensify (Wong, 2021). Many such analyses have pointed to smaller tactics and patterns (partly because they assume that liberal hegemony has been fundamental and unchallengeable after 1989), but they also implicitly raised the issue of strategy. From an international perspective, strategies may connect ideological contests with the proliferation of localised tactics that hollow out peace processes across different regions and conflicts. Much of the scholarly work done so far suggests that the former BRICS grouping, some Gulf States, several sub-Saharan African states and others have encouraged, joined and supported such practices while remaining closely entangled with the IPA. This has been despite some earlier, post-colonial hope that a more emancipatory perspective might be forthcoming from such exchanges (Richmond and Tellidis, 2014).

These dynamics point to a complex constellation of blockages to peace occurring at the local, national, regional and international level, serving to counter international and local efforts for peacemaking. At the same time counter-peace is sheltered to some extent by peace and reform processes. In what follows, we investigate the international driving forces of counter-peace, especially the strategies, norms and ideologies that underpin it. Based on fieldwork produced by the authors and a partner network in 11 conflict-affected countries,² this illustrates how diverse, tactical challenges to the IPA may constitute wider, strategic attempts to reshape international order.

The rise of counter-peace on the international stage

With many peace processes having collapsed (e.g. in Afghanistan, Israel /Palestine, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Burma and El Salvador), long-standing interventions unable to resolve conflicts (e.g. in the DRC, CAR, Mali, Bosnia, Kosovo and Cyprus) and access to ongoing conflicts blocked (e.g. Syria, Ethiopia), the IPA appears weak and ineffective. Common tactical blockages and their capacity to combine into more effective counter-peace strategies appear to spur conflict escalation by connecting counter-peace dynamics and actors.

Previous research has identified three prevalent counter-peace patterns (Pogodda, Richmond and Visoka, 2022): the stalemate, the limited counter-peace

and the unmitigated counter-peace. Stalemate patterns of counter-peace occur in frozen conflicts in which violence has been proscribed but inter-group tensions persist unabated (Smetana and Ludvik, 2018). The limited counter-peace pattern describes contexts in which surface stability in some parts of the country coexists with a diversity of geographically limited conflicts (e.g. the Sahel region, which suffers from secessionist conflicts, localised insurgency and small land disputes). Unmitigated counter-peace patterns, by contrast, prevail in contexts in which human rights are systematically violated across the country (i.e. in dictatorships, military occupations, civil wars) and violence has returned as a political tool. While the stalemate pattern may remain stable for decades (e.g. in the Balkans and Cyprus) in the context of the LIO, frozen conflicts might be more easily destabilised in a multipolar order. This tendency may be exaggerated further in the limited and unmitigated counter-peace patterns. They tend to demarcate a fluid spectrum of violence in which conflicts might shift, often escalating from the former to the latter (Pogodda, Richmond and Visoka, 2022).

This evolution also indicates the formation of broader, revisionist or revanchist political processes, aimed at achieving maximalist pre-negotiation objectives. After regrouping under cover of the peace and reform process, counter-peace actors might deploy the threat of violence, division and polarisation to this end. While these tactics can be used in a stalemate, external counter-peace dynamics could escalate them into localised conflict or civil war. If fuelled by international ideological struggle, an authoritarian, nationalist or imperialist bloc might form, reconstituting regional order based upon the states that emerge from counter-peace processes (Constantini and Santini, 2022; Kobrin, 2020; Öniş and Kutlay, 2020; Soares de Oliveira, 2011; Subedi, 2022). This reflects the way that authoritarian states have also regularly linked up in alliances or formed parallel institutions that both suppress challenges from within their own societies as well as block attempts to expand human rights and democracy in the international sphere.

International counter-peace dynamics thus provide a powerful platform through which to resist the decentralisation of power, block the rise of human rights and democracy, reverse or exploit interdependence, undermine law and justice and block dialogue and reconciliation. Peace processes, by contrast, require all the above to check and even reverse established power relations that tend to control the state and regional order, political economy and security services (see Richmond and Visoka, 2021). Civil society and its transnational links may also pose a threat to the nationalist and imperial configurations of power that counter-peace reconstitutes.

In addition, the limitations of liberal international norm diffusion, international law, multilateralism and order building under recent liberal and neoliberal paradigms (Paris, 2004) have contributed to failed peacemaking. Without a decisive alliance between civil society and international backers who command significant resources and political will, local conflict actors are likely to revert to stalemate or limited forms of violence. Yet while international support for civil society has been waning, domestic counter-peace forces have been bolstered directly (through external support in the emerging multipolar order) and indirectly (through unintended consequences of peace interventions) (Day et al., 2021; Pogodda, 2020). This has allowed quasi-states or revanchist forces to consolidate as 'fierce states' (e.g. as in Egypt after 2013, Belarus after 2019 and Burma, Chad, Mali, Sudan and Guinea since 2021) (Heydemann, 2018; Pogodda, Richmond and

Visoka, 2022). Blocs within the rising multipolar order have already developed competing practices (Lewis et al., 2018) to counter the IPA. To expand their power and political control, geopolitical actors might underpin these practices with revisionist and revanchist ideologies, attempting to supplant it. This results in geopolitical competition focused on competing ideologies, potentially fuelling a renewed ‘cold war’ in a multipolar framework.³ Counter-peace tactics at the domestic level rapidly spill into the international scale and become systemic blockages to peacemaking. As a result, broadly speaking, civil society has been marginalised or shut down completely, and its international networks have been blocked.⁴ Indeed, stalemate and backsliding in peace processes around the world over the last 30 years may have been harbingers of these regressive processes and dynamics (Soares de Oliveira, 2011).

Revisionist and revanchist actors (including recent and current leaders in Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Russia, Sudan, Chad, Mali, Burma and Colombia) may be determined to use violence or war as political tools. Their analysis is shaped by ideology, grudges, hierarchy and the pursuit of power, rather than being guided by science, norms or the critical pursuit of peace, justice, equity and sustainability. They encounter substantial opposition in multilateral, regional and international organisations, manifested in norms, security guarantees, alliances or peace-interventions connected to the UN, European Union (EU) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), among others. Yet the latter have failed to consolidate peace, and domestic leaders tend to deploy counter-peace tactics and strategies.

Ideological struggle and concepts such as counterinsurgency or counter-revolution once alerted scholars to the dangers and subtleties of power and inequality, intervention and the contested constitution of legitimate authority (Halliday, 1999). Counter-revolutionary debates were often designed to explain that progressive politics would be destabilising, whereas the status quo was natural and stable even if it only provided a limited, negative form of peace. Thus, radical movements for social change came to be seen as more of a danger than oppressive forms of power, even if the former drove state and international reform (Losurdo, 2015) and were responsible for the multi-layered construction of the IPA (Richmond, 2022).

In sum, the concept of counter-peace sheds light on the formal and informal structures and processes that resist and reshape the political order sought by peace processes (through mediation, peacekeeping, peacebuilding or statebuilding). This in turn points to the contrast between scientific, critical knowledge and ideological assumptions about peace and order.

Tactics and strategies

For every peace intervention and process, there may be a counter-peace dynamic, as previous literatures have already highlighted (Stedman, 1997). Recent work on hybrid, authoritarian and illiberal forms of peace (Soares de Oliveira, 2011), as well as on ‘backsliding’ and peace-breaking figurations (Visoka, 2016), confirm this. Minor domestic or localised counter-peace strategies, which try to moderate the impact of peace interventions, development and state reform on conservative power relations, tend to escalate slowly. If small pushbacks against peacemaking and reform find more traction, they become visible at the geopolitical level. This has been clear from the growing leverage

of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia, Serb pushback against a Kosovan state, the consolidation of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus and the growing dominance of Prime Minister Hun Sen in Cambodia. The intensification of their revanchist tactics has depended on increasingly ambitious regional hegemonies (Russian, Turkey and China, respectively). At first, this process may well look like a pattern of separate stalemates, weak states and frozen conflicts, which tend to throw a poor light on liberal peacebuilding, statebuilding and development strategies. It makes peace interventions appear to be weakly backed, ill coordinated and internally incoherent.

Blockages and counter-peace dynamics can be seen on different levels of analysis. First, localised and tactical blockages may create an *enabling international environment* for counter-peace processes: this connection can be observed in the eroding impact of the US War on Terrorism after 9/11 on peace processes. Duplicious politics from the permanent members of the UN Security Council may also bring complex and urgently needed peace processes (as in Libya in 2019) to the point of collapse (Salamé, 2020). China and Russia's more recent resistance to the liberal peacebuilding consensus in the UN Security Council has also contributed. Their shift towards the construction of competing, multipolar zones of interests, their own development banks and forms of military and diplomatic assistance of intervention further drives the escalation of counter-peace dynamics (Jones and Marc, 2021; Richmond and Tellidis, 2014). External support by neighbouring dictatorships has proven to be crucial for the viability of authoritarian regimes (as in Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Belarus and Bahrain).

A second level of analysis links the operational level of peace interventions to a *national rejection* of the IPA. Here, the UN's tendency to become locked into maintaining unsuccessful peace processes, peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions over a long period of time (as in Cyprus) has created space for counter-peace dynamics to expand from the tactical to the strategic. Where urgently needed UN missions contract (as in Palestine) or where a drawdown and withdrawal of missions or donors indicates the lack of interest in sustaining peace process (as in Kosovo) or their inability to do so (as in Afghanistan), the credibility of the IPA suffers. A further loss of legitimacy occurs in contexts, in which international donor conditionality fails (as in Cambodia) or results in local elites developing a 'partial reform syndrome' (as in Liberia) (Van de Walle, 2001). Just as problematic is the inability to overcome blockages in the UN system even in cases of chemical weapons use (e.g. in the case of Syria and Gaza). Furthermore, the containment of civil society (as in Cambodia, most Arab countries and Sri Lanka), the establishment of ethnic or religious hierarchies and the targeting of minorities (as in India, Burma and China) are signs of the state's involvement in counter-peace dynamics. Corruption and the rejection of state reform further undermine the possibilities for a meaningful peace process. Brutal counter-insurgencies (as in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Egypt) often radicalise conflict-affected populations. The militarisation of the state through coups (as in the Sahel region and Burma), democratically legitimated rule of the military (as in Egypt) or military occupations (as in Israel), may turn the state into an epicentre of domestic counter-peace dynamics (Pogodda, Richmond and Visoka, 2022).

A third level identifies additional *societal blockages to peace*: a disinterest in peace processes (as in Israel) or the rejection of peace and the liberal model of state (as in Colombia (Chagas-Bastos, 2018)) by societal groups makes difficult compromises in

favour of peace impossible to achieve. (Ethno-) nationalism and the acceptance of identity-based exclusion and hierarchies (as in Cyprus, India and the Balkans) also work as effective blockages to peace. The willingness of the majority to trade the human rights of marginalised groups for stability (as in Egypt, Colombia, Sri Lanka, India and Cambodia) constitutes another major impediment to peace. The radicalisation of individuals (e.g. by fundamentalist movements) enables oppression, backsliding and persistent authoritarianism.

A more detailed analysis of cases allows us to recognise how a combination of blockages enables small scale counter-peace tactics (calibrated to resist peaceful reforms, but not to spark violence, operating within peace and reform processes) to extend their reach into the structures of international politics. For example, in the half-century-long Cyprus peace process, the forces of ethno-nationalism and geopolitics have been aligned against UN peacekeeping and mediation since 1964. On the surface, since 1974, both disputants have been careful to couch their positions diplomatically, to avoid sparking another war, while maintaining the existing status quo. In the period running up to the UN-sponsored referendum over the Annan Plan in 2004, a small number of Greek Cypriot nationalists managed to keep the international liberal peace framework at bay by voting against the UN's peace plan. They favoured ethno-nationalist majoritarianism, and the myth of the territorial nation-state, which disguised their preference for the former (Palley, 2006). Counter-peace forces tested the stability of the post-1974 order through basic diplomatic and political tactics which held back the UN mediation process, and could rely on the presence of UN peacekeepers as well as on the regional balance of power, allowing the shift to a more systematic counter-peace dynamic. This illustrates the weakness of the entire IPA, on one hand, and the ease with which nationalism can align itself with geopolitics, on the other.

Meanwhile, the gulf between critical knowledge about peacemaking and politics has been widening. In Cyprus, the EU ironically awarded membership to the Republic of Cyprus as the conflict party which vetoed the Annan Plan, relieving any pressure to make concessions. This was also mirrored in the failed peace processes in the Middle East, in Sri Lanka with the re-emergence of authoritarian nationalism after 2002, and during peace processes in Kosovo, Colombia or Cambodia over the last decade.⁵ Residual resistance to peace and reform increasingly enhanced its leverage and found regional and geopolitical supporters, as well as donors. This brings into view a camouflaged, but well-connected counter-peace process at the systemic level. As the subsequent analysis shows, the counter-peace appears increasingly to be a concerted effort to erode, block and replace the IPA. By building rival institutions to the IPA and connecting those to micro-level tactics as well as macro-level strategies, the counter-peace is increasingly proto-systemic. Its different elements aim to retain power, push back against reform, protect the privileged status of elites and enable the use of war and violence as political tools and for rent-seeking opportunities.

Over the last few decades, the systems for multilateralism, UN peacekeeping, international mediation and international peacebuilding have consequently become tactically blocked, and many peace processes and conflicts have been systematically frozen. This is in part because of the stances of disputants but also because international actors have prioritised their geopolitical interests over multilateralism and peace processes. Elite

actors are thus able to reshape political processes in their favour, even where this contravenes international norms, law and scientific knowledge. Disagreement within the UN Security Council, geopolitics, populism, nationalism, authoritarianism, weak states, as well as tensions between self-determination and territorial sovereignty, some of it amplified via digital technologies, have all hindered peacemaking (Karlsrud, 2014; Richmond, Visoka and Tellidis, 2023). This has led to a situation where a fragile, insecure and unjust status quo has become the main outcome of peace interventions, which in turn has favoured geopolitical and ideological contestation on the international stage. This has damaged various processes that were supposed to support unified notions of peacemaking and political reform, as it has involved challenges from alternative and competing notions of peacekeeping, mediation, diplomacy and development associated with geopolitical actors.

Isolated tactics, if successful, may link up, be disseminated through international and domestic networks, and become wider strategies, over time. This has been clear with the obstruction of revolutionary momentum in the Arab region by authoritarian elites and fundamentalist movements, and the contagion of military coups across the Sahel region. Growing and increasingly collaborative Serbian and Russian rejection of the post-war regional order have spurred different tactics to destabilise the stalemates in Kosovo and Bosnia (Ingimundarson, 2022).⁶ Western actors, donors, the UN, EU and other third parties all played their part in turning a blind eye, being under-committed or dominant. They operated according to strategic interests or shifting ideological preferences (e.g. from liberal peacebuilding in the 1990s to neoliberal statebuilding in the 2000s).

Another element relates to the formation over time of a political network around different axes of associated revisionist powers, which prefer to push back international law and human rights and reclaim lost historical territorial possessions, powers or hierarchies. At the centre of this network are global players such as Russia and China, who ally variously with regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and India, which in turn support their own regional clients (Doshi, 2021; Lewis, 2022). Within this network, authoritarian regimes prop up other dictatorships and ethnic or sectarian hierarchies through military, diplomatic and economic assistance. Internationally, this network rebuffs demands for human rights, minority protections and democratisation through insistence on non-intervention, sovereignty and a prioritisation of stability over rights. Of course, their foreign policies and geo-economics may differ from their internal social and civil society perspectives, where concepts of human rights, justice and democracy may be more germane.

Regional and international actors and organisations may thus begin to form a parallel system of global order, as with China's 'Belt and Road' project, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank or Russia's 'Eurasian Economic Union' complete with tools to maintain that order, even with tacit approval from within the IPA (Jütersonke et al., 2021). They also might form systematic frameworks that co-opt and hollow out peace processes, tools and institutional and legal frameworks, thus diverting emancipatory theories aimed at conflict resolution, justice, hybridity and sustainability, towards more conservative ideologies and theories such as 'conflict management'. Order versus disorder seems to dominate authoritarian conceptions of IR rather than considerations of peace (Thompson, 2022).

At the strategic and system level, counter-hegemonic tools aim to fragment the multi-lateral consensus on how to build peace, increase its inconsistencies, weaken the proscription of violence when it comes to political interests, and discredit liberal norms and law. These strategies may work indirectly, and at first be aimed at a stalemated counter-peace, as perhaps early on in Tunisia after 2014 or Sri Lanka around 2002. By producing domestic polarisation,⁷ or enabling an increasingly authoritarian government as in Cambodia through Chinese sponsorship of the Belt and Road project, the stalemate might be tipped into a more violent counter-peace pattern.⁸ Such dynamism in the counter-peace framework points to the contestation not just of the localised conflict and the stalemated tools for making peace, but to broader ideological issues.

For these reasons, counter-hegemony – like balance of power praxis – is difficult to modulate. Violence maintains stability in counter-peace, and scientific evidence about order is dominated by politics and ideology. Hence, counter-peace strategies, even when locked into a stalemate are likely to escalate, if they manage to create strong domestic and international connections with better resourced counter-peace actors.

At the state level differing variants of authoritarianism are its clearest outcome, facilitated by the deadlock of peace and reform processes. This is in line with elite interests to capture and securitise peace, as well as with geopolitical foreign policy goals. At the civil society level, a clear indication of a more active counter-peace emerging lies in the proscription and marginalisation of non-governmental actors working on human rights, democratisation and in social areas. The governments of China, Russia, India, some Gulf States, Pakistan, North Korea, Iran, Burma, Egypt and Venezuela, along with other authoritarian-capitalist and military-led countries, increasingly have rejected Western hegemony, liberalism and civil society activism.⁹ Counter-peace thus forms the embryonic foundations of new regional orders with their own ‘peace’ and ‘reform’ strategies, centred on alternative ideologies and power centres. A victor’s peace and the justification of authoritarian rule thus sets into sharp relief the liberal project (Rosenberg et al., 2022). An international counter-peace implies centralised power, aimed at imperial or (ethno-)nationalist domination, centralisation and bordering, the securitisation of dissent, the support of parallel states and institutions and a rejection of rights and democracy. Law and norms would be subservient to power-politics in this framing.

The liberal and neoliberal order would be reversed by peace and reform strategies that actively pushback via a limited or unmitigated counter-peace (rather than remaining in stasis as in a stalemate): meaning elite hierarchy and capital accumulation through the state and global capital; illiberal societies; the state being designed for war and internal oppression rather than peace; and in an extreme form an imperially based international order emerging from sovereign competition and ensuing arms races.

Such dynamics illustrate how the proscription of violence may collapse and how nationalist groups are increasingly defined according to centralised power and perhaps expanding borders, especially if geopolitical plates shift (Smetana and Ludvik, 2018; Strasheim and Bogati, 2021: 354). These dynamics appear in much of the existing literature to be associated with democratic backsliding (Haggard and Kaufman, 2021: 1–4).

Transitions in international order and the tools of peacemaking: back to the future?

The vacuum caused by the decline of liberal internationalism and the IPA has created space for competing approaches to conflict in the emerging multipolar international order (Hellmüller, 2021). The latter needs to accommodate rule-governed liberal democracies and their regional orders as well as authoritarian-nationalist, unfettered states and their geopolitical interests. International and Western disunity as well as intransigence towards the need for reform are complicit in the failure of the UN Security Council, World Bank, IMF and Development community to win legitimacy for their peace, security and development efforts. Their ‘offers’ to conflict-affected societies, already wary of external actors as much as their own elites, have been perceived as unjust, neo-colonial, appended to Western hegemony, and too little too late. Since this rejection has not led to an adjustment of this ‘offer’, the so-called BRICS actors have attempted to revise the international order, while China¹⁰ and Russia, and other states seek to influence, impede, displace and replace liberal peacebuilding. The subsequent sections investigate what this indicates for the current impasse of the IPA in the emerging multipolar order.

Contributions to a stalemate model of counter-peace

Effectively when critique crosses over into revisionism, reactionary politics and even revanchism, this places the IPA in competition with an increasingly explicit ideological and strategic alternative. Possibilities to build on or improve the LIO are eroded as a consequence. This produces competing systems of multilateralism, alliances, capital, technology and information flows (Zuboff, 2019), as well as populist networks, along with related tools of conflict management. It exploits dissatisfaction with the recent, regressive drift of liberal peacebuilding into neoliberal statebuilding and counter-insurgency in pursuit of Eurocentric and US interests. Yet if deprived of a commitment to human rights, anti-imperialist critiques of the IPA are at risk of allying with authoritarian regimes for their revisionist stances, which might indirectly amount to support for systematic human rights violations, socio-economic injustice and ethno-nationalist or sectarian hierarchies (Lewis, 2022: 654).

Some of these dynamics were visible in Turkish involvement in the Cyprus conflict in the period between 1963 and 1974. Despite an ongoing UN peacekeeping and mediation mission, Turkish involvement defied norms of non-intervention, manipulated approaches to self-determination as a cover for occupation and used war as a political tool (Ker-Lindsay, 2017). The debacle of ONUC from 1960 to 1963 inside the DRC as well as for the UN itself, where UN peacekeepers were drawn into a civil war which also destabilised the UN Security Council, also provided room for such manoeuvres (Boulden, 2001; United Nations Security Council, 1960). Turkish tactics succeeded in consolidating a subversion of early peacekeeping, mediation and later liberal peacemaking. Meanwhile, Turkey remained a member of NATO and seemed to display good faith in the UN process and potential hybrid outcomes (Adamides and Constantinou, 2012).

Such approaches laid the groundwork for a counter-peace framework of otherwise disconnected micro-strategies designed to hold back the encroaching liberal peace

framework as it emerged over time. Turkish policymakers could claim Turkey to be a member of NATO, pro-Western, and a good international citizen, while partially undermining UN mediation, exploiting the presence of UN peacekeeping, and deviating from Western norms of human rights and democratic governance, especially in the 1970s. Similar tactics are present in Western Sahara where Morocco manipulated the UN-led peace process, expanded the occupation on the ground, and curtailed the human rights of the Sahrawi people by exploiting geopolitical rivalries and active diplomatic and economic campaigns (Zunes and Mundy, 2022).

The Turkish government sought to make its occupation of Northern Cyprus viable by resettling populations from the mainland to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). This settler population helped create and consolidate the emerging *de facto* state (Jensehaugen, 2017) and provides substantial support for the nationalist UBP (Hatay, 2005), which seeks to prevent a bi-communal solution to the conflict in Cyprus. While nationalist parties in the Republic of Cyprus and their Western backers are equally responsible for creating and maintaining the Cypriot stalemate, the Turkish position warrants reflection in the light of Turkey's role in the breakdown of another stalemate: the recent war in Nagorno Karabakh.

In the latter case, Turkey had been an important external actor in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan since the early 20th century, affecting a power shift from Armenia to Turkey's ally Azerbaijan in governing the contested region (Cornell, 1998). Yet during the war of the 1990s, Kemalist doctrine and external pressure from its Western allies prevented Turkey's military involvement (Cornell, 1998: 63). By 2020 though, Turkey's military and diplomatic support for Azerbaijan had enabled its authoritarian president, Aliyev, to violently contest the stalemate (Keddie, 2020; Ulgen, 2020). The militarisation of Turkish foreign policy under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in turn, has been attributed domestically to Turkey's descent into authoritarianism and internationally to the decline of liberal internationalism, generating a power vacuum in Turkey's near abroad (Kutlay and Öniş, 2021). Hence, the combination of unresolved conflicts, domestic backsliding, alliances between authoritarian leaders and shifting geopolitical spheres of influence render stalemates both escalatory and a powder keg for wider international conflict. In this respect, the current Ukraine war is a visceral reminder of how local tensions can be manipulated by an external counter-peace force to escalate conflict through the three patterns of our typology (Pogodda, Richmond and Visoka, 2022).

Serbia's stance on Kosovo's statehood and on its internal and regional conflicts along with its support for Republika Srpska's secessionism in Bosnia-Herzegovina are also indicative of how counter-peace dynamics can escalate.¹¹ The UN Security Council remains divided on Kosovo's independence, with United States, France, and the United Kingdom vouching for Kosovo with many strings attached, while Russia and China unreservedly back Serbia. While the presence of NATO peacekeepers and EU's rule of law mission on the ground is the most important deterrent of inter-ethnic tensions, legacies of the conflict, structural pressure and emergent disputes persist. In the absence of progress on the EU-led talks for normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo (Visoka and Doyle, 2016), hardliners on both sides of the conflict have regained momentum. The stalemate can only hold as long as the pro-peace forces manage to contain the forces that threaten to violently overturn the status quo.

In Bosnia Herzegovina, various domestic and international counter-peace forces are currently putting pressure on the stalemate that the Dayton agreement imposed (Bell and Pospisil, 2017). Its power-sharing provisions have given ethno-nationalist hardliners the veto power to block, undermine and decimate Bosnia's weak central institutions (Leroux-Martin, 2014). Serb nationalist Milorad Dodik, for instance, has spent the past 15 years building up the Republika Srpska as a para-statelet with the intention to erode the Bosnian state (Carcic, 2022). With his plan to secede from Bosnia, his politics align with Russian President Putin's objective to keep Bosnia divided, dysfunctional and unable to join Western institutions (Carcic, 2022). Yet, an alliance between counter-peace forces at different levels requires mutual support in addition to an alignment of politics. This can be seen in Dodik's and Croat nationalist leader Dragan Covic's collaboration to stop Bosnia from joining the UN sanctions regime after the start of Russia's war on Ukraine (Ruge, 2022). Similarly, Hungary's President Victor Orban promised to protect Milorad Dodik from EU sanctions (Ruge, 2022). Concerningly, the Office of the High Representative (backed by the United States and the United Kingdom) has recently used its Bonn powers in ways that have reinforced the sectarian dysfunctionality of the Dayton regime (Mujanovic, 2022). Yet since these actions were part of a wider intervention to tackle Bosnia's governmental dysfunctionality and happened alongside sanctions on the hard-line nationalist saboteurs of the central state (Ruge, 2022), this might count as the unintended consequences of peace interventions.

Against this international backdrop, peacemaking efforts that resulted in stalemates have tested the credibility of the UN and the EU, as well as notions of rights and justice, norms of sovereignty and non-intervention. They have perhaps undermined the legitimacy of international order itself. Other seeming post-conflict successes, such as in Northern Ireland, now also appear to be weakened. The examples above also illustrate how the main nexus of power in the counter-peace framework links (ethno-)nationalism with authoritarian regimes and geopolitics.

Contributions to the limited counter-peace

Revisionism is present in attempts to develop tools that undermine – rather than help improve – the IPA. It points to the implausibility of maintaining an IPA with homogenised institutions, units, norms and policies in an ideologically fragmented international environment. Scholarship has shown that the IPA itself became increasingly entangled with the counter-peace after the end of the Cold War. When the pressure of having to compete with the material emancipation the communist bloc proposed fell away, the IPA contracted to support only basic rights while otherwise tracking power. In the limited counter-peace pattern, the IPA provides only localised stability through stabilisation missions. It is unable to transform conflicts. Indeed, the IPA's stabilisation approach has contributed to a militarisation of governance structures (Charbonneau, 2021), entangling internationally supported peace missions with counter-peace dynamics.

In this section, China serves as a prime example due its complex relationship with the IPA, but also because of its increasing role in many limited counter-peace contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and in gang-crime affected countries in Latin America (e.g. Cabestan, 2018; Hein, 2017; Lanteigne, 2019; Roy, 2022; Toogood, 2016). China has

gone further than other global powers in establishing new institutions which could either help fill gaps in the IPA or erode it further. Hence, this section investigates the ramifications of China's opaque approach to the IPA, human rights and democracy.

As a member of UN Security Council (and thus being able to veto or shape UN policy directly), China has been comfortable with the neo-Westphalian system established by the UN (Kim, 1993). After the end of the Cold War, China started participating in UN peacekeeping since it served the Communist Party's security interests and propaganda purposes (Cabestan, 2018: 730). Restoring stability after conflict helped secure China's investments in conflict-affected regions, while participation in UN missions positioned it as a responsible great power in the international system. MINUSMA, the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali, with its mandate to expand state authority matched the Chinese leadership's understanding of acceptable responses to the conflict in the Sahel. Considering state instability as the cause of poverty and radicalisation, the Chinese Communist Party regarded stabilisation through UN peacekeeping as an opportunity to expand its investment in and trade with Mali (Lanteigne, 2019). Yet differences between China and other MINUSMA contributors came to the fore after the 2021 military coup in Mali. Despite China's previous rhetorical commitment to regional solutions for African security (Lanteigne, 2019), China and Russia vetoed an extension of ECOWAS sanctions in the UN Security Council. This assertion of the principle of non-intervention in favour of Mali's new dictator Assimi Goïta backfired against MINUSMA. Goïta's imposition of restrictions on the UN mission, coupled with his alliance with the Russian Wagner Group and the resulting withdrawal of France's security support for MINUSMA, has led to a mass pull-out of peacekeepers, making the UN mission appear increasingly unviable (International Crisis Group, 2022). Since MINUSMA has been working towards the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement, constitutional reform, decentralisation, security sector reform and women's participation in the peace process, the current crowding out of UN peacekeeping by Goïta and the Wagner Group implies a regression in Mali's peace process.

Analysts have identified more areas in which China is seemingly on a collision course with the IPA. China is creating its own financial, political and regional networks and institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Belt and Road Initiative, the China-Africa Forum, and other regional networks (Doshi, 2021). These institutions combine a belief in economic growth as a force of stability and order with the assumption that markets for future growth will be located in the global South (French, 2022). In recent years, Chinese commentators have argued, according to Doshi (2021), that its concepts of peace, security, development and government are more viable than liberalism and able to contend with extremism and terrorism better, partly through the use of advanced technologies.

Initially – at least until 2019 – such initiatives were seen as complementary, experimental and constructive for the IPA. However, recent events in Hong Kong, China's increasing use of its veto on the UN Security Council in favour of non-intervention (Wenqi and Xinyu, 2016) without much regard for human rights, its continuous support for Russia in the face of international sanctions, and its steadfast defence of authoritarianism, have led observers to assume that China aims to – at least partly – reshape the international order (Bolt and Cross, 2018). Some have interpreted this as a plausible

attempt to reject the LIO altogether, and to replace it with alternative hegemonic formulations, maintained by its own peacemaking tools. So-called rising powers, according to Gilpin (1981, 1988), are prone to efforts to undermine existing hegemonic systems to establish counter-hegemonies, complete with new tools for the preservation of the rising order, its norms, security, stability and areas of influence (Doshi, 2021: 298).

For Chinese strategists, this may extend as far as a whole range of strategic goals in East Asia, related to control over Taiwan, the Koreas, Tibet, removal of US forces from Japan, and influence in the wider Pacific area. It may also be related to the reform of world order, the exemplar of the ideal state as authoritarian-capitalist and China's partial control of the developing world through the Belt and Road Initiative (Doshi, 2021: 302). The existing multilateral systems, its laws, norms and institutions would stand as an obstacle to such extensive goals, as they maintain Western/American, not Chinese, hegemony. Since the 2000s, China has focused on balancing Western power in the UN Security Council, while pursuing a stabilisation strategy in limited counter-peace contexts in its spheres of influence (where little progress can be made along liberal, civil or scholarly lines, but where order prevails and violence is limited or hidden). Its contribution to UN peace interventions aimed to co-opt the IPA towards Chinese interests. However, there are now suspicions that it may go much further vis-à-vis control of Taiwan (given its recent success in Hong Kong), dependant perhaps on the outcome of Russia's war on Ukraine.

An unmitigated counter-peace

Similar dynamics can be seen in Russia's engagement with peace and order maintenance (Lewis, 2022). Russia followed a version of the evolution of UN peacekeeping as with China through the 2000s, but began to diverge during the War on Terror and after the Financial Crisis of 2008 (Zheng and Hang, 2020). Sakwa has described this evolution as 'neo-revisionist', indicating some intent to work within the existing system as well as to supplant it with alternative regional models, and to reject US hegemony. This has become more pronounced recently (Sakwa, 2019). The split widened after the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011. President Putin, ever aware of the potential for revisionism, has called Russian military intervention in Syria a model for 'regional crisis management', which has spilled over into Libya, Mali and the Central African Republic (Lewis, 2022).

This concept emerged from Russian mimicry of liberal peacebuilding, designed to undermine the rules-based international system and allow space for its own interests to re-emerge (Lewis, 2022: 659). In the context of Chechnya, an illiberal and authoritarian state model began to consolidate based upon Russian coercion. This became attractive to countries like Sri Lanka and Serbia in their attempts to frame liberal peacebuilding as weakening their own standing and security (Ratelle and Souleimanov, 2016).

After trying to collaborate with Western peacebuilding briefly in the Balkans (which highlighted substantial contradictions in Western and Russian approaches), Russian President Putin's model now mirrors and extends Western counter-terrorism and stabilisation policies, but more explicitly focuses on short-term conflict management connected to its geopolitical advantage. It pioneered a diplomatic and mediation approach of exclusive and limited conflict management with key power-brokers, including the

Taliban in Afghanistan, bringing to bear Russia's own leverage for its own multipolar and regional interests (Lewis, 2022: 668). In Syria, it consolidated a model of counter-insurgency to help allied leaders such as Syrian President Assad to regain state control, buttressed by aggressive military support even for the use of chemical weapons against civilian populations. Extreme violence against rebel-held enclaves in Syria facilitated local 'peace agreements', which made no political concessions other than a cessation of hostilities (Turkmani, 2022). Moreover, Putin has pursued an interest-based approach to regional diplomacy often through the provision of mercenaries in exchange for primary resources (Parens, 2022). This approach highlights the utility of war over peace, aligning pacification and diplomacy with older forms of conflict and crisis management that enabled Putin to reconstruct Soviet spheres of influence from sub-Saharan Africa to the Middle East (Lewis, 2022: 661).

With the deployment of Russian 'peacekeeping' in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, a model emerged based upon the use of military force, top-down coercive negotiations following Russian geopolitical interests, and the exclusion of Western actors, interests and models. This represents the rejection of multilateralism in favour of regional dominance and multipolarity. Even humanitarian issues were controlled under this model, along with information, and longer-term reconstruction (Lewis, 2022: 665). It offered a competing model of order maintenance and crisis management, in other words, one which replaced rights, democracy and inclusion with Russian pacification, authoritarianism and exclusion. It points to crisis management and balance of power tools in a broader, multipolar order, perhaps resonant of the failed 19th-century attempts to curtail war through balance of power mechanisms in an imperial order. The use of private military companies also joined the panoply of measures to replace norms with interests, as in CAR, Mali and Libya with Russian mercenaries (Euronews, 2022; United Nations Security Council, 2022).

Taken all together, this suggests that Russian approaches have pushed into an unmitigated counter-peace terrain. Here, violence coexists with a coercive peacemaking framework, geared towards rent extraction, pacification and victor's peace. By combining Russia's veto in the UN Security Council with its military intervention in support of authoritarian regimes, this unmitigated counter-peace aims to replace the IPA, impacting international order itself. This indicates ambitions for a restructured multipolar international order, complete with tools for its own maintenance, based upon power-relations rather than cosmopolitan norms, legitimate institutions, democracy and rights. It also indicates a rejection of liberal approaches (e.g. decentralisation of power, democracy, active civil society, proscription of violence, rights and human rights-based interventions), which Russia sees as destabilising historical patterns of order (Lewis, 2022: 668).

Even in the current economic and political crisis in Sri Lanka, Russia has sought opportunities to indicate the viability of its support, seeking political credibility during the military invasion of Ukraine (*Al Jazeera*, 2022a). All these strategies have achieved success according to Putin's revisionist and possibly revanchist policy goals, including the attempt to reduce the already limited emancipatory capacity of the UN, multilateral organisations and related peacemaking tools. Russian attempts (together with China) to build a regional, revisionist network of states, playing on anger at Western hypocrisy particularly in Iraq after 2004 (Dodge, 2013) and the West's weakness since the 2008 financial crisis, have met substantial acceptance (*Al Jazeera*, 2022b). Like China's

evolutionary approach of pushing back at Western hegemony within the IPA, blocking it by becoming integral to its systems, and then perhaps competing with its institutions, Russia's approach has substantial implications for the tools, norms and functional capacity of the IPA. China has also apparently noticed the utility of the Russian conflict management approach in its goal of reclaiming Taiwan (Lewis, 2022: 670). Other actors have also noticed the revisionist potential in their own locales and regions of such an approach, especially in terms of counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, power-based mediation, peacekeeping, arms acquisitions and hybrid military interventions.

On entanglement and the impact on the multipolar order

The limited and long-term capacity of civil agency in the IPA is easily countermanded through different counter-peace strategies. The latter may nest within the IPA and peace tools in parasitic form, leading to morbidities in the overall framework. Counter-peace tactics deploy direct, structural or governmental power, to undermine law, order and social agency within the IPA. We have already noted the entanglement of Western and US foreign policy and interventionism with counter-peace dynamics. They are not merely the preserve of non-liberal or non-Western actors. They aim to reduce rights and justice by foregrounding power and interests, exploiting the available political space: they use propaganda, often in the form of disinformation campaigns; they exploit the global economy to maintain inequality; they block or pushback international and regional organisations; and they contain or ban civil society actors and networks. Personalised power, exclusionary access to the assets of statehood, control of information and society, as well as grey operations that manipulate legal norms are often connected (see Visoka and Lemay-Hénert 2022: 119–150). The counter-peace concept provides a framework to understand the escalation of tactics into strategy. Furthermore, it indicates some sense of mission or an ideological framing, which is camouflaged at first. Thus, from challenging critical and post-colonial civil norms and discourses in international order, authoritarian domestic governance then relates to the structural contestation of international norms.

The next step in the escalatory framework entails ideological struggle. Here, counter-peace actors will seek to justify the reversal of progress in peace and reform processes. This targets rights, norms, the rule of law, effective and accountable governance, security sector reform, the redistribution of resources, the establishment of checks and balances, as well as global social networks and multilateral tools. At the moment, establishing 'order' and preventing 'disorder' is used as an argument to justify a reversion to top-down, centralised and territorialised autocracy, the return of escalating regional geopolitics, and effectively, renewed regional tensions (perhaps reframed for a digital era).

Should the IPA survive, the pressure of rising authoritarian forces might transform the IPA and its interventionary practices fundamentally: the role of elite power in the IPA could be heightened, while the role of civil society and social movements along with their political and justice claims might be further reduced. Stabilisation operations might continue to replace attempts at conflict transformation. At the very least, this international contestation requires a complete rethinking of the IPA. The rise of a multipolar order risks international instability, the return of revolutionary politics at the domestic level and the escalation of many more direct and proxy conflicts.

Conversely, the pressures of a newly forming world order could aid the urgent reconstruction of the IPA, align it more closely with scientific, critical and post-colonial knowledge about peace, justice and sustainability, and connect the IPA more substantially to the claims of global civil society. Yet, an enormous investment in new international mechanisms designed to support the IPA would be needed in this scenario. This requires close attention to current critical debates about the ‘decolonisation’ of the international system, justice and sustainability therein. To some degree, these issues have been connected in the UN’s sustaining peace agenda (which emerged from global civil society engagement with expert knowledge in multilateral venues across the UN system (United Nations Secretary-General, 2018)).

The international counter-peace dynamics discussed in this paper make clear that peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding have arisen within a system of hegemony since the end of the Cold War. In parallel, illiberal actors discussed in this paper have gone from being potentially part of the liberal international system in the 1990s and 2000s, to revisionist actors in the 2010s, and are now on the cusp of authorising alternatives to the tools and thinking that emerged within the post-war liberal and US-dominated epistemological framework. This loose counter-peace alternative at the international level exploits but also drives local dissatisfaction with the liberal international order. It also indicates that there is a bifurcation between the scholarly understanding of the roots and drivers of conflict and what needs to be done about them, and the multipolar direction of travel in global politics. Effectively, this indicates that the liberal peace, top-down alignment has collapsed into a multipolar order of different spheres, which have their own internal and limited peacemaking approaches. Between these different spheres, there is little left in the way of an IPA, other than the balance of power, traditional diplomacy and minor tools like early generation peacekeeping and mediation as remnants from the Cold War and previous imperial order. Although local-level agency seems to determine social legitimacy for peace settlements to a large degree in critical scholarship and across disciplines (Richmond, Pogodda and Ramović, 2016: 1–17), it appears to be international politics that determine whether a counter-peace escalates from small tactics to the strategic level, and even gains a wider ideological platform. As the counter-peace phenomenon is inherently escalatory, the IPA needs wide-ranging rethinking to contain it.

Conclusion

Given the trend of stagnating, reversing and collapsed peace processes, this paper has investigated the ways in which the IPA is blocked, leading to counter-peace processes. In particular, it has explored the international dimensions of such processes: how blocking tactics merge into larger strategies; the links between counter-peace actors at different levels and the preliminary contours of an emerging counter-peace architecture.

Initially, international counter-peace dynamics maintain peace processes to a limited degree to harvest indirect resources from them. The internationally mediated power-sharing agreements of the 1990s tended to produce such stalemates, which have been fairly durable as long as a balance of forces in the underlying frozen conflict was maintained. However, stalemated patterns of counter-peace – as in Cyprus, Kashmir, Bosnia,

Nagorno Karabakh, Lebanon, Kosovo – are vulnerable to shifting alliances and the militarisation of external backers' foreign policy. The limited counter-peace pattern (in which geographically constrained violence coexists with surface stability) constitutes a more fragile state, which easily escalates into unmitigated forms of counter-peace (as heralded the current Ukraine war and in the Sahel region).

Small-scale tactics have blocked power-sharing from overcoming war-time identities and have prevented contested borders from being transcended by inter-communal federations in the last three decades. Counter-peace tactics maintain securitisation and thus facilitate the return of identity-based hierarchies, authoritarian rule and socio-economic exclusion. Such tactics might converge at different levels: resistance within society to peace processes may connect with the rejection of the IPA at the national level and an inhospitable international environment for peace operations. If such convergence happens, small-scale tactics combine into larger strategies, implying the potential for ideological opposition.

This pits evolving liberal internationalism (as a platform for more advanced postcolonial, pluriversal and intersectional approaches to peace) against regional geopolitics, authoritarianism, nationalism and possibly imperialism, with all of their social stratifications related to race, identity, gender and class. This ideological competition might be contested by the allegiance of a third camp with a yet indistinct ideology: the global South (Schuman, 2022). Given that so many peace processes have led to illiberal and authoritarian outcomes recently (Day et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2018), ideological rivalry might effectively gloss over the fact that all political blocs have tended to ignore or pay only lip service to civil, scholarly and scientific developments vis-à-vis the IPA.

The emerging multipolar order may generate alternative approaches limited to pursuing authoritarian forms of pacification with an even weaker role of civil society and a strong defence of non-intervention for oppressive governments. Negating international peacebuilding thus revolves around interfering with UN and development support, accentuating regional geopolitics, co-opting elites at the state level and countering civil society with 'uncivil' majorities. It requires the construction of different and competing international narratives about ideology, authoritarian nationalism and its efficiency in development, its capacity to maintain order and to reconstitute former territorial possessions. This appears to be the main ideological tendency of the counter-peace framework, which draws on reserves of power that far outweigh those of international and grassroots peace tools.

International counter-peace dynamics are deeper rooted and better networked than often assumed. Related strategies span interference with balance of power mechanisms, ideological contests, the provision of a peace dividend through global capitalism, authoritarian conflict management, support for populist (ethno-)nationalist networks and prioritisation of geopolitics over norms, law and rights. Yet, rather than a coherent project with a consistent theory of change, the contours of counter-peace appear most clearly in juxtaposition to what it tries to undermine: the liberal peace. To this end, counter-peace tactics block civil society and multilateral networks. They reject rights as well as designs for the peaceful state and multilateralism, which check power and interests. They chip away at international support for the implementation of a peace settlement or process, local reconciliation and state reform. They also reject the emancipatory, epistemic premises of scholarship on peaceful social orders, the state and international security. In sum, counter-peace forces at the international level form an ideological axis of geopolitical

power with alternative visions for the nature of political order. This indicates some preference for the avoidance of direct war, but given its oppressive nature counter-peace remains war by other means to a large extent.

In terms of China and Russia's engagement with the IPA, it is clear that they have an interest in keeping the UN system alive as a platform to coordinate pacification strategies and conflict management, while effecting the disconnection of the UN system from human rights and the liberal order. This may also be true of Turkey's engagement with the IPA in normative terms. Ultimately, however, this approach is too limited to have any chance of achieving peace and may cause even more internal contradictions bound to erode the remaining peace tools within the system (e.g. such as with peacekeeping in the Mali case). It hints at new and competing, but still unclear, international orders, as well as the risks inherent in any international transition.

By contrast, the liberal peace model includes some space for rights to expand, for subaltern voices and hybrid approaches to emerge, and for democracy to consolidate even within a generally stalemated outcome. Despite its many flaws and much-needed course corrections, the liberal peace has proven less prone to conflict escalation, but it has also lost legitimacy in conflict-affected societies. However, none of the international counter-peace dynamics further the IPA or its alignment with emancipatory scholarship on peacemaking, and merely entangles them within the stranglehold of ideological and structural forces, particularly related to territorialism, nationalism, geopolitics, lack of political will, poor legal capacity and enforcement and unsustainable and inequitable economic models. In a multipolar framework, peacemaking outside the LIO may thus tend to be very weak and be replaced by internal authoritarian and securitised interests, limited development and fluid geopolitical alliances, which might ultimately presage war. Worse, it may not engage with growing critical knowledge about the IPA.

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Notes

1. Revanchist actors aim to restore pre-war power structures and hierarchies, and are potentially motivated by grudges, while revisionist actors contest power structures and hierarchies within the international system.
2. This paper draws on a number of reports on blockages to peace in different contexts. Over a 3-year period (2019–2021), these included reports on Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia,

- Colombia, Ethiopia, Kosovo, Burma, Sierra Leone, Southern Thailand, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Tunisia. They were generously supported by the ECPR, the Global Challenges Research Fund and a grant from the University of Manchester.
3. In the Middle East, a new Cold War has already broken out between regional players such as Iran and Saudi Arabia (Gause, 2014).
 4. See numerous *confidential sources* from a global network of scholars and civil society actors in conflict-affected societies for the 'Blockages in Peacebuilding' project (with Sandra Pogodda, Gëzim Visoka and Jasmin Ramovic, University of Manchester) 2019–2022.
 5. See our various *Project Reports*.
 6. See the various reports on counter-peace in our range of cases, 2019–2021 as well as Allan (2020).
 7. *Tunisia Report*, 2019; *Sri Lanka Report*, 2021: 12.
 8. *Cambodia Report*, 2020: 1.
 9. *Sri Lanka Report*, 2021: 7.
 10. See, for example, Doshi's argument that China joined regional organisations to stall and constrain them and limit Western influence (Doshi, 2021: 66).
 11. See *Blockages Project Reports*, 2019–2022.

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