

# **Flexibility in Order: Three Conditions that Preclude Change in International Order**

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**Abstract:** The international order is currently beset by numerous challenges and much attention is dedicated to determining how it can adapt. To answer these increasingly important questions of order transformation, we turn to theory and the dominant conception of international order. This conception is built on three necessary conditions: (1) order is created at a “re-ordering” moment following major power war; (2) the leading states are sitting on a declining power base; (3) weak states have leverage over the terms of order through their decision to join in. In this paper, I examine these conditions and show that the very structure of such an order precludes changes to the international order. A concept of order which does not allow for change cannot explain the changes the current international order is going through. Having found these conditions wanting, I provide some insights for a different foundation on which international order can be built, a foundation which allows considerably more flexibility in order.

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The health of the international order has come under close scrutiny in the recent years. Some argue that the liberal international order established after World War Two is on its last dying breath.<sup>1</sup> Others argue that it is just going through growing pains.<sup>2</sup> Some go so far as to declare it dead.<sup>3</sup> While many put forward proposals for how to revive it,<sup>4</sup> others discuss the potential and emerging alternatives.<sup>5</sup> Some attribute the international order's declining health to the actions of the leading state – the United States – which failed to maintain and preserve the order.<sup>6</sup> Others claim that the damage stems from the attempts of discontented powers, like Russia and China, to strangle the order.<sup>7</sup> Many are concerned that China is building an alternative and competing international order.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the ample disagreement, there is general consensus that the international order is both important and in peril. Much of the concern over the current order boils down to two empirical questions. First, why is the international order in trouble? Second, where is the

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security* 43, no. 4 (April 1, 2019): 7–50, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00342](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342); Hanns W. Maull, "The Once and Future Liberal Order," *Survival* 61, no. 2 (March 4, 2019): 7–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1589076>; Mauro Guillén, "The Demise of the Global Liberal Order," *Survival* 61, no. 2 (March 4, 2019): 87–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1589081>.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Gray, "The Ebb and Flow of International Orders," *Survival* 61, no. 2 (March 4, 2019): 83–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1589080>; G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?," *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 7–23, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix241>.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Haass, "Liberal World Order, R.I.P. | by Richard Haass," Project Syndicate, March 21, 2018, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/end-of-liberal-world-order-by-richard-n--haass-2018-03>.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, "The Once and Future Order: What Comes After Hegemony?," *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 1 (February 2017): 25–32; G. John Ikenberry, "The Future of the Liberal World Order," *Foreign Affairs*, June 2011, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2011-05-01/future-liberal-world-order>.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart Patrick, *The Sovereignty Wars: Reconciling America with the World* (Brookings Institution Press, 2019); Michael Lee, "Populism or Embedded Plutocracy? The Emerging World Order," *Survival* 61, no. 2 (March 4, 2019): 53–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1589078>; Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Stewart M. Patrick, "The Liberal World Order Is Dying. What Comes Next?," *World Politics Review*, January 15, 2019, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/insights/27192/the-liberal-world-order-is-dying-what-comes-next>; Doug Stokes, "Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order," *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (January 2018): 133–50; Jeff D. Colgan and Robert O. Keohane, "The Liberal Order Is Rigged," *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 3 (June 2017): 36–44.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Mazarr, Timothy Heath, and Astrid Cevallos, *China and the International Order* (RAND Corporation, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2423>; Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline," *International Security* 36, no. 1 (2011): 41–72.

<sup>8</sup> "A 'China Model?' Beijing's Promotion of Alternative Global Norms and Standards," § U.S-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2020).

international order heading? Change is at the center of these questions. Whether the international order is adapting to a changing world indicates if it is in trouble or not. Likewise, determining if the international order will collapse, be revised, or limp along is all about transformation. These two questions about change in international order are inexorably linked to a third: where did the current order come from? After all, large scale changes of order – when one order ends and another takes its place – are all about order formation.

Answering these important empirical questions hinges on the theoretical question of how order changes. Change can refer to two different processes: fundamental change and amendments. Fundamental change occurs when an existing order is destroyed and an alternative order replaces it. Fundamental change is, thus, a question of order formation. Amendments are changes to the existing order that adapt it to new circumstances. These changes are more modest and do not require the order to be destroyed and rewritten in the process. An explanation of fundamental change does not necessarily need to explain amendments as well, but an explanation of amendments to order needs to be compatible with the mechanisms of fundamental change in an order formation theory. How an order is formed says a lot about the potential of the order to change. Therefore, a theoretical examination of the foundations of order is required to address the empirical questions about changes to the current international order.

According to the dominant conception of order formation, the current international order was created by the United States at the end of World War Two. This order used institutions to place restraints on the power of the strong and provide a voice to the weak, all the while preserving the United States' power over time.<sup>9</sup> As the order emerged victorious from the Cold

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<sup>9</sup> Evelyn Goh, *The Struggle for Order: Hegemony, Hierarchy, and Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia* (OUP Oxford, 2013); G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2012); David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Cornell University Press, 2009); G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of*

War, it became the blueprint for encouraging better relations with Russia and deeper engagement with China. Thus, after a few failed experiments with order formation at the conclusion of earlier major power wars, the post-World War Two order provided the ideal structure for fixed, binding, international order. This creation story has a lot to say about change – or rather the absence of change in our understanding of international order.

Three conditions are necessary to create such a fixed, binding international order. First, order must be created in “re-ordering moments” which occur at the conclusion of major power wars. War destroys the previous order and creates the opportunity for order formation. This condition explains fundamental change of order. Second, when order is being formed, the leading state must be sitting on a declining power base. It will never be able to get a better bargain on the rules of order, thus the leading state wants to set the bargain over order in stone. Third, the weaker states must be coaxed into joining the order and thus have leverage over the stronger states. The leading state has to credibly commit to restraining the arbitrary use of its power to persuade weaker state to join an order designed to primarily benefit the leading state. These two conditions account for the possibility of amendments to international order

Overall, this dominant concept of order formation makes change in order highly unlikely. Based on this explanation, fundamental change requires a major power war. However, due to the effects of the nuclear weapons, major power wars are no longer likely to occur.<sup>10</sup> This means that fundamental change is likewise unlikely to occur.<sup>11</sup> With the only method for fundamental change removed, the current order is here to stay.

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*Order After Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Cornell University Press, 1989); Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, *The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution: Power Politics in the Atomic Age* (Cornell University Press, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, 338–39, 345. Specifically, “Old international orders were ultimately overturned through hegemonic war. In the age of nuclear weapons and great-power deterrence, this mechanism of historical change – thankfully – is taken away.”

At the same time, a fixed binding international order is purposefully structured to preclude amendments to order. The leading state, holding the best bargaining position at the formation of order, creates the most favorable set of rules and binds those rules in institutions to ensure they remain unchanged. The weaker states are co-opted into this system, where the rules are unlikely to change, with the restraint of the leading state. The current international order, specifically, was created by a liberal democracy, which according to the dominant concept of order formation is best able to credibly commit to such binding rules making this order the least likely to see change. Even when new members seek to join the order, they are faced with the deal of accepting the benefits the existing set of rules can provide them, but at the cost of their inability to change the existing rules.<sup>12</sup> Lack of amendments to order is one of the chief incentives for a leading state to build a fixed binding international order.

In this paper, I will examine the explanations for order formation and order change that stem from the dominant conception of order. I will show that the structure of such a fixed binding international order prevents change in order. This makes this version of order ill-equipped to address the most important empirical questions about the current order – how is it changing and where is that change heading. Moreover, the three conditions driving the creation of a fixed binding international order are deeply problematic building blocks for order formation and change. None of them are logically necessary for the creation of order, nor are they a good match for how states have constructed order historically. I conclude with some insights for different foundations on which international order can be built, foundations that allow considerably more flexibility in order.

Changing our conception of order to a more flexible version has two important

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<sup>12</sup> Ikenberry, 345. Specifically, “China has incentives and opportunities to join, while, at the same time, the possibilities of it actually overturning or subverting this order are small or non-existent.”

implications for international politics. First, the current international order is not the end of history. Yet, at the same time, neither is war required for the order to change. Order is not only created in the aftermath of horrendous world wars. States can create and amend order whenever their interests on a set of behaviors converge. This does mean that China is free to build an opposing order to the United States, which some might find distressing. But it also means that a war between China and the United States is not inevitable for China to have greater influence over international affairs.

Second, the better China gets at articulating an opposing order to the United States, the less restrained the United States will become in its arbitrary use of power towards weaker allies that find Chinese leadership unattractive. When faced with a threat, despite the potentially shrinking relative power distance between the weaker and the leading state, it is the absolute distance that matters more. The greater the threat from the outside gets, the more the weaker states will rely on the leading state for protection, the less of a voice in the order they will have. While a Chinese regional order will make the United States more restrained in its global misadventures<sup>13</sup>, it will also make the United States less restrained in dealing with its allies.

The rest of the article will proceed as follows. The first section provides the definition of international order. The following section lays out the dominant conception of international order, the three necessary conditions on which it is built and what this means for the potential to change the order. Sections three through five concentrate on each of the three conditions. They explain why the condition is important to the dominant conception of international order, how it precludes change in international order, and provides some insights for removing the condition from our theorization of international order. Each section ends with an empirical assessment of

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<sup>13</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, 1st Edition edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

how the conditions fare in the order formation that occurred after World War Two. This case is used illustratively as it is frequently lauded as the best case for the dominant conception of order. After showing that the three conditions make for a faulty foundation for building international order, in the sixth section I conclude with some insights for a different foundation for understanding international order.

### **What is Order?**

International order refers to a set of agreed upon rules governing behavior in the international system.<sup>14</sup> Most of such rules apply to states, who are the main actors internationally; however, nothing specifically limits the creation of rules to just govern state behavior. Order is created by the most powerful states in the system through a bargaining process. This decision-making circle could be as small as one state, which should make bargaining fairly easy. Alternatively, it could involve all the relevant great powers of the time period, making agreement more difficult to come by.<sup>15</sup> The distribution of capabilities amongst these actors affects their bargaining leverage as the order is negotiated.

Additionally, states have specific worldviews guiding their beliefs about how best to reach a more ideal world – democracy, monarchy, theocracy, communism, capitalism, fascism, etc. Finding agreement amongst states with similar worldviews is easier than across worldviews; though, states that share a worldview do not necessarily agree in all of their interests. At the same time, states that approach order construction from different worldviews can still find areas of common interest, for example the need for security. The lowest common denominator of what

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<sup>14</sup> For similar definitions, reference: Kyle M. Lascourettes, *Orders of Exclusion: Great Powers and the Strategic Sources of Foundational Rules in International Relations* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 6; Andrew Phillips, *War, Religion and Empire: The Transformation of International Orders* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5; Charles L. Glaser, “A Flawed Framework: Why the Liberal International Order Concept Is Misguided,” *International Security* 43, no. 4 (Spring 2019): 55, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00343](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00343); Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> In the creation of a regional order, it is the most powerful regional powers that make up the decision making circle.

the states writing the order can agree on sets the shared goals of the order. These shared goals are translated into desired behaviors for states to adopt in their relations with each other. Additional rules are made to settle questions of distributional gains and conflict resolution when states interpret the existing rules differently.<sup>16</sup> Rules of order are typically codified into institutions, which provide the additional benefits of information sharing and reduced transaction costs.<sup>17</sup>

Order is more than just a pattern of repeated behavior.<sup>18</sup> It is created for a specific purpose – a shared goal of the states writing the order. This distinguishes order from systemic effects. The international system imposes constraints on states which can create some predictability in state behavior and establish a regular pattern of action, thus mimicking order.<sup>19</sup> However, the system does not provide a set of rules for states to follow, nor does it designate one set of behaviors to be preferable over others. The system only increases the cost of taking certain actions. An order, on the other hand, designates a specific set of behavior as preferred, especially in situations when different behaviors could lead to similar outcomes.

The absence of order means there are no agreed upon rules governing state behavior. Systemic constraints still exist, but there is no agreement on how states should interact. This is different from disorder, which involves a breakdown of existing rules.<sup>20</sup> Even though avoiding unnecessary war is a prominent feature of most orders, war between states does not, by itself, signify a lack of order or disorder. War can be, and has been historically, a legitimate method of conflict resolution. As such war between states, in some orders, actually shows that the order is

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<sup>16</sup> Goh, *The Struggle for Order*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 3rd ed. (Macmillan International Higher Education, 2002), 7.

<sup>19</sup> For an opposing point of view, see Randall L. Schweller, “The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 161–86.

<sup>20</sup> Disorder occurs when conflict between states is resolved in a manner inconsistent with the conflict resolution rules of the given order. This means that states refuse to follow the rules of the order (status quo is broken) and they ignore the rules meant to return states to orderly behavior (returning to status quo is impossible).



regulating behavior properly. In the current global order, a collection of states can be given a mandate by the United Nations to start a war – which would be order affirming. However, without order, war becomes harder to avoid. There are many points of potential disagreement between states and no established rules for how to resolve them.

An implication of this definition is that given a choice between order and disorder, rational actors would always prefer order. States might dislike the existing rules governing behavior, but having a set of rules is preferable to complete uncertainty in interactions. While an order with a favorable distribution of gains is the best outcome, states will settle for an unfavorable distribution of gains when the alternative is a lack of order. Likewise, rational actors will not purposefully seek to destroy an existing order without having a plausible alternative.<sup>21</sup>

There are two processes of change in international order: amendments and fundamental change. Amendments seek to adapt an order to new circumstances without changing the fundamental end goals of the order.<sup>22</sup> Amendments to order do not include things like changes to states' foreign policies, which is how states chose to translate the rules of the order into policies of the day. Amendments are changes to the rules of the order, or more specifically the distributional gains, conflict resolution rules, and especially the desired behaviors mandated by institutions. States can amend an order by dissolving some rules which are no longer useful. The creation of new institutions that govern issue areas where no previous agreements existed are likewise amendments to the existing order. For example, when space exploration became a realistic possibility, the great powers at the time agreed to set limits on weaponizing this new frontier. The Outer Space Treaty (1967) increased the set of desired behaviors for states to follow altering the future balance of power (by preventing an arms race on celestial bodies), thus

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<sup>21</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 53.

<sup>22</sup> Bull, 53.

changing the existing order.

Conversely, fundamental change occurs when an existing order is destroyed and a new one is built. This process entails a change to the shared goals guiding order creation. The creation of a new order – and a set of shared goals and purpose for that order – where one did not exist before would likewise be a fundamental change. However, fundamental change does not mean that every single rule governing behavior in the old order has to be replaced with a different rule in the new order. Some rules are beneficial regardless of who builds the order or what the shared goals of the order are. Rules which are universally profitable for all states under most circumstances become part of customary international law and provide some continuity amongst orders throughout time. For example, the right of a state to remain neutral in the conflict between two other states. The existence of customary international law does not imply that order has only ever been amended and has avoided fundamental change.

Of the many dimensions which can characterize an order, two are particularly relevant to a discussion of change – the flexibility in the rules of the order and the extent to which the leaders are constrained by the rules of the order. The flexibility dimension gauges the extent to which amendments in order are desirable. Flexibility does not mean that the rules of the order are in constant flux. Rules can remain unchanged for lengthy periods of time even when the potential to change them exists. The important distinction is whether change is possible not whether it is enacted. At one end of this spectrum is a fixed order, where very little change is possible to the rules of the order. At the other is a fully flexible order, where every rule can be changed. There are tradeoffs between these two extreme positions. A fixed order provides its greatest benefits from predictability. All states know exactly what the rules are. And as the rules do not change, there is never any confusion about when specific rules are applicable, what will or will not spark

a conflict. However, a fixed order is not very adaptable to changing circumstances in the world. A fully flexible order, on the other hand, is highly adaptable. It can respond to changes in the strategic environment with the amendment of previous rules. However, these changes might not reflect the interests of the states that paid the price to build and maintain the order.

The second relevant dimension is the extent to which the creators of order are constrained by the rules of the order. At one end of the spectrum is a binding order where no one is above the law. The creators of order have to follow the rules even when this goes against their immediate short-term interests. This is a fundamental element of domestic order for rule of law societies. At the other end is an unbound order where the creators of the order do as they please. The rules are enforced for all other states, but the leaders are largely unconstrained by the existing rules. There are tradeoffs between these two extreme positions. In a binding order, the leaders cannot profit from short-term gains of breaking the rules when it is most convenient. However, this restraint comes with the benefit of decreased maintenance costs. If the other states see that even the leaders are constrained by the rules, they are less likely to break them. In an unbound order, the leaders enjoy the short-term gains from selectively breaking the rules at opportune moments. However, this comes at the cost of more expensive order maintenance as other states in the order attempt similar actions.

### **Binding Fixed International Order**

The dominant conception of international order is a fixed, binding international order. It states that at the end of a major great power war, the leading state creates a set of binding institutions that restrain its power and provide the weaker states with a chance to influence order.<sup>23</sup> These institutions help the leading state maintain the order, but they also maintain the

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<sup>23</sup> This model of order was most clearly articulated by Ikenberry, *After Victory*. Other scholars have built on this foundation, sometimes agreeing with the theoretical model for order formation put forward by Ikenberry, sometimes

leading state's privileged position at the top of the hierarchy, even as its power declines.

The scholars that write in this tradition gesture to the idea that order needs to be flexible and change with the demands of the time. However, there are few explanations of what this change could look like, how it could occur, or by whom the change could be precipitated.<sup>24</sup> Hedley Bull went so far as to say that “the international order is notoriously lacking in mechanisms of peaceful change, notoriously dependent on war as the agent of just change.”<sup>25</sup> In the forty years since *Anarchical Society*, the literature has yet to provide one. What's more no one has yet reconciled the need for institutions to remain unchanged to preserve the power of the leading state with the need for institutions to change to accommodate the shifting interests of the states in the order.<sup>26</sup>

Ikenberry states that “the rules and institutions of international orders, once put in place, do tend to persist, at least until a subsequent disruption shatters the old rules and institutions and opens up a new moment of order-building.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, the rules of order are only changed at “re-ordering” moments and remain fixed otherwise. He specifically argues that when it comes to “overarching international rules and institutions change tends to be episodic rather than continuous and incremental.”<sup>28</sup> While conflating amendments to order with fundamental change, he places his bet on war as a mechanism of fundamental change and an order otherwise unchanged by amendments.

Lascurettes argues that change is even rarer in international order, as not all major power

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proposing alternative theories of order formation. Additionally, scholars have created theories of order maintenance, preservation, enforcement, and decline using this model of order as the foundation. This paper focuses on this (now shared) model of order, not on the specific theory of order formation laid out in *After Victory*.

<sup>24</sup> The same problem is identified by Catherine Jones, *China's Challenge to Liberal Norms: The Durability of International Order* (Springer, 2018), 43–44.

<sup>25</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 183.

<sup>26</sup> Schweller, “The Problem of International Order Revisited.”

<sup>27</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise, Character, and Evolution of International Order,” in *International Politics and Institutions in Time*, ed. Karl Orfeo Fioretos (Oxford University Press, 2017), 64.

<sup>28</sup> Ikenberry, 64.

wars bring with it a change in the rules of order. At the conclusion of some major power wars, states prefer to keep the rules of behavior that existed before the war – despite the fact that these rules failed to prevent the conflict. States only change the rules of international order when they “perceive a major new threat on the horizon, a threat to their security or to their enduring primacy.”<sup>29</sup> In the same vein, Goh expects to find change in international order at the “re-ordering” moments. The rules of the order are “subject to renegotiation in the event of significant systemic changes such as the dissolution of the bipolar superpower conflict.”<sup>30</sup> She broadens the definition of re-ordering moments to include the end of the Cold War, even though there was no physical major power war. While she provides a description of how a peaceful renegotiation process can occur between the leading state and the weaker states, she nevertheless argues that such an amendment process will only occur at rare moments in history.

Lake describes the international order as a social contract between the dominant state and the weaker states. This contract, in theory, should be under constant renegotiation from both sides, allowing for considerable change in international order. Yet, Lake also introduces the idea of discipline, which allows the dominant state to legitimately coerce weaker states into following the existing rules.<sup>31</sup> This prevents a lot of the possible change in international order. While order is assumed to be under constant renegotiation, how and more importantly when that change is allowed to occur is not explained.

Taking a different approach to international order by looking at when international organizations change their rules, Lipsky argues that the degree to which institutions accommodate change depends on the network effect and the barriers to entry in the specific area

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<sup>29</sup> Lascurettes, *Orders of Exclusion*, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Goh, *The Struggle for Order*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, 13.

the institutions regulate.<sup>32</sup> Institutions that govern interactions in the security realm tend to have high network effects and high barriers of entry, which make them the least likely to change. Yet again, international order tends to be rather rigid as a result.

Overall, to the extent that change is discussed, the focus is on fundamental change not on amendments to order. The explanation for fundamental change is great power war. Amendments to order are assumed to happen as they are important to the adaptability of order, yet they are not an inherent part of the order conception and are not explained. In fact, the difficulty of explaining change from the perspective of a fixed binding international order is not surprising at all. The dominant conception of order is structured to preclude amendments to order and allow only fundamental change only at the end of great power wars.

This version of order rests on three necessary conditions which generate the incentives for states to build a fixed binding international order. However, these same forces also prevent the resulting order from changing.

Diagram 1: Conventional view of order formation

Necessary Conditions		Incentive	Outcome
“Re-ordering moment”	→	Urgency	Binding Fixed International Order
Declining power base	→	Lock-in	
Power of weak states	→	Restraint on leaders	

First, order is formed at “re-ordering” moments, which occur at the conclusion of major power wars. Since the war destroyed the last international order, states are faced with a lack of order and an urgency to create anew. If this chance to construct an order is missed, the next will only come at the end of the next great power war which everyone is keen to avoid having just

<sup>32</sup> Phillip Y. Lipsky, *Renegotiating the World Order: Institutional Change in International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 30.

fought such a war and which is also most likely when there is no established order. This also provides an explanation for fundamental change. A new order can only be created in the aftermath of a great power war.

Second, the leading state responsible for creating the new order is sitting on a declining power base. Having won the major power war, the leading state is at the height of its relative power compared to the other states. Yet those weaker states will soon start to recover inevitably causing the leading state's relative decline. Knowing that it will never be able to negotiate a better order than it can at the re-ordering moment, the leading state wants to set the rules of the order in stone. This ensures that the leading state will continue to benefit from the order even as its power position declines. It also ensures that the resultant order has to be resistant to amendments. If the order can be amended in the future when the leading state is weaker than it is at the moment of creation, the leading state will eventually see its gains evaporate. Binding the order is done specifically to prevent this from occurring.

Third, the weaker states have leverage over the terms of the order because the leading state needs them to join the new order. Rules are meaningless without states to follow them. To co-opt weaker states, the leading state writes restraints on its power into the institutions of the order and credibly commits not to break the rules. The weaker states are thereby protected from the arbitrary use of power and the leading state receives its followers. At the same time, this restraint by the leading state ensures that the weaker states join an order that cannot be amended.

When all three conditions are combined, states should have the incentives to create a fixed binding international order. Such an order should be almost completely unchangeable, as this stems from its very structure. Using such an order as a lens to explain a changing order in world politics would be particularly difficult. In the following three sections, I will examine each

of these necessary conditions in turn. For each condition, I will first explain what incentives it provides for the creation of a fixed binding international order. Then I'll show that the condition makes for a faulty foundation for the construction of international order – not in the least because it excises the ability to change from the order. Finally, I'll provide some implications of removing these necessary conditions from the theorization of international order.

### **Necessary Condition #1: “Re-ordering” Moment**

#### *Incentive for Fixed Binding International Order*

The first necessary condition, on which the dominant conception of order depends, is that order is created at “re-ordering” moments, which come at the conclusion of major power wars. The war destroyed the old order, leaving states at the conclusion of the war with a lack of agreed-upon rules to guide behavior. The rules of interaction that were considered settled before the war are now open to renegotiation and reinterpretation.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, the winning states can capitalize on the momentum of their wartime alliance. For a brief period of time, there is still agreement over common goals and considerable shared values on which to build the new order.<sup>34</sup> At the very least, there is agreement on what caused the rupture of the previous order and the desire to prevent this from occurring again.<sup>35</sup> Most importantly, at the end of major power wars, both the winning and the losing states have the shared goal of avoiding another destructive major power war. In such moments, states find it easier to take advantage on the momentary predisposition towards peace in order to build a lasting international order.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Lascurettes, *Orders of Exclusion*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Ian Clark and Teaching Fellow in Defence Studies Ian Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society* (OUP Oxford, 2005); Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848* (Clarendon Press, 1994); Andreas Osiander, *The States System of Europe, 1640-1990: Peacemaking and the Conditions of International Stability* (Clarendon Press, 1994); R. Albrecht-Carrie, *Concert of Europe* (Springer, 1968).

<sup>35</sup> Kalevi J. Holsti, *Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648-1989* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*; Randall L. Schweller, “Entropy and the Trajectory of World Politics: Why Polarity Has Become Less Meaningful,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 23, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 161,



Relying on this condition, while theorizing international order, provides states with an urgency to build order immediately. The good will between the victorious states at the end of a war is fleeting. Conflicts over the division of the spoils and diverging national interests ultimately start to pull states in different direction when there is no common enemy to unify them.<sup>37</sup> The longer states wait, the harder it will be to come to an agreement, the greater the incentive to write order quickly. At the same time, with the old order destroyed, states momentarily exist without an order. Without agreed upon rules for dividing the spoils of the war, for interactions between states in the post-war years, for conflict resolution to prevent disagreements from spiraling into war, war becomes a much more likely outcome. Having just finished a major power war and eager to avoid another, states have incentives for urgency. States cannot afford to wait a decade or two to see if their bargaining position improves.

#### *Faulty Foundation*

There are two problems with using this necessary condition as a foundation for international order. First, it implies that rules of order are only destroyed by major power war. Second, it implies that common interests that facilitate the creation of order only materialize at the end of major power war. In general, it overemphasizes war as the only mechanism for change.

The inflated sense of comradeship at the end of war can lead to the creation of rules that are too idealistic to last when the euphoria of victory fades and national interests of states gain dominance.<sup>38</sup> The League of Nations presents an excellent example. At the moment of order formation, the members of the League agreed to impose complete economic sanctions on states

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570903456374>.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>38</sup> Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Cornell University Press, 2005).

engaging in aggression towards other members.<sup>39</sup> Learning from World War I, states remembered how damaging economic isolation could be to a state and believed such a punishment would be enough to forestall any war. However, when it came time to implement this solution, states realized that the costs of such sanctions would vary considerably among states.<sup>40</sup> National interests won the day and no economic sanctions were imposed. The same story recurs with the United Nations. Created at a “re-ordering” moment, the UN was meant to be a mechanism of collective security with the members of the Security Council working jointly to enforce peace.<sup>41</sup> However, as soon as the post-victory euphoria dissipated, it became a tool for each side of the bipolar standoff to prevent the other from engaging in any policing. Just because a set of rules was created at a “re-ordering” moment does not mean that it will persist until the next “re-ordering” moment.

At the same time, the conditions necessary for order creation do not only occur at the end of major power wars. States can acknowledge a lack of rules in a specific sphere of activity as problematic at any point and seek to rectify the problem. History shows us that states seek to create order all the time. The Hague conventions (1899, 1907), Geneva conventions (1864, 1906, 1929, 1949), the Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928), the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament (1961-1969) leading to the creation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations (1986-1994) leading to the creation of the World Trade Organization are just a small subset of examples of order creating institutions that were negotiated without the impetus of a major power war.

Many more international conventions were organized to create rules of behavior for states

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<sup>39</sup> “The Covenant of the League of Nations,” 1924, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp).

<sup>40</sup> There was the additional temporal problem that was not considered when the rules were being created. Economic sanctions are a long term policy tool. If the aggressors can end their wars quickly, the economic pressure will not be able to affect their actions.

<sup>41</sup> Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, *FDR and the Creation of the U.N.* (Yale University Press, 2000).

to follow. They are ignored by the order formation literature because they have failed to produce a lasting result. Yet by that metric, most of the order-creating institutions made at “re-ordering” moments were likewise failures – notably the League of Nations. Moreover, many of the most durable international rules in effect today were created outside of such rare historical moments – notably the NPT and the WTO.

It could be argued that all of the changes to order described so far are examples of amendments to order. War, in the dominant conception of order, could function only as a mechanism of fundamental change, not an explanation of smaller scale change such as amendments. This interpretation, however, would not solve either of the problems of overreliance on war as a mechanism of change. War is not the only force that can destroy an existing order. The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the destruction of the Eastern regional order run by that state. This process did not require a war – or if proxy wars count, it required considerably more than one. New orders can also be created without great power war. Both the Western and the Eastern regional post-World War Two orders were created well after the re-ordering moment passed, as will be shown later in this section.

#### *Implications of Removing the Condition*

How would removing this condition affect the theorization of international order? First, states do not need to go through a cycle of global destruction to establish guidelines for easier interaction among themselves. This goes for both fundamental change and amendments to order. When states find the common interest for it, they can create a whole new order based on a new set of shared goals. Likewise, when states in an existing order find the agreement for it, they can amend an existing order. Neither process necessitates fighting a war. On the other hand, given this increased possibility for change, the preferences of great powers in the system become

considerably more important. Since order can be changed at any point and since the great powers have a disproportionate role in writing the rules of order, who the great powers are and what their preferences are become considerably more important.

Second, urgency does not necessarily drive the process of order creation. States can afford to wait for an improved bargaining position before considering specific amendments to order or the creation of brand new orders. This helps understand why many order changing projects have failed. Finally, removing the “re-ordering” condition also places greater emphasis on order maintenance. Since rules do not automatically survive from one major power war to the next, states have to constantly make decisions about which rules to keep, which to change, and when to add new rules. This process of change needs to be part of the conceptualization of order.

### *Post World War Two Order*

While it is conventional to discuss the international order that was created after World War Two and lasted through the Cold War until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there were actually three orders that existed in this time period: the global order, the Western regional order, and the Eastern regional order.<sup>42</sup> Only the global order, created and maintained by the two superpowers, originated at the “re-ordering” moment.<sup>43</sup> At the formation, this order was mostly comprised of the United Nations as a set of rules for collective security between states and the Bretton Woods agreement to govern the economic interactions of the world.<sup>44</sup> Representing the overlap in the preferences of the two superpowers for the global order, these institutions were

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<sup>42</sup> Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail”; Stewart Patrick, *The Best Laid Plans: The Origins of American Multilateralism and the Dawn of the Cold War* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008); Acharya, *The End of American World Order*.

<sup>43</sup> Britain was likewise an important actor in the initial negotiation of the rules of the global order; however, it quickly lost its ability to compete with the two superpowers and played only a marginal role in order maintenance. Robert M. Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America, 1944–1947* (Columbia University Press, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> The Soviet Union was, in fact, an active participant in the negotiation of the Bretton Woods agreement. Vladimir O. Pechatnov, “The Soviet Union and the Bretton Woods Conference,” in *Global Perspectives on the Bretton Woods Conference and the Post-War World Order*, ed. Giles Scott-Smith and J. Simon Rofe (Springer, 2017), 89–107.

meant to be a comprehensive guide of state behavior for the coming decades.

The opposing regional orders were created after the post war “re-ordering” moment has come and gone, in response to an unexpected shift in the security environment. The debate in Cold War historiography has gone through multiple iterations of placing the blame for the start of the Cold War on different sides of the conflict. Either Stalin’s aggressive policies forced the United States to organize Europe to contain the Soviet Union’s expansionism<sup>45</sup> or the American desire to expand its economic influence forced Stalin to consolidate control over Eastern Europe<sup>46</sup> or systemic forces lead to the inevitable conflict.<sup>47</sup> Regardless of how one characterizes the shift in the security environment, the conditions that lead to the creation of the regional orders developed after the “re-ordering” moment had passed.<sup>48</sup> And it was the superpower’s dissatisfaction with the global order created at the “re-ordering” moment that incentivized the formation of the regional orders.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the centerpiece and most prominent institution of the Western regional order, was not created until 1949. It was only created after the United States spent multiple years avoiding the creation of a regional order and incentivizing the European states to manage the increasing Soviet threat on their own.<sup>49</sup> The appeal of the Marshall Plan, which briefly preceded the Western regional order, was the limited and terminal American participation, and the requirement of European states to work as a unit to balance the

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<sup>45</sup> William McNeill, *America, Britain and Russia: Their Cooperation and Conflict 1941-1946* (Johnson Reprint Corp, 1953); Hugh Seton-Watson, *Neither War Nor Peace: The Struggle for Power in the Postwar World* (Praeger, 1960).

<sup>46</sup> William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1988).

<sup>47</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System,” *International Security* 10, no. 4 (1986): 99–142, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538951>.

<sup>48</sup> Patrick, *The Best Laid Plans*.

<sup>49</sup> Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO 1948: The Birth of the Transatlantic Alliance* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup> The goal of the United States was to avoid building a regional order. Only after all other options proved insufficient did the United States turn to order creation. This is certainly not the behavior of a state spurred by the urgency of a “re-ordering” moment to order formation.

The formation of the Eastern regional order was reactionary to the developments in the West. The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), established in 1949, was a reaction to the Marshall Plan and used to prevent Eastern European states from cultivating closer ties with Western Europe. The Warsaw Pact (1955) was a direct response to the policy of West German rearmament and the state’s admission into NATO.<sup>51</sup> Like its counterpart, the Eastern regional order was not born out of a post-war urgency to create order.

After the initial creation of the three distinct post-World War Two orders, all three continued to change to incorporate further rules throughout the Cold War. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe was added as a major pillar of the global order in 1975. However, the main changes to the global order came in the form of disarmament and arms limitation. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968), Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (1972), Nuclear Suppliers Group (1976), Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (1987) are just a small sample of rules created by the two superpowers to manage the spread of nuclear weapons during the Cold War. These rules could not have been included in the initial order formation since nuclear weapons were not as prevalent in 1945. However, the lack of a major power war in the 1970s and 1980s did not prevent the two superpowers from agreeing on a set of rules to govern state behavior. And nuclear weapons did not represent the only issue area where the two superpowers could agree to additional order formation. The Outer Space Treaty (1966) and the Biological Weapons Convention (1972) are other examples of unanticipated arenas where some

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<sup>50</sup> Benn Steil, *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Laurien Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: International Relations in Eastern Europe, 1955-1969* (Routledge, 2015).

rules to govern the interactions of states were welcomed.

These examples only account for the successful instances of order formation. There were, likewise, calls for more order that never came to fruition – none of which required a “re-ordering” moment. For example, in 1955, the Soviet Union proposed a “General European Treaty on Collective Security in Europe.” While the proposal was not accepted by the Western states, it provided an instance of order formation. Similar efforts later lead to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which did yield results.<sup>52</sup> Another example is the Action Plan for a Nuclear Weapon Free and Non-Violent World Order (1988) proposed by the Indian Prime Minister.

## **Necessary Condition #2: Declining Power Base**

### *Incentive for Fixed Binding International Order*

The second necessary condition, on which the dominant conception of order depends, is that the leading state rests on a declining power base. By virtue of their victory in the major power war, the winners have a power advantage over the losing states. Additionally, states that avoided fighting on their territory end the war with an advantage over states that need to reconstruct. The major power war, thus, creates a hierarchy among the belligerents with the offshore winners at the top.<sup>53</sup> The leading state is the state ending the war with the greatest power advantage.<sup>54</sup> However, this advantage is fleeting. As the less fortunate winners and especially the losers recover from the destruction of war, the relative power of the leading state will decrease sharply.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Crump.

<sup>53</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, “Negotiating ‘Order’ During Power Transitions,” in *Power in Transition: The Peaceful Change of International Order*, ed. Charles Kupchan et al. (United Nations University Press, 2001), 34–67; Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*.

<sup>54</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*.

<sup>55</sup> Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*; Patrick, *The Best Laid Plans*; David A. Lake, “International Economic Structures and American Foreign Economic Policy, 1887-1934,” *World Politics* 35, no. 4 (1983): 517–43,

Incorporating this condition into the foundation of international order provides the leading state with an incentive to create a fixed order. The leading state is the most powerful state at the “re-ordering” moment. It, therefore, has the greatest influence over the terms of the new order. However, it is also at its most powerful position at the “re-ordering” moment, and its power will only decline in the future. In any subsequent negotiations over the rules of order, the leading state will have to give up its valuable position and accept rules that are closer to the interests of other states. Having attained the most profitable set of rules it can at the “re-ordering” moment, the leading states is incentivized to preserve it by setting the new order in stone. It creates a fixed order, writing the bargain over international order into institutions that have very little potential for rule change.<sup>56</sup> This lack of change in the order preserves the beneficial rules the leading state negotiated at the zenith of its power, even as its bargaining advantage recedes.

#### *Faulty Foundation*

Using this necessary condition as a foundation for international order is problematic both because decline of the leading states is not assured and because such a decline would not necessarily provide the incentives for a fixed order. At the “re-ordering moment”, there is reason to expect that the leading state will actually be increasing in power. If the “re-ordering” moment condition is removed, and order can be created at any point in time, it becomes impossible to predict the power trajectory of the leading state. Finally, even if the leading state is in inevitable decline when the rules of order are being negotiated, it still might not want to “lock-in” the

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<https://doi.org/10.2307/2010388>; Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; Charles P. Kindleberger, “Dominance and Leadership in the International Economy: Exploitation, Public Goods, and Free Rides,” *International Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1981): 242–54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600355>; Stephen D. Krasner, “State Power and the Structure of International Trade,” *World Politics* 28, no. 3 (1976): 317–47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009974>.

<sup>56</sup> Lascurettes, *Orders of Exclusion*; Goh, *The Struggle for Order*; Ikenberry, *After Victory*.



resulting bargain.<sup>57</sup> The incentive to build a fixed order – one where amendments to order are exceedingly rare – does not emerge, nor does the condition supposedly necessitating the decision in the first place.

At the “re-ordering” moment, the power trajectory of the leading state is highly contingent on the leading state’s strategy for engaging with the rest of the world. The leading state faces eventual relative decline only if it isolates itself from the world. In relative terms, the states recovering from the war will grow faster than the leading state. This stems from the differential growth rates of developed states compared to states undergoing industrialization or recovering industry destroyed by war.<sup>58</sup> If the leading state isolates itself from the recovery process, these differential growth rates spell relative decline for the leading state.

However, the leading state can – and most frequently does – engage with the world recovering from the major power war. The leading state can expropriate the losing states. This will lead to an immediate increase in relative power.<sup>59</sup> If that option is unattractive, the leading state can assist the states recovering from the war. Structuring post-war assistance to benefit the leading states can also prevent the leading state’s relative decline. For example, the leading state can provide the recovering states with loans to purchase necessary products from the leading state’s domestic market, thereby channeling a large portion of the benefits to its own economy.<sup>60</sup> Finally, the leading state can use the “re-ordering” moment to construct an order which skews the distribution of gains towards the leading state – precisely the strategy the dominant

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<sup>57</sup> Scholars have questioned this link from the perspective that “locking-in” an international order in institutions is not possible – most notably: Schweller, “The Problem of International Order Revisited.” The argument in this article is that, regardless of whether it is possible or not, locking-in the bargain is not *desirable* for the leading state.

<sup>58</sup> Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962); Karen A. Rasler and William R. Thompson, *The Great Powers and Global Struggle, 1490-1990* (University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>59</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*.

<sup>60</sup> This is what the Marshall Plan did for the United States. Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

conception of order expects the leading state to pick. Such a strategy would likewise circumvent the presumed relative decline of the leading state. Given the particularities of reconstruction after major power wars, the leading state is in a position to benefit greatly from the war's aftermath, maintaining or even increasing its power. While eventually decline will come, as historically no state has managed to escape it, when decline comes is highly dependent on the leading state's strategy.

If the "re-ordering" moment assumption is removed, and order can be created at any point in time, it becomes impossible to predict where a state will be on its power trajectory. The leading state could attempt to build order only when it is at the zenith of its power to maximize its bargaining advantage. Trouble is, no one knows how to figure out if a state has hit the flat of its growth potential.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, there are considerable domestic political pressures for states to err on the side of expecting continued growth.<sup>62</sup> Even with the full benefit of hindsight, historians cannot pinpoint when specifically powerful states started to decline. This variable is generally measured in decades or centuries. An instance of order formation, on average, takes less than a century.

The timing of order formation is not solely in the hands of the leading state. If order formation is conceptualized as a negotiation between a very powerful and multiple weaker states – as is stipulated by the next necessary condition – the decision to come to the bargaining table is a mutual one. The issue area in need of some additional rules might be too pressing to wait

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<sup>61</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton University Press, 1988); Charles F. Doran, *The Politics of Assimilation: Hegemony and Its Aftermath* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

<sup>62</sup> Hendrik Spruyt, *Ending Empire: Contested Sovereignty and Territorial Partition* (Cornell University Press, 2005); Mark Randal Brawley, *Afterglow Or Adjustment?: Domestic Institutions and Responses to Overstretch* (Columbia University Press, 1999); Charles Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1994); Judith Goldstein, *Ideas, Interests, and American Trade Policy* (Cornell University Press, 1993); Miles Kahler, *Decolonization in Britain and France: The Domestic Consequences of International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

requiring the leading state to negotiate before it reaches the height of its power. Conversely, the timing might permit some leniency allowing the weaker states to wait for the leading state to decline. Without the “re-ordering” moment urging states to negotiate immediately after the great power war, order formation can take place when the leading state is at any point on its power trajectory. And without facing inevitable decline, the leading state does not have the incentive to create a fixed international order.

Finally, even if the leading state is creating order at the “re-ordering” moment and is sitting on a declining power base, it might still not want to create a fixed order. The rules created by the leading state remain beneficial so long as international environment remains unchanged. But order is meant to be a long-term endeavor. And states do not have crystal balls. They cannot anticipate every possible future shock and write it into the rules. When the strategic environment changes, the same rules that were beneficial yesterday might become constraining today.<sup>63</sup> Even under the best circumstances, states do not have strong incentives to create a fixed order.

#### *Implications of Removing the Condition*

The leading state can expect its power and leverage over weaker states to change over time. It could find itself in a position to extract more concessions from weaker states than at the “re-ordering” moment. Removing the declining power base condition from theorization of international order means leading states are not faced with incentives to build a fixed order. This reintroduces change back into international order. Without this structural backbone removing the possibility of amendments to order, a conception of international order can take a different value on the flexibility spectrum.

#### *Post World War Two Order*

Since the dominant conception of order assumes only one leading state, even among a

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<sup>63</sup> The United States found itself in such a bind (pun intended) with the Iraq War. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*.

group of great powers jointly creating order, the United States is considered to be the leading state for both the Western regional order and the global order created after World War Two. The Soviet Union was the leading state in the Eastern regional order.

The United States emerged from World War Two more powerful than it has ever been, and certainly in a far more advantageous position than the rest of the states involved in the fighting. It managed to avoid the war for the first two years of the conflict, profiteering from being a neutral country in the meantime.<sup>64</sup> After it joined the war effort, it kept the battlefield away from the homeland, with the exception of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The domestic economy enjoyed a great boost from the increased military production without having to sacrifice most of the civilian production as the other belligerents had to.<sup>65</sup> While its allies ended the war with empty coffers, almost entirely devoid of foreign reserves, and in need of considerable reconstruction, the United States was fully capable of taking advantage of the new economic opportunities that stemmed from the destruction of the Axis countries.<sup>66</sup>

The war did make the United States the most powerful state in the international system, accounting for almost half of the gross world product. And as per the declining power base condition this boost in power was temporary. Eventually the United States reverted to its pre-war ranking among the other powers – still the most powerful state in the system but by a considerably lower margin. The United States share of world product stabilized around 20-25 percent. However, the expected decline did not start until the mid 1950s and most of it occurred in the mid 1960s<sup>67</sup>. At the end of 1945, at the “re-ordering” moment, the United States was still

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Domke, *Trading with the Enemy in World War II*. (Central Book Co., 1943).

<sup>65</sup> Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930's* (Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>66</sup> Fred L. Block, *The Origins of International Economic Disorder: A Study of United States International Monetary Policy from World War II to the Present* (University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>67</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?,” *Foreign Affairs* 67, no. 2 (1988): 76–96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20043774>.

in the upswing of its power trajectory.<sup>68</sup> Thus, at least the formation of the global post World War Two order occurred while the United States was not sitting on a declining power base. Had it waited even half a decade more, it could have gotten a better bargain over the rules of the global order.

As was shown in the assessment of the “re-ordering” moment condition earlier, successful moments of order change occurred in 1949, 1968, 1972, 1975, 1976, and 1987. For the United States to have constantly been at the zenith of its power and on a declining power trajectory at each of these moments, it would have had to be in continued decline from the end of World War Two through the end of the Cold War. That argument is hard to sustain given that decline is a relative measure and to maintain continued decline with an economy growing in absolute terms would require some other states to constantly grow faster than the United States.

The other way to consider the question of decline is from the perspective that power is nearly impossible to measure (especially correctly)<sup>69</sup> and what really matters is the perception of decline by the leading state. The United States has gone through five cycles of fear of relative power decline between 1945 and 1991 – cycle implying periods of rise along with periods of decline.<sup>70</sup> Using this approach likewise leads to the conclusion that the leading state creates order regardless of its position on the power trajectory.

Finally, addressing the idea that states do not have crystal balls and cannot predict shocks to the international system, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the greatest increase in relative power the United States has ever seen. This one event propelled the country to unipolarity. Even if the United States was sitting on a declining power base in 1945, having rules

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<sup>68</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 167.

<sup>69</sup> Joseph S. Nye, “The Changing Nature of World Power,” *Political Science Quarterly* 105, no. 2 (1990): 177–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2151022>.

<sup>70</sup> Huntington, “The U.S.: Decline or Renewal?”

negotiated with the Soviet Union in 1945 set in stone would certainly not have looked attractive to the United States in 1991.

A similar picture of growth in power at the “re-ordering” moment seems to hold true for the Soviet Union. While it ended World War Two in considerable disarray, the other members of the Eastern regional order were likewise severely damaged by the war. The Soviet Union, however, had the large advantage of its size. The Soviet economy experienced considerable growth through the 1950s, outstripping the other states in the Eastern Europe.<sup>71</sup> When the Eastern regional order was being formed, the Soviet Union was definitely not sitting on a declining power base.

### **Necessary Condition #3: Power of Weak States**

#### *Incentive for Fixed Binding International Order*

The third necessary condition, on which the dominant conception of order depends, is that the weaker states in the international system hold leverage over the terms of the order. Despite not having the capabilities to affect the bargaining at the negotiating table, the weaker states can still influence the rules of the new order because the leading state needs them to join. If no one agrees to follow the rules, the new order cannot serve its purpose. And if the terms of the order offered to the weaker states are not attractive enough, they will not join.<sup>72</sup> They will be too afraid of being expropriated or inadequately protected and will, therefore, chose to ignore the leading state’s attempts at order formation.

Using this condition as a foundation for international order gives the leading state a strong incentive to credibly restrain its own power. In general, no state wishes to limit its own

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<sup>71</sup> Robert C. Allen, “The Rise and Decline of the Soviet Economy,” *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue Canadienne d’Economie* 34, no. 4 (2001): 859–81.

<sup>72</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*; Jones, *China’s Challenge to Liberal Norms*; Ian Clark, *Hegemony in International Society* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*.

power and influence. For a state that has just fought a war to win its dominance, giving up power is even more antithetical to its goals. However, having the privilege of writing the rules of a new order comes with a steep price, especially since the rules of the order are unlikely to be amended. To co-opt the weaker states into a fixed order, the leading state needs to make the order bargain marginally more attractive.<sup>73</sup> The leading state creates rules restraining the arbitrary use of its power and credibly commits to be bound by the rules of the order.<sup>74</sup>

### *Faulty Foundation*

Building on the foundation of this necessary condition is problematic because it misconceptualizes the “choice” of the weaker states. If order is being constructed at a “re-ordering” moment, all states are deciding between order and a lack of order. With the old order destroyed by war, if the states do not agree on a new one, they will have to exist without any rules governing their interactions.<sup>75</sup> As was discussed in the definition section, order is always preferable to a lack of order. Without rules regulating behavior, it is much easier for states to stumble into unwanted wars. An unattractive order without any protections for weaker states still provides the benefit of predictability.<sup>76</sup> Placed in this context, the choice before weaker states is an easy one – they accept any order provided. This is not to say that the weaker states will not negotiate for any concessions they can get, only that they do not have any inherent bargaining leverage stemming from their ability to spoil the creation of order.

More practically, weaker states join an order for protection from threats.<sup>77</sup> This could be a security threat of conquest by a superpower, an economic threat of the imposition of unequal trade relations, an existential threat of a nuclear accident, etc. And it is up to the leading state to

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<sup>73</sup> Goh, *The Struggle for Order*.

<sup>74</sup> Patrick, *The Best Laid Plans*.

<sup>75</sup> Phillips, *War, Religion and Empire*.

<sup>76</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*.

<sup>77</sup> Lascurettes, *Orders of Exclusion*.

provide protection to the weaker states of the order. The more the weaker states are afraid of the threat, the less leverage they have over how the leading state protects them.<sup>78</sup> This places the leverage firmly with the leading state, as it can credibly threaten to exclude a weaker state from the protection of the order. Since some protection is better than no protection, the weaker states are yet again in a position where a less attractive order is still more beneficial than a lack of order. This varies with how afraid the weaker states are of the threat from which the order protects them. The greater the threat, the less of a voice the weaker states have.

Additionally, not all states even get the nominal choice of joining a specific order. By virtue of their strategic location, access to strategic resources, or symbolic importance, some states are forced to join an order that was chosen for them.<sup>79</sup> It is hard to argue that West Germany or Japan had the option of not joining the Western order being created by the United States to conduct the Cold War. Similarly, it is impossible to see Poland or East Germany having a choice to not join the Eastern order being created by the Soviet Union. Some weaker states are simply too important – not for their military capabilities, but for their location or access to industrial resources – for leading states to allow them to make their own independent choices.

Outside of “re-ordering” moments, the necessary condition that weak states still have power to affect the terms of order can be restated to stem from their ability to exit the order and potentially join a different one.<sup>80</sup> This choice to leave an order provides weaker states with leverage and therefore incentivizes the leading state to consider the interests of the weak states in

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<sup>78</sup> James D. Morrow, “Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances,” *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (1991): 904–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111499>; Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>79</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>80</sup> During the “re-ordering” moment, leaving the previous order is not a relevant question and the war destroyed the previous order.



the maintenance of order.<sup>81</sup> This version of the condition is still problematic. When opposing orders exist in the same international system, they tend to follow different ideological commitments<sup>82</sup>: fascism and liberalism, communism and free market, authoritarianism and democracy. For some states, the ideological costs of switching can be too prohibitive to ever exercise their exit option, no matter how onerous their current order might become. And, yet again, some weaker states are simply not given the choice to exercise their exit option. When states do try to leave an order, the leading state can use military means to keep them in the order. In an ironic twist, scholars of legitimacy as it relates to order formation call this discipline, which is an acceptable and legitimate option available to leading states to correct the actions of the weaker states in their order.<sup>83</sup> Such discipline removes the exit option from weaker states and with it the potential leverage over the leading state.

#### *Implications of Removing the Condition*

Removing the power of weak states condition from theorization of international order leads to the implication that the leading state does not have any incentive to restrain the arbitrary use of its power or to commit to following the rules of the order. In other words, leading states do not have reason to build binding orders. There is no need to pay such a high price for the participation of weaker states, when the same can be achieved much cheaper. Weaker states do not have any inherent leverage to extract concessions from the leading state. They cannot force the leading state to follow the rules of the order when this is inconvenient for the leading state. The weaker states, of course, still attempt to gain the most concessions in negotiations over the rules of order. They attempt to use the existing rules to maximize the advantages they get from

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<sup>81</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Harvard University Press, 1970).

<sup>82</sup> Lascurettes, *Orders of Exclusion*.

<sup>83</sup> Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*; Goh, *The Struggle for Order*; Phillips, *War, Religion and Empire*.

the order. But they do not have any inherent leverage to actually constrain the leading state.

A second implication is that the bargaining strength of the weaker states within the order varies with the extent of the external threat from which the order is protecting them. The greater the threat, the more unrestrained the leading state can be with the weaker states in its order. Since the weaker states can be prevented from defecting, and since they still need the protection from the leading state, the leading state actually gains more leverage over the weaker states as the external threat gains potency. When the weaker states feel most threatened, they have least amount of voice in how they are protected against the threat.

#### *Post World War Two Order*

The construction of the post Cold War global order began while World War Two was still raging on. In the United States, President Roosevelt wanted to make sure that the mistakes of the past were not repeated for a third time. He wanted a way to maintain peace, in a more realistic manner than the idealistic League of Nations.<sup>84</sup> While the ideas for such a possibility were being developed in the United States, other states were in some part bribed and in some part coerced into accepting whatever the United States developed.

Part of the Lend-Lease program, which provided billions of dollars of equipment for the allied war effort to over 30 countries, was the expectation that the repayment for this assistance would come in the form of policy concessions. States signing on to this agreement consented to a “consideration” of joining the new international order in the post war world.<sup>85</sup> To be invited to the Conference where the structure of this new order would be discussed, weaker states were required to make further policy concessions. They had to give up their neutrality in World War

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<sup>84</sup> Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations* (Basic Books, 2009).

<sup>85</sup> Michael Holm, *The Marshall Plan: A New Deal For Europe* (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

Two and declare war on Germany.<sup>86</sup> And this only bought states participation, not much more in the creation of the United Nations.

The main structure and most of the details of what the new global order would look like were negotiated by the United States, Soviet Union and Britain, without the input of other states who would ultimately participate in it. When the discussion was opened up to the other states at the San Francisco conference, the focus of the American delegation was to ensure the final result pleased both of the domestic political parties without losing the Soviet participation.<sup>87</sup> Dealing with the weaker states was an inconvenience that occasionally threatened to derail the American efforts. Weaker states were placated where possible without receiving major concessions. And this was well appreciated by the weaker states. For example, the Latin American voting bloc, which made up almost half of all states attending the conference, could have used its size to great leverage at the Conference. However, their position was that they preferred order to a lack of order and were afraid that if they pressed for concessions, the United States would lose interest in creating international order.<sup>88</sup> Most of the weaker states at the conference focused on letting the leading state get what it wanted to ensure that order would still be created.

The Western regional order and the Eastern regional order that characterized the Cold War are frequently seen as prototypical examples of opposing styles of empire management. The Soviet Union imposed empire on its sphere of influence coercively changing all the details of the weaker states to fit its interests, while the United States was invited to build an empire in Europe with the consent and willing participation of the weaker states.<sup>89</sup> However, when considering

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<sup>86</sup> Douglas Brinkley and David R. Facey-Crowther, *The Atlantic Charter* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 1994).

<sup>87</sup> Schlesinger, *Act of Creation*.

<sup>88</sup> Schlesinger.

<sup>89</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Clarendon Press, 1997); Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952," *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3 (1986): 263-77.

order formation, the distinction does not seem so clear cut. Both leading states impelled the weaker states in their sphere of influence to undergo changes to better fit the leading state's version of order.

In order to maintain the productivity of the United States economy after the war ended, the United States needed foreign markets to absorb American goods. This requirement ran contrary to the bilateral payment and trading systems maintained by Germany and Japan and the preferential access to colonies maintained by Britain.<sup>90</sup> Changes to the economic structures of these weaker states were hardly voluntary for Germany and Japan and severely coerced for Britain. At the same time, at the end of World War Two many Western European states had communist parties vying for control of the government. The possibility of communist revolutions spreading westward was not negligible, and if successful would limit the open free trade economic system the United States was developing. In response, the United States instituted the Truman doctrine to provide overwhelming financial support to prevent states from becoming communist. While the United States did not use its own tanks to ensure that Greece did not turn red, it greatly assisted the Greek army to reach that goal.<sup>91</sup>

The Soviet Union, likewise, encouraged states to turn towards communist revolutions. Where the communist parties could win elections (Bulgaria, Romania) or held power by virtue of liberating their state from Nazi occupation (Albania, Yugoslavia)<sup>92</sup>, the Soviet empire was not nearly as imposing at the moment of order formation. In other states, the Soviet Union assisted local parties in ensuring an outcome that was more preferential to them. While the means of accomplishing goals between the leading states were different, the process was remarkably

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<sup>90</sup> Block, *The Origins of International Economic Disorder*.

<sup>91</sup> Donald Sassoon, "The Rise and Fall of West European Communism 1939-48," *Contemporary European History* 1, no. 2 (1992): 139-69.

<sup>92</sup> Sassoon.

similar.

When it came to the question of weaker states exiting from the regional order, both leading states had the same response – “discipline”. For the Soviet Union, this was the intervention in Hungary in 1956, at the request of the Hungarian government to restore order when it looked like the protestors were close to overthrowing the government. Interestingly, the Soviet Union had also refrained from interfering in Poland in the same year despite the urging of East Germany and Czechoslovakia.<sup>93</sup> The Polish government handled the situation internally, thus there was no need for discipline. The United States preferred covert interventions and sponsoring of coups to using tanks, but this leading state likewise engaged in multiple instances of “discipline” to prevent weaker states from leaving the regional order. It sponsored coups in Guatemala in 1954, Brazil in 1964, Dominican Republic in 1961, Bolivia in 1971, several failed attempts in Cuba, and supported many other groups in fighting anti-communist forces. In both regional orders, weaker states were not given the option to leave and defect to the other side; thus, they did not have such an opportunity to use as leverage.

### **A Different Foundation for International Order**

The dominant conception of order claims that states build order at the end of major power wars. Given the conditions that appear at such moments, namely the declining power base of the leading state and the unexpected leverage of weaker states, states want to build a fixed binding international order. Sometimes these efforts succeed; sometimes they fail. But a fixed, binding international order is the ideal towards which states aim.

A fixed binding international order is highly resistant to change. The only way to destroy the order is through a major power war. One of the central goals of the order is to prevent another major power war. While this is a central goal of most international orders, as major

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<sup>93</sup> Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered*.

power wars are highly destructive, in this dominant conception of order this goal has a second effect. It doesn't only ensure peace for the states of the order; it also prevents fundamental change of the order. This is particularly relevant in a world of nuclear weapons, which makes major power war and therefore fundamental change, according to this concept of order, highly improbable.

Additionally, a fixed binding international order is structured to preclude amendments to order. Having created the most favorable set of rules possible, the leading state faces a situation where each subsequent renegotiation will leave it worse off. To maintain the existing bargain, the leading state needs the rules of order to remain unchanged. It, thus, builds a fixed order. The price for a fixed order, what it takes to get weaker states to join an order they will not be able to change, is a binding order. The leading state has to credibly commit to be restrained by the rules of the order even when such rules interfere with its short-term interests. It is a steep price to pay, but it ensures that the favorable set of rules remains indefinitely, as the potential for amending the order is removed. This is particularly relevant in an order created by a liberal democracy, which makes commitments to both keeping the order fixed and binding more credible, and therefore, according to this concept of order, least likely to be amended.

However, all three conditions that give rise to the dominant conception of order are flawed. Great power war is not the only mechanism of order change. Rules can be abandoned without a war to destroy them. Rules can also be created without the impetus of a great power war. Leading states do not only create order when they are at the zenith of their power and are facing inevitable decline. States can create order whenever there is interest, and therefore at any point in their power trajectory. Nothing specifically pushes states into building fixed orders. States can leave room for themselves to increase in power and bargain for a better set of rules in

the future. Weak states do not have unexpected leverage over the rules of order. Since any order is better than a lack of order, weaker states join any order the leading state happens to build. They cannot force the leading state to pay the high price of making an order binding on the leading state.

Having removed the faulty foundations for international order, what are we left to build on?

Order is created through a bargaining process, with the most powerful states writing the rules for the rest. As with any other negotiating process, agreement is easier to forge among smaller groups.<sup>94</sup> Agreement is, likewise, facilitated by shared worldviews among the states creating the order. A large collection of states with disparate worldviews will find fewer areas of overlap in their beliefs about what an ideal order would look like. The lowest common denominator of what the rule-writers can agree on becomes the shared goals of the order. These shared goals or purpose of the order is translated into desired behaviors for states to adopt in their interactions.<sup>95</sup> This shared foundation or purpose of the order is translated into rules of behavior for states to follow.

The rules of order are subject to two types of change. Fundamental change occurs when the existing rules are destroyed and a new set of rules is created to replace the old. Amendments to the order are more modest changes that adapt an order to new circumstances without rewriting it anew. Since the conditions preventing change to order have been removed, it becomes important to distinguish between these different types of change. Amendments to order are made by the same states that are responsible for writing the order in the first place. They follow the same shared goals of the order, but affect how those shared goals are translated into desired

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<sup>94</sup> Kenneth A. Oye, "Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies," *World Politics* 38, no. 1 (1985): 1–24.

<sup>95</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*; Goh, *The Struggle for Order*; Phillips, *War, Religion and Empire*.

behaviors. This could include the creation of new rules to cover issue areas where cooperation did not previously exist, the alteration of existing rules, or the abandonment of rules that no longer serve the interests of the rule-writers. Fundamental change requires a change to the shared goals of the order. At this point, the rule-writers start building something distinct from what was being built previously. Importantly, this process does not mean that all the rules of the previous order are removed and replaced by an entirely new set of rules. Some rules serve multiple purposes and fit with multiple possible goals of order. However, the fact that some rules are carried over from one order to the next does not mean that the order remains unchanged. What matters is the change in the shared goals of the order, when they change a fundamental change in order follows.

The driver of amendments to order is likely the changing interests of the states writing the rules, which are in turn likely responding to shifting world conditions. For example, as part of the post-World War Two global order states negotiated a monetary policy where each state's currency was pegged to gold. However, in the two decades that followed, the global conditions changed, most spectacularly in the start of the Cold War and the subsequent more expansive global aims of the United States. A fixed monetary order prevented the United States from conducting the Cold War; this change in the interests of the United States led to significant rule changes in the Bretton Woods system.<sup>96</sup> Ultimately, the whole system was abandoned. Similarly, the amendment to the post-World War Two global order in the form of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was a response to the changing interests of the rule-writers. When the global order was created, nuclear weapons were not very prevalent. However, when the significant changes they brought to international politics were understood and the spread of such weapons became a real threat, states amended the order to adjust to new circumstances.

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<sup>96</sup> Block, *The Origins of International Economic Disorder*.



The drivers of fundamental change have to be factors that affect the shared goals of the order. This could stem from a change in the membership of the states writing the rules of the order or from a change in the worldview of a rule-writer. Each affects the lowest common denominator of what the states writing the order can agree on, and therefore the shared goals of the order. Neither factor is specifically tied to major power war; however, both can coincide with it, explaining the development of the “re-ordering” moment condition.

An increase, decrease, or change in the ranks of great powers transforms the composition of states responsible for the creation and maintenance of order. When the composition of any group is altered, the lowest common denominator of what the group can agree on shifts as well. In this case, a change in the membership of the rule-writers changes the shared goals of the order leading to the construction of a fundamentally different order going forward. An increase in the number of states creating order, all else being equal, is likely to allow for less agreement over what the order should be. A decrease in the number of states creating order, all else being equal, is likely to lead to more agreement. Order created by a unipole faces the least amount of obstacles to generating shared goals; it is a lot easier for a state to agree with itself than with other states. A change in the ranks of great powers does tend to coincide with major power war. It is the most likely way for a state to lose a considerable amount of power quickly and the easiest way for a rising power to prove itself. However, war is not the only method by which great powers are born or die. The unification of smaller states can propel the unified state towards great power status. The collapse of the Soviet Union also shows that there are (more or less) peaceful ways for the international system to transform.

The other factor that can lead to a change in the shared goals of an order is a change in the worldview of one of the rule-writers. Due to a change in leadership, a revolution, or a shift in

the international environment, a state can alter how it approaches the world. This will in turn modify the lowest common denominator of what the rule-writers can agree on, change the shared goals of the order, and fundamentally change the order. The state experiencing a change in worldview is unlikely to find the existing order amenable to its transformed interests. It is likely to withdraw from the existing institutions and rules of order and, if it chooses, structure an alternative set of rules. This process can be a precursor to major power war. For example, Hitler's rise to power shifted the German approach to order and resulted in the withdrawal from the existing rules and imposing a new set of rules onto its neighbors. However, the causal flow here is reversed from the "re-ordering" moment assumption. A change in the order preceded the war; it was not caused by it.

Additionally, a fundamental change occurs each time a new order is created where there was a lack of order previously, such as a great power creating a new regional order. Nothing had to be destroyed, yet a new set of rule-writers agreed on a new set of shared goals and translated them into desired behaviors. This fits with the idea of a change in membership of the rule-writers. The new order went from having zero rule-writes to more than zero. Both the regional orders built in the 1950s are examples of such fundamental change. Neither of the superpowers could convince the other of what the idea version of order should be – largely due to a difference in worldview – and instead created order with a smaller set of states where agreement on shared goals was easier to find.

There are two situations when a change in the membership of rule-writers or a change in the worldview of a rule-writer does not affect the shared goals of the order, and thus does not lead to fundamental change. The first is when the rules of the order are so sparse that any state with any worldview would still agree to it. In this case changing the composition of rule-writers

or their approach to the world, would not shift the already very minimal shared goals. The other possibility is that the change in membership or worldview leads to the exact same lowest common denominator in the agreement of the rule-writers. This seems to be possible only theoretically, as states with similar worldviews still approach order construction with different interests.

Furthermore, when a large potential for change is introduced into the order, order maintenance becomes a much larger task for the order. Order maintenance refers to the process of ensuring states follow the rules of the order. This includes the process of updating the order to new circumstances, as this makes rules more likely to be followed. States have to frequently reappraise the value of the existing rules and determine when they need to create, change, or remove the rules. In some respects, this allows for considerable continuity in order. Some rules remain because they continue to be beneficial. Sometimes rules are linked together in bargains, with less favorable rules enduring because the linked rules are too beneficial to give up. Many rules persist by inertia. Order has many rules, and states cannot constantly reassess the value of each individual rule. The rules remain unchanged until it becomes clear to the rule-writers that a specific rule is problematic. Finally, while the potential to change rules is ever-present, the success of a venture to change the rules of order is not guaranteed. Amending the rules of order requires garnering the support of all the rule-writers for the change, which can be a hard task.

An important factor that affects order maintenance is whether the rule-writers follow the rules of the order – whether the order is binding or not. This has to do with the cost of enforcing the rules. If the leading state(s) of an order forces itself to follow the rules even when they conflict with its short-term interests, the rest of the states won't expect much leniency if they break the rules. When the leading state has to leave short-term gains on the table, so do the

weaker states. On the other hand, if the leading state flouts the rules regularly, other states can attempt to follow suit. It is by no means guaranteed that the leading state will let weaker states get away with rule violations, but the expectation of stringency is not the same as in a binding order. At the same time, as was discussed earlier, binding an order is a very high price for states to pay. Mostly, it seems not worth the cost reduction in order maintenance. But this does not mean that the leader will want to break the rules all the time. Sometimes the short-term gains from breaking a specific rule are too small to overcome the increase in the cost of order maintenance. It seems that a leading state would prefer not to make this decision a priori by binding an order or by ensuring that an order is completely unbound. They will want to maintain flexibility and decide when breaking the rules is warranted by the situation.

Lastly, order maintenance is influenced by the size of the order and the extent to which the weaker states find the rules of the order beneficial to them. As was discussed earlier, weaker states do not have very attractive options when it comes to order formation. They do not have the capabilities to affect change within an order. Yet having an order is markedly better than a lack of order, consequently weaker states join even orders that are deeply unfavorable to them. Therefore, joining a specific order cannot be interpreted as a sign of agreement with the rules of the order. An implication of this is that the weaker states have reason to follow the rules of the order selectively, or to test the extent to which they can break certain rules which are not beneficial to them. This naturally impacts the cost of order maintenance. If weaker states are in an order with rules deeply unfavorable to them, the leading state will need to continually enforce those rules, as the weaker states constantly have reason to break them. Incidentally, this does not necessarily mean the leading state has to rely on coercion. States can enforce the rules through other mechanisms, like following the established conflict resolution rules of the order. Either

way, constant enforcement gets expensive. Smaller orders where the weaker states find most of the rules beneficial are easier to maintain. Large orders with diverse membership quickly reveal where the weaker states agree on the shared goals of the order with the leading state and where they disagree.

## **Conclusion**

The dominant conception of order provides us with faulty foundations on which to build international order. Each of the three necessary conditions for the creation of a fixed binding international order is problematic in its own right. But taken together they are most problematic in that they cannot explain change. The most important questions about the current international order are all centered on change. Why is the order in trouble and where is the international order heading are both questions of transformation. They can only be answered from an understanding of order that allows for change. A fixed binding international order simply cannot explain what is going on in the world today.

Removing these faulty foundations from our understanding of international order allows for a more flexible version of order. Making this switch already provides for some implications for international politics. The first is that major power war is not necessary for order to change. Amendments to order can be made whenever it is in the interest of the states writing the rules. Nor is great power war necessary for fundamental change of order, which means that the current global order is not necessarily the end of history. This does mean that the rise of China will necessitate a fundamental shift in the global order. When China reaches parity with the United States, the number of states that have the privilege of writing the rules of the global order will increase by one. The new global order will contain only the rules where the United States and China can find shared agreement. China can, likewise, build a new regional order without first

having to fight a war with the United States.

The second implication is that the more articulated the Chinese regional order becomes, the less restrained the United States can become in its arbitrary use of power towards weaker allies. Those states that find Chinese leadership unattractive, will seek protection in the order lead by the United States. The larger the Chinese regional order gets and the more threatening it seems, the more the weaker states will rely on the United States, the less their interests will matter in how the United States chooses to protect them. The same holds for the Chinese regional order. The greater the division between the Chinese-lead regional order and the US regional order, the less restrained China can become with its weaker allies.

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