

The University of Reading

IS GLOBAL ORDER DYSFUNCTIONAL?

*An analysis of UN General Assembly speeches
on behalf of the members of the G20*

Jonathan Engerer

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Graduate Institute for Politics and International Studies

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Declaration of original authorship

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Jonathan Engerer

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Abstract

It is widely argued that global order is experiencing some form of crisis. In such a context, this dissertation investigates whether contemporary order is dysfunctional, addressing a notable gap in scholarship on the functionality, or dysfunctionality, of order. To this end, the study advances a functionalist framework through which to understand the concept of global order, structured upon ordering principles and aspirational principles, denoting the evaluative criteria of buy-in and responsiveness as a means to assess dysfunctionality.

Through content analysis of 332 speeches at the UN General Assembly (from 1990–2022) by the members of the G20, the study finds that global order is partially dysfunctional. While G20 members consistently affirm support for the principles of order, demonstrating strong buy-in, they express negative assessments regarding responsiveness: a responsiveness deficit. I argue that government expectations are not being met, suggesting that orthodox analysis confuses dissatisfaction with contestation. However, my findings sustain previous research emphasising the implications of a politically fragmented international society.

I propose three potential explanations for this responsiveness deficit. Firstly, that government expectations are simply too high. Secondly, status-based competition and increasingly antagonistic relations amongst key stakeholders cause a crisis of coercion. Thirdly, I cite criticism regarding the UN Security Council's lack of representativeness and responsiveness which are emblematic of such inequality of status – a crisis of integrity. Crucially however, I underscore that this is not a crisis of order, but a crisis that has been confined within the parameters of order.

This thesis registers several contributions to the field. Notably representing an initial foray into the topic of functionality; demonstrating the value of studying political discourse, particularly UNGA speeches, to assess government perspectives on global order; illustrating the active debate amongst governments on the state of order; and producing a substantial body of evidence complementing previous research.

Acknowledgements

My interest in international politics began as a child, when I stumbled upon a section in an encyclopaedia on the United Nations. After so many pages dedicated to wars and conquests, along came a photo of peacekeepers, the Blue Helmets. Here was an institution that represented peace and hope, and at least in my mind at the time I reduced this to a question of good and bad. This was the seed that would blossom into my academic interest in questions of global order, alongside my diplomatic career. No doubt a sentiment felt by many, as the years went by it felt increasingly as if something in international politics was broken, something wasn't quite right.

Compared to the scholarly knowledge already generated by the names cited throughout the study, this research represents a humble offering. Nonetheless, I am confident that my research contributes to literature on global order substantially. I am privileged to be in a position to make such a contribution, acutely aware that this is an opportunity not available to so many people around the world.

A sometimes lonely and frustrating endeavour, this project would not have been possible without valuable help and support. I wish to thank my primary and secondary supervisors, Sarah von Billerbeck and Dominik Zaum for their priceless insight and guidance in the interests of a more targeted, rounded, and mature study, as well as Martin Binder as my initial supervisor who helped me to see through the noise, arriving at a viable foundation for this study. I thank Alan Cromartie, Joseph O'Mahoney, and Jonathan Golub for providing me with the tools to conduct this research. I wish to also thank all the administrative staff at the University of Reading.

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List of Abbreviations

AI:	Artificial Intelligence
BRICS:	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (emerging powers grouping)
EU:	European Union
FAO:	Food and Agriculture Organization
G20:	Group of Twenty
G7:	Group of Seven
G77:	Group of 77
GATT:	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IAEA:	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICAO:	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICC:	International Criminal Court
ICJ:	International Court of Justice
IFAD:	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO:	International Labour Organization
IR:	International Relations
KSA:	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LIO:	Liberal International Order
MERCOSUR:	Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market)
NAFTA:	North American Free Trade Agreement
NAM:	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT:	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPCW:	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
P3:	Permanent Three (commonly UK, France, USA)
P5:	Permanent Five members of the UNSC (China, France, Russia, UK, USA)
R2P:	Responsibility to Protect
ROK:	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
UK:	United Kingdom
UN:	United Nations
UNGA:	United Nations General Assembly
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund (originally known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)
UNOOSA:	The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs
UNSC:	United Nations Security Council
UNSG:	United Nations Secretary-General
US/USA:	United States of America
WEOG:	Western European and Others Group
WFP:	World Food Programme
WHO:	World Health Organization

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Chapter 1: An Introduction

1.1: From the New World Order to The New World Disorder

The New World Order

On 11th September 1990, US President George H.W. Bush Senior delivered a speech to Congress where he proclaimed the emergence of a new world order. This new world order represented a new era of international politics, a new way of doing international politics. Bush claimed that this was a vision shared by states around the world: a vision of cooperation, peace, justice, common rules, and shared interests. He made this declaration following events in the Persian Gulf where in early August 1990, after months of tension, Saddam Hussein gave the order for Iraq to invade Kuwait.

Bush declared that this was not simply an attack upon another country but an attack against the rest of the world, and an attack against this shared vision of a new world order. Despite UN Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions, authorising a naval blockade, and issuing a deadline to exit Kuwait, Saddam Hussein persisted. In response, backed by the Security Council, America gathered a coalition of states to force Iraq out. The US-led Operation Desert Storm was launched in January 1991, and Kuwait was liberated in little over a month. The New World Order passed its first test.

Within academic circles this vision of a new world order is synonymous with the concept of the Liberal International Order and its coming of age in the post-Cold War era. According to John Ikenberry, a leading scholar on the subject, the notion of ‘liberal internationalism’ is at the heart of this vision. Tracing the roots of liberal internationalism back to Enlightenment philosophy in the 18th Century, he identifies five pillars at the core of this worldview: openness and trade, rules and institutions, liberal democratic solidarity, cooperative security, and progressive social purposes (such as rising living standards, social justice)¹. He sums up that “in the liberal international vision, order is established by

¹ Ikenberry (2020) p.28-41

independent self-governing states — led by liberal democracies — that cooperate to uphold a relatively open and rules-based international space”².

In the aftermath of the Second World War these ideas began to blossom. Accompanying the formation of the United Nations in 1945, the US and likeminded allies sought to cultivate an environment structured around these five pillars. Constrained by the Cold War and a competing Soviet worldview, the scope of this order was confined to the American – ‘Western’ – sphere of influence. But with the end of the Cold War, the reach of the Liberal International Order expanded towards the rest of the world. Bush’s proclamation of a New World Order represented what Ikenberry described as the culmination of the “liberal ascendancy” – the “globalisation” of the Liberal International Order³.

Initially, the liberal internationalist vision of global order appeared to be justified⁴. By the end of the 1990s, serious inter-state conflict had become a rare occurrence⁵. Despite major civil wars and the resultant humanitarian crises dominating headlines, the rate of intra-state conflicts also declined⁶. The Economist assessed that by 2010, almost half of the world’s countries could be considered democracies, and almost half the world’s population lived in some sort of democracy⁷. Similarly, Freedom House reported that until 2015 almost 40% of the global population lived in free societies⁸.

On the economic front, the world became more economically integrated, regionally and globally. According to the World Trade Organization, by 1990 only 30 regional trade agreements were in force. By 2020 more than 350 such agreements were active⁹. The Millennium Development Goal of halving the global rate of extreme poverty was met in 2010, five years ahead of the envisaged 2015 target, with over a billion people lifted out of extreme poverty¹⁰. Whereas in the 1990s emerging economies contributed to 30% of global growth, by the 2000s this increased to 60%. Likewise, by the year 2000, emerging economies accounted for 25% of global GDP, and by 2025 this increased to 45%¹¹.

The optimism was often interrupted by stark reminders of reality: gross human rights violations, notably in Rwanda and Srebrenica; brutal civil wars in Sierra Leone and Algeria; numerous coups around the world; as well as financial crises. Rushed economic reforms in Russia illustrated the shortcomings of economic liberalism. Nevertheless, it is generally held that substantial progress was made around the

² Ikenberry (2020) p.217

³ Ikenberry (2018) pp.9-17

⁴ Hawthorn (1999) pp.145-146

⁵ Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2024) See the chart: “State-based conflicts by type of conflict (1946-2023)”, and “Fatalities by type of violence (1989-2023)”; Szayna, Watts, et al. (2017)

⁶ Jones & Stedman (2017)

⁷ The Economist Intelligence Unit (2010), p.2.

⁸ Freedom House (2015) p.6

⁹ WTO (2025)

¹⁰ United Nations (2015) pp.14-15

¹¹ World Bank (2025) pp.105-106

world following the end of the Cold War in terms of increased global security, international development, and the promotion of liberal values. Sustained by the rate of international conflicts decreasing, the global economy growing, and by more democracies and open markets, it would appear that the liberal internationalist vision of global order was vindicated.

America & The New World Order

One may justifiably question whether the developments and achievements in the immediate post-Cold War era can be directly attributed to the principles associated with the liberal internationalist vision of order. Certainly, there is a case to be made that this is just as much a product of an international system characterised to a great degree by American unipolarity. Described by the French Foreign Minister Vedrine in 2004 as a “hyperpower” without peers¹², America’s unprecedented concentration of power supported by allies around the world brought a sense of stability to the international system, even if imperfect – a Pax Americana¹³.

At least compared to previous empires with hegemonic aspirations, the USA served as a “benevolent” hegemon¹⁴: typically favouring compromise rather than coercion, combining unmatched power with “strategic restraint” and investment in regional and international institutions. Republican and Democrat administrations alike have generally been guided by a strategy of “enlightened self-interest” aiming for consent-based relations, recognising that this contributes to a more legitimate and enduring vision. Marrying hard power and soft power made the USA not only a dominant partner, but an attractive one¹⁵.

The problem here is that by the start of the 21st Century, Western governments appeared to take this vision a step further. Beyond the pillars of liberal internationalism oriented towards organising relations between states, fostering interdependence and economic growth, the USA and its allies adopted foreign policies associated primarily with provocative promotion of liberal values: advocating in favour of humanitarian intervention, a conditional form of sovereignty, and the establishment of the International Criminal Court¹⁶. Holm¹⁷ writes about a “liberal anti-pluralism”, where the promotion of liberal internationalism was imbued with elements of morality and conditionality tied to a narrower liberal democratic ideal. This was an approach that undermined the principle of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.

¹² Vedrine (2004)

¹³ Wohlforth (1999)

¹⁴ Kagan (1998); Catley (1997)

¹⁵ Ikenberry (2011) p.321-325; Ikenberry (2020) p.302-303

¹⁶ Kundnani (2017)

¹⁷ Holm (2025)

Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11 the US establishment removed the shackles of strategic restraint, embarking upon the War on Terror, brazenly invading Afghanistan, and Iraq. Though these wars may signify the apex of American hegemony, they weighed heavily on the American electorate¹⁸ and budget¹⁹ in the coming years, while the scandal of Abu Ghraib and the opening of Guantanamo Bay military facility tarnished America's international image²⁰. The 'benevolent hegemon' label does include caveats in this respect.

As a result of the backlash produced by such policies, combined with the 2008 financial crisis, the American political vision became more moderate. Consequently, for some time now American administrations have sought to wind down their international commitments. President Obama's reluctance to uphold the red line following the use of chemical weapons in Syria illustrated this more cautious approach, preferring to cede influence rather than to risk a new entanglement²¹. However with the repeated election of Donald Trump to the White House, the USA has deviated from the policy of strategic restraint and enlightened self-interest almost entirely²².

The Republican camp has seemingly bought into the 'America First' doctrine for the long haul, demonstrating a lack of confidence in multilateralism, where the strong dictate to the weak. A readiness to 'go it alone' is certainly not new as a US foreign policy approach. Yet today's behaviour seems to be justified simply on the basis of being more powerful in relation to allies and competitors alike²³. Niblett describes this America as a "mercenary superpower" seeing relations with other countries through a purely transactionalist lens²⁴. Closing the first quarter of the 21st Century, American support for the vision of the New World Order that has framed international politics since 1990 appears to have been decidedly abandoned²⁵.

A New World Disorder

For the moment, rather than an era of peace and prosperity, international politics appears to have become increasingly chaotic. The lukewarm international response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and its renewed invasion of Ukraine in 2022 stand in contrast to the international response when Kuwait was invaded. The indifference towards the price paid by civilians in Syria re-emerged in the context of Israel's military campaign in Gaza. War has again become prevalent, with an alarming

¹⁸ Doherty and Kiley – Pew Research Center (2023), Newport – Gallup (2021)

¹⁹ Crawford (2021), Bilmes (2021)

²⁰ Nye (2004)

²¹ Rhodes (2018)

²² Keohane and Nye (2025)

²³ Ibid. (Keihane and Nye, 2025)

²⁴ Niblett (2017)

²⁵ Patrick (2025); Cooley and Nexon (2025)

increase in territorial conflicts and civil wars reaching levels not seen since the end of the Cold War²⁶. Meanwhile, the United Nations Security Council – the guardian of international peace and security – is perceived to be paralysed, inept and incapable of ensuring peace²⁷.

On the economic and development front, many millions continue to live in poverty. Following COVID-19, global inequality widened again, with much of the progress made in recent decades being lost. After the pandemic, a report by the World Health Organisation in 2022 estimated that around 900 million people globally suffered from food insecurity at severe levels²⁸. Momentum in favour of sustainable development and mitigating the impact of climate change appears to have largely fizzled out amidst political division²⁹. On the part of the countries forming what has come to be known as the ‘Global South’ – mainly emerging powers, developing economies, and former colonies – a sentiment of injustice, hypocrisy, and double standards prevails³⁰.

Liberal political values are also floundering. Human rights, women’s rights, and civil rights have become afterthoughts for governments that have typically been at the forefront of this endeavour³¹. For many around the world these ideals remain a dream, even as some frame the concept of human rights as a tool for interference³². Similarly, democracy appears to be in decline, amidst clampdowns on civil liberties, the rise of illiberal ‘anti-woke’ leaders dismantling democratic institutions from within, as well as the interference of authoritarian actors within democratic countries³³.

Transnational challenges persist, and new ones are continuously emerging: from terrorism and organised crime – human smuggling, drug trafficking – to humanitarian crises and managing migration flows, from regulating outer space and cyberspace to cryptocurrencies and the immense potential of artificial intelligence. The to-do list on the global agenda appears to be ever increasing, seemingly without solutions to anything. A general overview of global affairs suggests that in terms of international security, economic security, and human security the situation seems to be getting worse around the world.

Only a few decades since the proclamation of this New World Order, we would be forgiven for speaking of global disorder – the New World Disorder. Governments appear to be lost, unable to generate coherent international responses and unable to address these issues. Scholars increasingly express concern about the trajectory of international politics. They warn of an ineffective order where it is more

²⁶ Poast, P. (2023)

²⁷ United Nations (2023)

²⁸ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2022)

²⁹ Ulgen (2021); David (2021); Volcoviki and Dickie (2024)

³⁰ Eisentraut (2024)

³¹ Human Rights Watch (2024)

³² Eisentraut (2024), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2022)

³³ Freedom House (2024); The Economist (2025)

and more difficult to generate impactful policies at the international level, an order lacking leadership and direction: an order in crisis³⁴. Symptomatic of all this, the centennial Foreign Affairs issue released in 2022 was aptly titled ‘The Age of Uncertainty’³⁵. It is precisely this sense of crisis, of uncertainty, unease, and incoherence that motivates this project.

In such a context the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, has repeatedly described the current situation as “dysfunctional”, citing a fragmented international community, relations between the great powers, as well as outdated mentalities to international politics³⁶. At face value this is quite understandable. Following a brief interlude of post-Cold War optimism, the vision of a global order rooted in cooperation, common rules, and the pursuit of shared ideals has been derailed. Problems aren’t being solved, while new challenges are continuously emerging. Relations between influential actors are deteriorating, while key players undermine key tenets of global order. This context of uncertainty, crisis and things going wrong begs the question as to whether global order is indeed dysfunctional. Thus lies the central theme that I explore in this study: the functionality – or dysfunctionality – of global order.

1.2: Theoretical Context

To start with, it is worth situating the topic of global order within the wider discipline of International Relations. Global order is typically shorthand for global *political* order, as opposed to other aspects organising international life – such as the global legal order, or the global economic order. In his introduction to the topic, Andrew Hurrell poses a simple, but significant question: “how is the world organised politically?”³⁷. This takes us to the essence of what we are trying to understand when studying global order: it is a question of how relations amongst states are organised, and how the way that relations amongst states are organised in turn organises international politics.

As an initial introduction prior to the more detailed discussion in the literature review, order refers to “the settled rules and arrangements that guide relations among states”³⁸. What these rules and arrangements are, what they do, if they are actively shaped by states or passively accepted by them, if they serve as a means to an end or are ends themselves is up for debate. It is possible to discern two broad camps in this regard: those in favour of a traditionalist descriptive approach, and those in favour

³⁴ Bremmer (2012); Haass (2008) p.52; Haass (2017); Maull (2019) p.18; Ikenberry (2018); United Nations (2021) p.3; Peoples (2022) Vinjamuri et al (2025)

³⁵ Foreign Affairs (2022)

³⁶ World Economic Forum (2019); United Nations (2021); United Nations (2022); United Nations (2024i); Guterres (2024)

³⁷ Hurrell (2007) p.1

³⁸ Ikenberry (2011) p.47

of a normative approach³⁹. However, neither of these approaches give importance to the functionality of order.

International Relations scholarship largely overlooks the functionality of global order as an area of research. Colloquially, something dysfunctional is understood as something not working properly, not working or behaving as it usually would, or how one would expect it to⁴⁰. Even on this preliminary basis, the notion has some value as a way of framing and investigating the state of contemporary order. There is in this regard a notable theoretical and analytical gap meriting further research⁴¹. Particularly considering the uncertainty characterising contemporary international affairs, there is certainly value in exploring this domain.

Traditionalists question the extent to which order in international relations can exist in any meaningful way, given that the international system is anarchic⁴². Following this approach, one could interject that perhaps concerns about a crisis are overblown. Alternatively, those in favour of a normative understanding argue that the prevalent arrangements organising relations between states should promote certain “desirable” behaviour and objectives. This normative standpoint opens a door to studying the effectiveness if not the functionality of order, in the sense that there is an expectation that these prevalent arrangements contribute to an intended outcome.

In the context of the vision of the New World Order, there would appear to be a crisis related primarily to the aspirations that it sought to achieve and the type of behaviour it promoted. Commentators frequently point towards a crisis of liberal internationalism, highlighting that the promotion of human rights and democracy worldwide has been overrun by authoritarianism and illiberal democracies, with Western governments seemingly abandoning the normative vision that they themselves spearheaded⁴³. Yet this is not a view necessarily shared amongst all who follow a normative understanding of order.

Taking a more critical stance, others interject that perhaps these concerns are the product of a ‘Western’ normative outlook – which does not fully account for the perspectives of non-Western actors. Ikenberry notes that for the ‘revisionist left’ the liberal internationalist order is seen as somewhat of a façade for American imperialism and hegemonic dominance⁴⁴. Perhaps this is not a crisis at all, but a romanticization of an era where the Western powers dominated international politics in a quasi-hegemonic fashion, shaping events according to their interests, and instrumentalising international

³⁹ Acharya (2018) p.4-5; Waltz (1979) pp.61-64

⁴⁰ Merriam-Webster (2025)

⁴¹ It is worth noting that McKeil (2020) makes a similar point regarding the concept of disorder.

⁴² Aron (1995) pp.48-49; Waltz (1979) pp.89-91, pp.104-107

⁴³ Ikenberry (2018) Mearsheimer (2019)

⁴⁴ Ikenberry (2020) pp.19-25

institutions⁴⁵. Maybe the sense of unease that commentators in Europe and America feel is less about a crisis of order, and more of a creeping awareness that the balance of power is shifting away from those who have had a chokehold over global affairs since the days of the colonial empires.

Valid as these critiques are, in my view there is an uncomfortable tendency to blur the line between the global order and the international system – with no clear, overt distinction being made, as if the former is an inevitable reflection of the latter. Whether there is a crisis or not is frequently dependent upon how researchers position themselves in relation to the international system, which in turn conditions how they frame the arrangements of contemporary order: an idealistic utopian order as opposed to an anarchical order; an order promoting liberal values as opposed to authoritarianism; a Western-led hegemonic order as opposed to an inclusive and just order.

Perhaps the issue here is that the subject of global order lies at a crossroads. Though the subject of global order is under the spotlight today, it is still very much a sub-topic subsumed within broader International Relations scholarship – at least within English language scholarship – typically discussed with little differentiation between global international order and the international system, with the terms often used interchangeably. Zarakol makes the same observation, noting that “the terms are not necessarily in competition, but nor are they interchangeable”⁴⁶.

Conflating global order with the international system can be problematic because it implies that changes at the level of the international system automatically change the make-up of global order, which isn’t necessarily the case. As a case in point, China’s rise is typically framed as being a threat to the current global order because the international *system* that is to some degree ‘Western-led’ is conflated with an *order* that is ‘Western-led’. Thus, China’s rise – challenging unipolarity – represents an inevitable upending of global order. Yet, it is unclear why China would challenge the same order that enabled its rise⁴⁷. It is not order-level dynamics but system-level dynamics that are changing. This shortcoming underscores the value of framing global order appropriately⁴⁸.

My preference is therefore to treat the concept of global order as a standalone topic. Substantiating this approach, in recent years researchers have increasingly taken stock of the current state of play with bespoke framings of order. This has produced more moderate assessments compared to blanket statements of crisis⁴⁹. Here, I acknowledge Acharya’s appeal for more ‘Global IR’⁵⁰ research – a valid call for studies to go beyond a conventional Euro-American centric lens when studying contemporary

⁴⁵ Parmar (2018)

⁴⁶ Zarakol (2024) p.203

⁴⁷ Chan and Hu (2025) p.385

⁴⁸ See also Kristinsson (2022), another doctoral thesis making a similar point.

⁴⁹ Compare for example Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann’s analysis (2018) with Patrick (2023), and Goddard, Krebs et al. (2024).

⁵⁰ Acharya (2014), supported by Hurrell (2016)

order. Similarly, Hurrell emphasises the diffusion of “power” and “preferences”, “of ideas and values”, “of agency and of political consciousness” that characterise today’s international system. He further underlines “that the historical self-understandings of a much wider and culturally diverse range of players need to be central to the theoretical and practical analysis of global politics”⁵¹.

In parallel, a recent trend of note is the turn towards analysing, comparing, and contrasting the “visions” and perspectives of different stakeholders⁵². This suggests that there is increased awareness today that global order is subjective, that different actors have different expectations of order, and thus that to arrive at an appropriate understanding of contemporary order an inclusive approach is necessary. This trend is likely also a reaction both to the proliferation of influential states, as well as American and European governments outwardly challenging long-held norms and foreign policy practices.

Considering these points, I would further argue that the concept of order should certainly not be considered simplistically as a reflection of the international system, nor the preferences of a hegemonic actor, but as a construct that exists in the context of the system, created by states to try to manage the system. With these elements in mind, I find the concept of functionality to be an alluring alternative way of framing the concept of order and evaluating the state of contemporary order. In particular, surveying academic literature on contemporary global order, I would agree that more focus is required on how the main stakeholders in international politics from around the world expect global order to work and what they expect global order to achieve.

In this vein, my study focuses on the members of the G20, as a particularly relevant group of actors representing an approximation of the contemporary great powers. The G20 reflects shifting power dynamics, including what are conventionally considered to be ideologically Western countries alongside leading voices of the Global South, bringing together established and emerging powers alike. Since its inception, the Group has evolved into a “global governance hub”⁵³, and the platform conveniently delineates an informal concert of “systemically significant” players in international affairs⁵⁴.

Finally, it is worth closing this segment with a brief reference to the theoretical underpinnings that inform and anchor this research. As already alluded to, this study is driven by the conviction that order is what states make of it; that more attention should be given to the perspectives of states in relation to how they want relations between themselves to be organised, as well as in relation to how they perceive the current state of affairs. In turn, my research is rooted in the underlying assumptions that states do

⁵¹ Hurrell (2018) p.93

⁵² See for example Vinjamuri et al (2025), Stares et al (2020)

⁵³ Layne (2018) pp.99-100; Berger, Cooper, and Grimm (2019)

⁵⁴ Viola (2020); Slaughter (2019) pp.37-53; Berger, Cooper, and Grimm (2019)

have the agency to manage anarchy if they so wish, that states have the capacity to collectively author arrangements intended to organise relations amongst themselves, and that contemporary international politics is certainly characterised by an element of normative socialization, as per the concept of an international society. Hence, my approach broadly aligns with a combined Wendtian Constructivist and English School outlook⁵⁵.

Having outlined the general political and theoretical context for this project, the rest of this chapter introduces the different components of the study. I begin by defining the research question, outlining the aims and objectives of this research, highlighting what this project intends to achieve. The next section elaborates on the research design and methods, content-focused analysis of political discourse, discussing the particular material and techniques used to gather relevant data. Finally, I outline my discussion chapters, turning to key findings, conclusions, deliverables, and the added value of this study.

1.3: Research Question, Aims & Objectives

Is Global Order Dysfunctional? (Aim 1)

Considering the context outlined in the previous section, latching on to the remarks of an individual ideally placed to provide a birds-eye commentary on global affairs, and recognising a gap in research from this particular standpoint, the theme of this study is the functionality of contemporary global order. The primary aim of this study is to explore the rather neglected concept of functionality in relation to global order, to propose a framework that may be used to assess the functionality of order, and to use this framework to assess if contemporary order is dysfunctional. My study thus seeks to contribute to research in the field of international relations by answering the overarching research question: is contemporary global order dysfunctional?

Answering the research question and achieving this aim requires understanding the concept of order, the arrangements of contemporary order, as well as arriving at a method of evaluating potential dysfunctionality. I delve deeper into these different components in the second chapter of this study, the literature review. The chapter covers literature on the concept of global order, on the principles of contemporary order, and the current crisis of order, providing the vocabulary and background necessary to understand the subject being investigated in this study, explaining key terms and concepts as

⁵⁵ Reus-Smit (2009)

necessary, highlighting shortcomings of previous research and setting the scene for where exactly this study fits in within the wider literature.

The theoretical background and motivations inspiring this research have already been introduced in this respect. Focusing on the specific aspect of functionality, particular emphasis is given to Ikenberry's very brief reference⁵⁶ to the topic, summed up as "the practical capacity of an international order to get things accomplished" and "the ability of an international order to solve problems that states want solved". Despite this being only an initial interpretation, it is notable that Ikenberry points towards two relevant factors: what states wish the arrangements of order to achieve, and the ability of these arrangements to achieve what states want achieved.

Building on this, my study puts forward an initial functionalist framework of order, drawing upon persistent dilemmas in previous literature. The first such dilemma concerns the legitimacy and endorsement of the arrangements characterising contemporary order – 'buy-in'. The second dilemma relates to the ability of an order to be responsive to the needs, expectations, and interests of its members – 'responsiveness'. I introduce this framework, in more detail further on in this chapter where I elaborate on the contributions of this study.

I devote time to this point both because of the theoretical gap that a functionalist framework fills, and because there is more added value in producing an analysis of global order that is practical and relatable. It is attractive to speak about such things as a shifting distribution of power, and the rise of potentially revisionist non-liberal actors, but such analysis may have limited value if it is framed in a way that does not reflect how the vast majority of states perceive global order or does not reflect the expectations held by states around the world. Evaluating whether contemporary order is dysfunctional forms part of a broader conversation in this regard and putting forward a theoretical framework through which to evaluate the current state of play from this perspective is only the first step.

Identifying the Principles of Contemporary Order (Aim 2)

Beyond a lack of vocabulary specifically related to the functionality of order, previous analysis also suffers from an unclear departure point. Already in the 1990s, even as Francis Fukuyama infamously heralded the end of history⁵⁷ some questioned what exactly this New World Order represented⁵⁸. This debate is significant because how one defines the key arrangements of the post-Cold War order conditions any analysis on the subject. Accordingly, in line with the theoretical undertones influencing

⁵⁶ Ikenberry (2014) pp.102-103

⁵⁷ Fukuyama (1992)

⁵⁸ Nye (1992); Krauthammer (1990)

my approach, the second aim of this study is to identify the principles of the contemporary post-Cold War order, based on what significant stakeholders themselves perceive to be the key principles of order.

This lack of clarity is likely the result of a few factors. Again, to some degree this can be traced to the awkward positioning of research on global order vis-à-vis the international system. A further complication is that the “liberal” component of order is a particularly problematic term, open to interpretation⁵⁹. Another complicating element is the relationship between the USA and contemporary order, the role played by the USA in the international system, and the impact of the ebbs and flows of US foreign policy on global affairs. I revert to this debate in more detail in the literature review.

On the one hand the ambitious maximalist view associates the arrangements of contemporary order with the preferences of the dominant Western powers who had the most influence in the post-Cold War international system. This approach places emphasis on politically liberal values, notably democracy and human rights, as well as economic liberalism as a key priority. Ikenberry writes that liberal internationalism inherently entails a degree of expansionism⁶⁰, and similarly Mearsheimer considers that the aggressive promotion of democracy, including intervention, is “of paramount importance” for a liberal international order⁶¹.

On the other hand, a more prudent minimalist interpretation acknowledges that these elements may be aspirational. Critics highlight that such policies were pursued selectively and inconsistently⁶², and that they undermined the very same vision of order that Western powers sought to cultivate in the first place⁶³. Others note the existence of actors with different political systems and outlooks, such as China⁶⁴. Admittedly taking a more pragmatic view, a minimalist approach centred around a narrower set of principles such as sovereignty, with the UN and rules-based multilateralism at its core, as well as the promotion of economic liberalism appears to be a more accurate reflection of an international order with truly global reach⁶⁵.

Assessing Claims, Proposing Explanations (Aim 3)

All this being said, despite the lack of a framework and the lack of a departure point, and despite the lack of studies dedicated to the functionality of contemporary order, a strong body of research nonetheless addresses the topic indirectly. Previous studies repeatedly claim that the post-Cold War

⁵⁹ Lake, Martin, and Risse (2021)

⁶⁰ Ikenberry (2020) p.216

⁶¹ Mearsheimer (2019) p.8

⁶² Niblett (2017)

⁶³ Kundnani (2017)

⁶⁴ Glaser (2019)

⁶⁵ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann (2018)

order lacks direction today due to a conflagration of three trends. The first claim is that the established liberal Western actors have withdrawn buy-in from the principles of order, and that the emerging powers never signed up to them in the first place. The second claim relates to a general dissatisfaction with contemporary order. The third claim relates to the consequences of the shift in the distribution of power, how this diffusion of power amplified a diffusion of interests and policies amongst influential actors which are too diverse, and as a result common, collective action is being obstructed.

These claims are interlinked and intertwine with each other, as illustrated by a few prominent pieces. Notably, such arguments frame Ikenberry's assessment of the Liberal International Order's "crisis of success"⁶⁶ resulting from the incorporation of diverse states with diverse and not necessarily liberal identities. They form the basis of Mearsheimer's conclusions that the post-Cold War order was "bound to fail" due to the aggressive promotion of liberal values by the US and its allies which produced resentment, coupled with disillusion amongst these same actors regarding these same values as losers of globalisation⁶⁷. Focused more on the implications of the diffusion of power, Bremmer refers to the "vastly broader diversity of views" amongst G20 members compared to the G7⁶⁸, and Kupchan refers to an emerging multipolar world characterised by competing "versions of modernity"⁶⁹.

The third aim is thus to analyse the perspectives promoted by influential states in relation to the arrangements of order from the end of the Cold War until the present day, evaluating them according to the criteria of buy-in and responsiveness – as per my functionalist framework – and comparing my results with these core claims, with the scope of putting forward potential explanations regarding the current state of affairs. In doing so, I seek to amplify the voice of the main actors in international politics, given that despite the rich body of work emphasising the trend towards fragmentation, there are few studies which incorporate a systematic analysis of attitudes towards the principles of contemporary order conducted according to clear criteria.

All in all, this project is structured around three aims in this respect. The first aim is theoretical, exploring the theme of functionality. The second aim is both conceptual and methodological. Conceptual in that it is oriented towards identifying what I refer to as the ordering principles of contemporary political order, demonstrating that collectively authored arrangements are identifiable. The aim is also methodological as through this exercise I seek to demonstrate the value of studying the rather under-researched source material and the value of pursuing an inclusive approach. The third aim is analytical in scope, evaluating the state of contemporary order – if it is dysfunctional and why this is the case if it is so – and evaluating the dominant claims regarding the crisis of order. Combining these

⁶⁶ Ikenberry (2018)

⁶⁷ Mearsheimer (2019)

⁶⁸ Bremmer (2012)

⁶⁹ Kupchan (2012) pp.3-5, p.183

three aims together, this thesis seeks to put forward an alternative analysis regarding the state of contemporary global order, based on three novel contributions.

Firstly, I seek to put forward a theoretical framework regarding the functionality of order. Secondly, a set of principles of the post-Cold War order from the perspective of the contemporary major powers. Thirdly I provide evidence-backed data to support or challenge the main claims being made, accompanied by potential explanations as to what might be going wrong, illustrating the utility of my functionalist framework. By prioritising the way states perceive global order – the arrangements that they identify, and whether they express positive or negative sentiments regarding the buy-in and responsiveness of these arrangements – the project therefore aims, ultimately, to put forward an evaluation of the state of contemporary global order which is practical and accessible, bridging traditional academic analysis with discourse and viewpoints from the main stakeholders themselves.

1.4: Research Design and Methods

The third chapter covers the research design and methods employed in the study, which I split into two main components. The first relates to the protagonists of my research: the G20, and the material studied – speeches delivered at the UN General Assembly as a manifestation of strategic narratives. The second component covers the process through which I gathered and processed data – coding and content analysis. I briefly introduce these elements herewith.

The G20, The UN General Assembly & Political Discourse

Despite heeding the call for more ‘Global IR’ research, it was nonetheless necessary to be quite selective in terms of the actors whose perspectives I incorporate in this analysis, in the interests of a manageable project. The G20 represents an appropriate balance in this regard, as an ideologically heterogeneous group of influential established and emerging powers from around the world. Moreover, the G20 incorporates voices seldom given attention in such research, like Mexico, Turkey, and Indonesia amongst others. This brings additional value given that my findings are informed by viewpoints extending beyond both the established Western actors, and prominent emerging players such as the BRICS, whilst retaining a selective sample.

Turning to the material being studied, the building blocks of my analysis are the speeches delivered by the members of the G20 at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) annual debates. Surprisingly, despite headlining the agenda for the diplomatic community as the most high-profile venue for states to communicate their policies and deliver messages to audiences at home and abroad, UNGA debates have

been rather neglected in terms of research on contemporary order. My study harnesses this wealth of untapped data. Whilst cynics may see these meetings as a lot of empty talk and posturing, in practice the rhetoric employed is deliberate, and the statements are drafted with purpose⁷⁰. Statements range from a presentation of foreign policy objectives to an overview of aspirations and accomplishments, to justifications and criticisms, to general perspectives on international affairs. Such properties make these debates “ideal for using text analysis to derive estimations of state preferences”, enabling researchers to track the positions and preferences expressed by states on different themes in a systematic manner⁷¹.

In this sense, UNGA speeches are particularly rich sources of political discourse. Constructivist and interpretivist arguments supporting the study of such discourse to improve our understanding of how governments perceive international affairs and global order are well established⁷². Scholars at the crossover between the field of strategic communications and international relations explain that governments do not only compete in terms of military and economic power. They compete to sell their own preferred narrative of international politics⁷³. They promote their expectations, values, and beliefs using carefully crafted political discourse.

In this respect, while political discourse is not necessarily representative of honest discourse and also considering that there may often be a gap between words and actions, such discourse nonetheless represents a valuable tool to gather data. The methods employed in this study are oriented towards tracking such political discourse at the UN General Assembly to understand government perspectives relevant to global order – whether they support or contest dominant principles, perceive them to be responsive to their needs, as well as overall assessments regarding the state of global order.

Coding & Content Analysis

Having outlined what this study is about, and the material being used to perform this study I then turn to the practicalities – how the data was collected and analysed: by conducting a content analysis via coding. In broad terms, content analysis may be defined as “a method designed to identify and interpret meaning in recorded forms of communication by isolating small pieces of the data that represent salient concepts and then applying or creating a framework to organize the pieces in a way that can be used to describe or explain a phenomenon”⁷⁴. It is an interpretative approach, though conducted within the confines of an explicit framework or system.

⁷⁰ Goddard and Krebs (2015) p.6

⁷¹ Baturo, Dasandi and Mikhaylov (2017)

⁷² See for example, Kratochwil (1989), Ruggie (1998), and Wiener (2014)

⁷³ Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2012); Antoniadis, Miskimmon, and O’Loughlin (2010); Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, Roselle (2013) pp.32-34; Goddard and Krebs (2015)

⁷⁴ Kleinheksel, Rockich-Winston, Tawfik, and Wyatt (2020) p.127

Considering the text-based material being studied, as well as previous studies using similar material, coding was deemed the most appropriate research technique. Coding consists of gathering data by assigning codes or labels to specific parts of a text – such as phrases, sentences, and paragraphs – following “observer-independent rules”. Some have also referred to coding as indexing, or labelling⁷⁵. A code is a typically “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data”⁷⁶.

In this respect, my research design follows a three-step process. Firstly, the ‘preparatory phase’ through which I familiarised myself with the research material and prepared what is typically known as a codebook or coding scheme. Secondly, the ‘data collection phase’, where I gathered data using this coding scheme. Essentially, this consisted of tracking the positions taken by G20 members regarding contemporary order: if they were conveying a general assessment on the state of order, or a position regarding a specific principle, and if the latter, which principle, what position was taken, and the justification. The process was rounded off with the ‘analytical phase’ which involved the cleaning of data – sorting it out into practical information.

The study makes extensive use of tabulations providing descriptive feedback. Tailor-made scales of ‘intensity’ and ‘dispersion’ were prepared so as to assess the different levels of buy-in and responsiveness generated by the principles of order (intensity), as well as to assess the degree to which positions between governments associated with the West and the Rest converge or diverge. That being said, the main goal of such scales is illustrative, translating raw data into something understandable to the reader. Finally, I dedicated time to the content with explanatory value, concentrating on rhetoric of particular interest providing deeper and more granular insight, setting the scene to present my findings and conclusions.

1.5: Deliverables, Findings, & Conclusions

As a subject of extreme relevance today, commentary on the state of contemporary global order is thriving. Cognisant of this highly saturated space, my study explores the functionality of order as an under-researched theme within this broader conversation, making a series of relevant contributions to scholarship on the subject. As a theoretical contribution, I put forward a functionalist framework of global order, outlining my understanding of the conditions to consider when assessing the functionality

⁷⁵ Krippendorff (2004) p.126, Elliot (2018) pp. 2851-2852

⁷⁶ Saldana (2013) p.3-4

of order. As a methodological contribution, this research demonstrates the value of studying political discourse to analyse perspectives on global order, emphatically illustrated through the rich data contained within UNGA statements that encapsulate such perspectives. This is a strong vote of confidence in such methods.

The theoretical and methodological groundings of this research pave the way for three important analytical deliverables. Firstly, I identify a set of principles defining the vision of the post-Cold War order, based on the overlapping priorities promoted by the members of the G20 in the 1990s, and using my functionalist framework as a scaffolding to explain how these principles fit in with one another. Secondly, using this set of principles as a benchmark, together with the criteria denoted in my functionalist framework, I argue that contemporary order is partially dysfunctional due to a responsiveness deficit. Thirdly, I put forward potential explanations for this deficit, notably a ‘crisis of coercion’ driven by status-based competition, while remarking that to some degree this lack of responsiveness is the price being paid for an inclusive order.

Theoretical Contribution

Taking inspiration from previous contributions framed according to a dynamic of demand and supply, this thesis proposes a novel understanding of global order, with practical value. My functionalist understanding departs from the framing of global order as a question of demand and supply, where states possess a collective demand for a certain type and degree of order within the international system. Or rather, to go back to the definition of order cited earlier, they demand arrangements which shape relations amongst themselves according to certain expectations of how they believe relations should be organised, and what they consider that the sum of their relations should accomplish.

In this regard, building upon previous conceptualisations of order I posit that the arrangements shaping relations amongst states could be understood according to two dimensions: the organisational (normative) dimension, and the anarchical (systemic) dimension. The organisational dimension consists of two kinds of principles. Firstly, ordering principles refer to shared understandings amongst states in an international order on how relations amongst themselves are to be organised, setting out widely accepted expectations for how they ought to behave, and establishing the broad parameters within which they are expected to engage with each other. Secondly, aspirational principles refer to shared aspirations and goals that states within global order widely subscribe to; common objectives which they agree that their behaviour should be oriented towards achieving.

The anarchical dimension consists of systemic characteristics: prevalent features of international relations that emerge organically from the structure and dynamics of the international system, and which

contextualise and influence relations amongst states. Systemic characteristics incorporate both the structural conditions that influence international politics – such as anarchy – as well as dynamic elements such as the evolution of globalisation and technological advancements. Though such characteristics may certainly inform the behaviour of states depending on the level of importance given to them by governments, they do not actively set out expectations for how states should behave, nor are there any expectations assigned to them. They are not prescriptive.

Whereas the ordering principles and aspirational principles are products of collective authorship, systemic characteristics are not. As a consequence of this, whilst acknowledging the considerable influence that systemic characteristics may have upon interstate relations in parallel to ordering and aspirational principles, I do not consider such characteristics to be part of the equation in terms of whether global order is functional. To expect such properties of order to generate buy-in and responsiveness would be an overly high threshold essentially expecting the international system itself to be functional.

By investigating if the prevalent ordering and aspirational principles are collectively supported or contested, and by tracking if they are meeting expectations, we can in turn evaluate the functionality of order. A functional global order is an order where both sets of principles receive buy-in and support from states, as well as positive assessments in relation to their responsiveness, meeting their expectations. A partially dysfunctional global order is an order where one of these criteria is not met, and a dysfunctional order is one where both criteria are not met. Underscoring again the agency possessed by sovereign states, whether a principle is meeting expectations of buy-in and responsiveness is ultimately up to the main stakeholders themselves.

Analytical Contributions

Linking up with the above points, in the fourth chapter I outline a set of principles which reflect a widely supported understanding of the post-Cold War order, generating consistent buy-in throughout the decade on behalf of these actors. I present these principles according to the visualisation of order set out in my functionalist framework. In this regard, a core group of ordering principles is clearly discernible: multilateralism, rules-based interstate relations, (external) sovereignty, as well as the primacy and role of the United Nations as the fulcrum of this order. A set of aspirational principles is also identifiable: the promotion of peace and security including counter-terrorism and non-proliferation, the promotion of development including economic liberalism and sustainable development, and the promotion of human rights and democracy.

Answering the main research question, in the fifth chapter I posit that contemporary global order is partially dysfunctional. The members of the G20 convey sustained, widespread support for both the ordering and aspirational principles throughout the General Assembly sessions covered in my analysis (with the notable exception of China in relation to the promotion of human rights). Challenging a popular view, my findings dispute claims that emerging powers are seeking to challenge or rewrite global order. To the contrary, I comprehensively illustrate that throughout the years – from the end of the Cold War until today – the widely agreed upon properties of contemporary order continue to generate buy-in amongst all members of the G20, including the BRICS members and those who may be considered as forming part of the Global South.

However, such endorsement is offset by persistent negative assessments in terms of the responsiveness of these principles. These findings support previous studies referring to the dissatisfaction with contemporary order. Governments repeatedly highlight that their expectations are not being met, and this criticism extends across domains. Furthermore such criticism is not exclusive to rising powers either. Established powers and Western actors similarly express discontent and the sentiment of unmet expectations. I label this a ‘responsiveness deficit’. This perceived lack of responsiveness is illustrated clearly through the high frequency with which negative assessments are expressed in relation to the responsiveness of these principles, as well as through assessments on the general state of international affairs throughout the years, where states seem to converge on the view that the situation is deteriorating. I discuss the discourse related to such assessments in the sixth chapter, outlining the palpable shift from optimism to pessimism, and a sense of crisis.

The seventh chapter covers potential explanations for this responsiveness deficit. I initially entertain the argument that this is the result of an outdated global order, however I contend that this is a superficial analysis, downplaying the agency of states. Rather, the main thrust of my argument supports commentary on the division and fragmentation characterising contemporary international relations. I argue that this dysfunctionality is caused by a lack of coaction – a lack of political will. I classify a variation of this lack of coaction as being benign, a conventional shortcoming of multilateral processes, as well as a product of what Ikenberry terms a ‘crisis of purpose’ – a lack of responsiveness due to a high level of inclusiveness. However, I also draw attention to an antagonistic lack of coaction.

My findings indicate that negative assessments are primarily the product of accusations made by governments against other governments. Meaning, states blame other states for the principles of global order not being responsive. The prevalent recourse to accusations reflects an antagonistic, divided international society. I draw attention in particular to division in relation to three themes: international development, international security, and established powers violating widely accepted standards of behaviour. I contend that what is driving this lack of coaction is status-based competition.

Here, I defer to a body of literature on the question of status in international politics, underscoring that status is also a question of perception. Beyond material capabilities, status is a question of how states are perceived by other states. Within this backdrop, I argue that actors who wish to improve their status are exploiting divergent interests and ideologies, they seek to amplify differences and existing cleavages related to these three themes in order to stand out. Actors pursuing such a strategy are aiming to enhance their relevance, positioning themselves as a reference point in relation to a particular domain– and thus they elevate their status in the international system.

Though this argument would appear to suggest a paradox in my findings, I underscore that this dynamic of division does not relate to competing views on the overarching ordering and aspirational principles of order, or a critical mass of actors challenging the shared understandings that underwrite contemporary order. To the contrary, support for these principles is constant and if anything, members of the G20 utilise these same principles of order as a pretext to criticise other actors – they rally around them. Thus, like Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, I conclude that notwithstanding the current crisis of coaction, the situation characterising contemporary international relations is not a crisis of order, but a crisis within order – a crisis that has been contained by global order.

I also dedicate a significant portion of my discussion to the perspectives of the G20 on the United Nations Security Council. The members of the G20 criticise the UNSC incessantly throughout their speeches. Actors tend to express alarm about a sense of crisis whenever there is major uncertainty in the realm of international peace and security, and they assign particular importance to the Security Council for this reason. Based on their criticism, it could be said that the UNSC is a microcosm of the elements and trends that have been discussed so far: division and antagonism leading to an unwillingness to coact, status-based competition, and perceptions of a global order that lacks responsiveness.

Hence, factoring in the role of the Security Council is particularly salient in terms of understanding why contemporary global order appears to be dysfunctional, and indeed, my findings suggest that the Security Council is perhaps the most dysfunctional aspect of contemporary order. The vast majority of negative comments regarding the United Nations in the speeches surveyed are a result of criticism targeting the Security Council. Firstly, the Security Council is perceived to be divided and paralysed. Secondly, both as a result of this paralysis and the use of the veto, the Security Council is perceived as being unable to deliver results. Thirdly, the Security Council is perceived to entirely lack representativeness, representing an established elite that no longer reflects the contemporary distribution of power.

Again, this takes us back to the question of competition over status – and to add insult to injury, in this case status counts for a lot. In the eyes of the non-P5 members of the G20, this exclusive cartel prioritises national interests ahead of global, collective interests, highlighting a lack of results, the paralysis of the Security Council in the face of international crises, and the propensity of these great powers to abuse of their role. I label this as a crisis of integrity, and acknowledge that in its current setup, the Security Council does undermine the functionality of contemporary order – but it does not make it dysfunctional.

Finally, I consider whether the responsiveness deficit may alternatively be explained via more conventional power-based explanations. I begin by addressing the viewpoint suggesting that the lack of coercion is a product of hegemonic decline. Here, I put forward a more nuanced perspective – arguing that we may well be seeing the implications of a decline in soft power rather than hard power, with perspectives regarding the US worsening. Next, I turn to the second side of this coin: multipolarity. Perhaps the current antagonism was previously suppressed by unipolarity, which is no longer the case. Whereas I acknowledge the merit of this approach and highlight that my findings implicitly support the thesis that competition amongst influential powers has made it more difficult to generate coercion, I also argue that governments are not antagonistic by default, they retain the agency to coerce.

On this note, I question if, regardless of polarity, the responsiveness of order is fundamentally a product of great power policies. Here, I concede that my functionalist understanding of order has its limitations. Nonetheless, I posit that whilst great powers may violate principles and shared expectations of order, these same principles serve as a platform for the rest of the states within the international system to resist such behaviour. Even without enforcement capacity, they invoke and defend shared principles, they delegitimise such behaviour, as evidenced by the barrage of criticism I outline in the previous section on the UN Security Council. In this sense, though lesser powers may not be able to enforce the principles of order as a standard of relations amongst states, in such situations they are nonetheless responsive to the needs of such actors; allowing them to retain collective authorship over appropriate standards of conduct, and as a tool to try to mitigate and constrain the behaviour of the great powers.

All in all, I take my conclusion – the eighth and final chapter – in the opposite direction of a crisis of order. Like Ikenberry, I paint this current situation as a success, arguing that ultimately a potential crisis driven by anarchic influences has (so far) been contained by the agreed upon rules of the game. Despite a diversity of interests and expectations, governments consistently endorse the shared ordering principles setting common standards of behaviour and the pursuit of shared aspirational principles. Such support indicates a convergence on the overarching arrangements organising relations amongst states and is testament to the inclusivity of contemporary global order. The lack of responsiveness is the price being paid for this inclusive order.

While stakeholders may assess, generally, that there is a lack of solutions, this is because everyone has a seat at the table and as a result, the diversity and complexity of their competing interests and expectations creates a situation where compromise and common ground are essential if there is to be coercion rather than inaction. Yet, in a somewhat antagonistic political climate today significant stakeholders seemingly lack the political will to find common ground, there is an unwillingness to coact. As a result, members of the G20 feel that their expectations are not being met. For these actors, and analysts alike, this creates the semblance of inaction, of a crisis of order that cannot cope with contemporary demands.

By bringing everyone around the same table, the principles of contemporary order continue to set common standards of behaviour that are widely recognised and respected, despite a deterioration of relations, and despite increased competition including amongst the great powers. Notwithstanding the policy choice to compete rather than to coact, when there is disagreement this is channelled through the agreed upon rules of the game. Fundamentally, rather than states buying-out from the principles of order and challenging them, they are competing according to shared parameters, conforming to an agreed way of doing international politics. Thus, global order is partially dysfunctional, but this is dysfunctionality by design.

Methodological Contribution

As illustrated by the findings outlined in the previous section, this project plainly demonstrates the value of studying political discourse to enhance our understanding of states' perspectives regarding global order. In particular, my study shows the value of studying speeches delivered at the UN General Assembly as a prominent medium through which such narratives are transmitted. Given how under-utilised such speeches appear to be in relation to this macro level of study, it was positive to record substantial content of relevance. Suffice to say, the fact that there is an ongoing discussion on several clearly discernible principles of order for the past 30 years is itself testament to the value and content that can be harvested from such material.

Furthermore, such statements are an accessible route towards systematically sourced data straight from the horse's mouth. By tapping into this rich pool of content the study brings into play a large body of systematically sourced data, harnessing the insight and perspectives of key stakeholders in international affairs, in a manner which does not appear to have been done in previous studies. Such data adds value to this research primarily as evidence backing up claims and arguments. Additionally, by basing my findings upon a steady stream of relevant discourse from government representatives the study bridges

academic theory with real-world politics and events in the interests of contributions that are relatable, resonating beyond academic jargon.

Recalling the ongoing debate on the principles of the post-Cold War segment of the Liberal International Order, the methods employed in this study enable me to put forward a comprehensive evidence-based set of principles. Being able to cross-reference statement after statement by one member of the G20 after another in relation to these principles lends clear weight to the principles that I identify. From a methodological perspective, beyond the contribution to the debate in terms of the substance of my findings, this contribution is valuable as I plainly demonstrate the wealth of data that can be harnessed and applied to questions of global order from such source material and through such research methods.

Overall, the methodological contributions made through this study are therefore notable, and my research should encourage further studies utilising the same or similar methodology. Certainly, there are shortcomings, as I discuss in more detail in the relevant chapter, however all in all, this experiment was a success. Looking ahead, given that the focus of this study was only on G20 nations, it would be appropriate for additional studies to broaden the sample of actors covered by such studies in this respect, to continue deepening our understanding of how states perceive international politics, including regional powers who are not members of the G20 (such as the UAE, Qatar, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Spain), perhaps states having antagonistic relations with the US or China, and the wider UN membership.

Chapter 2: On Global Order, Functionality, & the Crisis of the ‘Liberal International Order’

This chapter provides an overview of salient literature relevant to a discussion on the functionality of contemporary global order, deconstructing concepts and introducing prior research progressively. I set out terms of reference with a focus on four components. Firstly, the concept of order in international politics. Secondly the concept of a functional international order and understanding what is meant when referring to the functionality of order. Thirdly the arrangements of contemporary order, with emphasis on the Liberal International Order. Fourthly, explanations regarding the evolution of contemporary order and the sentiment of an order in crisis.

Discussing the traditionalist and normative approaches to the concept of order, the former sets a low threshold of order as predictability, without prejudice to the substance of relations amongst states. I argue that the assumptions underpinning the former approach are misplaced today. Particularly, I emphasise that the descriptive approach disregards the agency of states, and that they have already shown their ability to cooperate with each other despite existing in an anarchical system, including by producing ‘collectively authored’ rules. Moreover, in a world characterised by high levels of interdependence and a certain acceptance of global governance, expectations of order go far beyond a simple desire for predictability.

After defining the concept of functionality, I go on to outline my own “functionalist” understanding of order. I structure this in terms of two dimensions, building on the normative approach, whilst accommodating the descriptive. The organisational dimension which consists of ordering principles and aspirational principles, as well as the anarchical dimension which consists of systemic characteristics. I explain that whilst the former dimension is constitutive of order as these principles set out expectations for how states should behave, to properly understand the functionality of order, the influence of the anarchical dimension must also be accounted for. In so doing, I offer a method as to how the functionality of order can be assessed.

Turning from theory to the topic of contemporary order, I review what I categorise as the ‘ambitious’ and ‘prudent’ interpretations of the Liberal International Order, noting the controversy regarding the

‘liberal’ element of order, and I briefly introduce an alternative “rules-based” interpretation. My focus turns to the predominant understanding of the changes which have occurred in international politics over the past decade or so: namely a shift in the distribution of power, the rise of emerging powers from outside the liberal Western hemisphere following the 2008 financial crisis, together with declining influence, and a crisis of identity on behalf of key Western players.

On this note, I refer in particular to Ikenberry and Mearsheimer who argue that for the Western powers the Liberal International Order is not responding to their expectations anymore, while rising non-Western powers never quite felt at home within it either. Both raise important points in terms of contemporary order lacking buy-in and lacking responsiveness in this regard. Taking this back to the question of whether contemporary order is dysfunctional, I underline the implications of this shift in the balance of power, the diffusion of influence and the diversification of interests being promoted on the international scene.

There appears to be a general agreement amongst scholars researching contemporary order that in today’s world where power is not easily converted into influence, and where challenges have transnational implications, it is more important than ever for states to find a common agenda if they wish to pursue their own interests successfully. The issue is precisely that alongside this diffusion of power international society is increasingly politically fragmented and essentially leaderless, leading to gridlock. I sum up that previous literature would appear to support the argument that global order appears to be dysfunctional.

I close with brief remarks on the main flaw with this body of work, which is that the voice of the main actors themselves in relation to the principles of order is quite muted. Considering that much of the research on the current crisis of order is based upon perspectives towards order – perspectives of legitimacy, of resentment, and that expectations are not being met – there is little data brought to the table. I note that my research is tailored specifically towards filling this niche, aimed not at substantially challenging the body of work that I have presented, but elevating it.

2.1: Global Order

Despite generous literature on the concept of order in international politics, the meaning of the term remains quite open to interpretation. This lack of a widely accepted understanding hinders a serious appraisal of contemporary order, given that assessments take place on different wavelengths and according to different criteria, undermining an otherwise rich body of work. Part of the challenge lies

in the way the concept of order is framed. There is a tendency to use terms such as “world order”, “global order”, and “international order” almost interchangeably¹, or with very little overt distinction between them.

International order is about “order among states” whereas world order is significantly wider in scope². While a global order is a type of international order, an international order is not necessarily a global order. In other words, international order is an umbrella term. There is a difference between an international order with global reach, encompassing all states – hence, a global order – and an international order which is limited to a certain group of states. The latter may be further classified as a *bounded* or *partial* order, often consisting of states aligned with each other’s political ideology, or which are bound by geography³.

Having established the level of this analysis, it is worth outlining what exactly is being referred to when speaking of international order. Amongst the most cited is Ikenberry’s definition, which I referred to in the introduction. He explains that international order is the “explicit principles, rules, and institutions that define the core relationship between the states that are party to the order” clarifying that this “limits the concept of order to settled arrangements between states that define their relationship to each other and mutual expectations about their ongoing interaction”⁴. For this study, I primarily use the term global order, referring to the prevalent arrangements organising relations between sovereign states globally, within the context of the wider international system.

The international system is much broader than global order. It is the “comprehensive global context within which states operate”⁵, meaning that inevitably global order is heavily influenced by the flavour of the international system. Some researchers⁶ make less of a distinction or refer to the system in place of the order, however this blurs the lines awkwardly. It is more appropriate to say that global order manifests and exists within the context of the system. I would also point out that while it is incredibly commonplace to use polarity as an informal descriptor of order, it is a description of the system. As Ikenberry explains, “polarity of the international system provides important but limited information about the character of international order. It is a description of the distribution of power capabilities. That is all”⁷.

¹ Acharya (2018) pp.2-5.

² Bull (1977/2012) pp.19-21

³ Maull (2018) p.7; Mearscheimer (2019) p.11

⁴ Ikenberry (2001) p.23. For an overview of a broad spectrum of definitions see: Acharya (2018); Fossati (2017) pp. 32-38; Maull (2018); as well as Lascurettes and Poznansky (2021) who provide a concise primer on the topic.

⁵ Mazarr et al. (2016) p.8, Mazarr et al. (2017) p.4

⁶ See for example Kocs (2019) pp.2-3

⁷ Ikenberry (2011) p.46

As the international system evolves, so does international order in parallel. Studying global order is an endeavour to study one part of the social fabric of international relations, knowing that this must be studied in complementarity with the international system. Like ying and yang, global order represents the arrangements organising relations between states, cultivating a shared set of rules of the game, juxtaposed with the anarchy of the international system. Simplistically, but fairly, some might say that this is a question of how international politics ought to be, as opposed to how it really is.

Though I draw upon the insight of several prominent international relations theorists who have advanced our understanding of the concept of order, I avoid entering into a debate on the major realist, liberal, and constructivist perspectives of international relations. Generally, the scope of these theories transcends the specific niche of global order – studying the behaviour of states within the international system, rather than the arrangements shaping their behaviour. With this caveat, Srivastava and Sharma elegantly present how order may be conceptualised according to each of the orthodox IR theories. Perhaps an appropriate point of departure in this respect is to make a distinction between those who follow a descriptive approach as opposed to those who follow a normative approach⁸, with the essential difference being how they interpret the condition and implications of anarchy⁹.

A Descriptive (Traditionalist) Approach

Following a descriptive approach, global order is simply a reflection of the overall state of international affairs, the prevalent arrangements of the system, where the ‘default setting’ is typically described in rather Hobbesian terms as a state of nature. It is considered to be anarchical due to the absence of any higher authority; a self-help system lacking standards of legitimate behaviour, where cooperation is obstructed by the prisoners’ dilemma and states live in paranoic fear of the threat of aggression¹⁰. If we consider this description, the prospects of global order would be fairly thin.

Indeed traditionalists question the feasibility of global order, asking “how to conceive of an order without an orderer”¹¹. The key point here is that absent some form of higher authority or entity capable of compelling states to behave in a certain way, states can rely on nobody but themselves to safeguard their interests, this produces relations amongst states premised on the approach that might is right, and the law of the jungle reigns supreme. Aron refers to this as an anarchical order¹². There are two key assumptions in the backdrop of this traditionalist approach to international order.

⁸ Srivastava and Sharma (2014) p.21 (In IR terms, the same cleavage would be between realists and institutionalists)

⁹ Waltz (1979) p. 61-64

¹⁰ Aron (1995) pp.48-49; Waltz (1979) pp.102-123; Milner (1991)

¹¹ Waltz (1979) p.89

¹² Aron (1995) pp.48-49

Firstly, in an anarchic situation where there is no restriction on the use of force beyond a state's own strategic considerations, states can always fall back upon the use of force in case of disagreement, to protect their interests, or to guarantee their own survival. The value of hard power is elevated in this context, and the most consequential arrangement influencing relations between states is the distribution of power, and the power of a state relative to others which constrains how they may or may not behave (or the power of a concert or alliance of states relative to others)¹³.

Secondly it is assumed that due to this situation of constant insecurity, states are unwilling to cooperate with each other, avoiding the vulnerabilities of interdependence and prioritising their autonomy. It is further assumed that "no state intends to participate in the formation of a structure by which it and others will be constrained". The result is that the development of arrangements contributing to international order in any meaningful sense is blocked by the inability to cooperate and to take common action – or a lack of "coaction" – towards such ends¹⁴.

Hence in its most stripped-down form, "order is merely a settled pattern of relationships and behaviours among actors in a system. It does not presume intentionality or coherence"¹⁵. A number of scholars appear to converge on such a descriptive understanding of order built upon two strata in this regard. Firstly, an international order consists of a set of settled, formal or informal arrangements. Secondly, these arrangements define relations amongst states, and govern or set expectations for their behaviour, leading to "some degree of pattern and structure"¹⁶.

The fulcrum of this perspective is that international order is a set of arrangements which guide the behaviour of states, enabling "a baseline level of predictability, or patterned regularity", without prejudice to the substance of such behaviour¹⁷. Essentially this conceptualisation of order differs from the conceptualisation of the international system in that there is a very modest expectation of predictability. Notably, this perspective does not factor in the legitimacy of the arrangements – if the order is a "coercive" one imposed by the powerful, or a "consensual" order¹⁸.

In practical terms, due to this condition of anarchy, the lack of an overarching authority, the reliance on power, and the continuous mistrust amongst themselves, states infer how other states may act, or react, and act accordingly themselves, and this logic leads to a certain predictability in relations among states. In the anarchical order foreseen by traditionalists the factors influencing how states behave are therefore

¹³ Wight (2023), Aron (1995)

¹⁴ Waltz (1979) pp.89-91, pp.104-107.

¹⁵ Mazarr et al. (2017) p.4, (2016) pp.8-9

¹⁶ Hurrell (2007) p.2; Ikenberry (2001) p.22; Maull (2018) p.5; Mazarr, et al. (2016) pp. 7-8

¹⁷ Patrick (2016) p.8

¹⁸ Patrick (2016) p.9

not necessarily agreed upon nor codified, rather global order comes about as a product of a balance of power, or indeed any expression of power which can create or impose order¹⁹.

This may be a somewhat thin approach to global order by today's standards. Compared to, for example, the bounded international order of the European Union this perspective might seem outdated. But even in this case, Brexit vividly illustrated the discomfort of the British electorate with this arrangement, and events in the Middle East routinely illustrate that the traditionalist logic still thrives. The value of the traditionalist understanding should not be understated in this regard. Yet, this approach has limitations.

The first flaw relates to the interaction between states and the formation of global order. Waltz uses the term "coaction" and "coact" on a few occasions. It is a term which does not crop up often in other texts. I use the term coaction to refer to the ability and sustained willingness of states to cooperate to the extent that they take collective action together in an open-ended manner. Coaction denotes a policy choice by governments not merely to meet or agree upon something, but to implement what has been agreed through sustained, coordinated action. Coaction is the product of a mentality that values habitual cooperation over ad hoc or issue-specific collaboration. Such a coactive outlook could be understood as representing the antithesis of a zero-sum, transactionalist orientation.

The traditionalist understanding is that the condition of anarchy in and of itself prevails over the ability of states to coact in the interests of constraining the implications of anarchy, that their ability to make such a policy choice is terminally constrained. However, this interpretation of order negates the concept of agency in international relations and presumes *a priori* that states are unable to coact comprehensively to regulate the substance of their interaction, removing the possibility of states to exert any influence upon their own relations with each other, and to come together to 'collectively author' global order²⁰.

In contrast, the existence of the principle of external sovereignty and the general respect for this principle amongst states today contradicts this perspective. Of course, there are exceptions, but particularly when considering the lack of an authority to enforce respect for the principle, the adherence to the principle is in fact quite overwhelming. Acknowledging this implies recognition that states have verifiably demonstrated the capacity to coact and to form "intersubjective knowledge" about their environment, whilst simultaneously cultivating individual identities and promoting individual policies²¹.

¹⁹ As masterfully illustrated by Wight (2023, pp.52-64), there are several instances of such international orders throughout history, from the Classical era of Greek city states to the Renaissance Italian city states, and beyond.

²⁰ Wendt (1992) p.41

²¹ Wendt (1992) p.410; See also Helal's commentary regarding the Montevideo Convention and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (2019, p.493-495)

The second flaw is that conceptualising order as arrangements leading to predictability sets the threshold for orderly relations among states remarkably low in today's context, making the concept of order almost redundant in practice. There is no threshold according to which we can say that international politics is in a state of order as opposed to disorder²². States may be at war against one another constantly and perpetually yet still behave predictably²³. Today, the international system has moved closer to what the English School classifies as an international society: a system where highly interdependent states recognise the merits of multilateralism and accept a certain degree of global governance²⁴.

In this vein, Ikenberry writes about the potentiality of global order arising out of three possible scenarios: balance of power – organised according to the principle of anarchy; hegemony – organised according to the principle of hierarchy; and constitutional order – organized according to the principle of rule of law, premised on the existence of binding institutions²⁵. Though the international system remains anarchic, the environment within which relations amongst states take place is increasingly conducive to closer cooperation and interaction between them, which has led to an increased demand for some sort of mechanisms which manage and organise relations amongst themselves beyond power politics.

Despite the realities that power politics remains present, and power still shapes behaviour, despite competing interests and worldviews, for the most part states have clearly chosen the constitutional path. Driven by a desire to avoid conflict and awareness of their interdependence, states have willingly coacted. They have agreed upon the principle of sovereignty, formed institutions such as the UN, and set rules which may constrain their behaviour to some acceptable degree, aspiring for more than predictability. States have recognised the benefits of an international order which is in some way rules-based²⁶. An appropriate understanding of global order for the contemporary era must recognise that coaction is not only possible but clearly feasible.

Admittedly, one could justifiably argue that certain states clearly have greater capacity of influencing international affairs than others, that the strong can overpower the weak, and power is still the name of the game. However, power imbalances constrain but do not negate agency. The third issue with the descriptive approach in this respect is that it implicitly presumes that states do not hold any views or preferences regarding the type of order organising relations amongst themselves or are incapable of expressing them or acting upon them, which is unlikely to be the case²⁷. To borrow and amend some

²² Bull (1977/2012) p.xxxiv

²³ Bull (1977/2012) p.3

²⁴ Haass (2020), Hurrell (2007) p.9

²⁵ Ikenberry (2001) pp.21-32

²⁶ Mearsheimer (2019) p.9-11

²⁷ Acharya (2018) pp.5-10

known phraseology, order is what states make of it, how they perceive order, and how they may actively shape order.

A Normative Approach

The normative approach to global order suggests that for relations amongst states to be in a state of order prevalent arrangements and norms should be consistent with “some desirable objectives”²⁸. Whereas traditionalists see global order as being constrained by a condition of anarchy, a more contemporary approach sees order as managing and mitigating anarchy, in the interest of common goals. Hedley Bull and other English School theorists merit special reference in this respect, modernising the understanding of global order and taking the parameters of the discussion to another level by introducing the concept of an international society.

In his “Anarchical Society”²⁹, Bull agrees that prior to the normalisation of the principle of external sovereignty and non-interference, political order was indeed characterised by an anarchical order. However, he goes on to argue that the gradual application of the principle of sovereignty and the existence of sovereign states represented a paradigm shift from an international system to an international society driven by a recognition amongst states that they had a mutual interest towards self-preservation, and that they should regulate behaviour towards this end. Notwithstanding the persistent condition of anarchy, states acted upon the realisation that relations amongst themselves could be organised to some extent by agreeing upon and giving authority to common rules.

In his analysis on contemporary order, Buzan refers to Watson’s perhaps less known concept of the *raison de système* in this respect. In contrast to national self-interest, this term captures an approach to international relations acknowledging “the belief that it pays to make the system work”³⁰. It pays to come together to uphold common rules, it is as much a national interest as a common interest. An international society is therefore a situation where states, “conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another”³¹.

In this vein, Bull succinctly describes international order as “a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society”³². Order goes beyond simply contributing to predictability in international politics. Rather, international order contributes to

²⁸ Acharya (2018) p.5

²⁹ Bull (1977/2012)

³⁰ Buzan (2021) p.177 citing Watson, The Evolution of International Society (1992, p.14)

³¹ Watson (1987) p.147

³² Bull (1977/2012) pp.3-16

the achievement of certain *specific* objectives which organise interstate relations: order is not a settled pattern, but “a pattern of a particular sort”. Order serves as a set of arrangements which “promotes certain goals or values”³³. Within broader academic debate on the scope of order as a means or an end³⁴, Bull sees order as being both – rules organise relations between states, but they also incorporate forward-looking objectives.

Bull further qualifies order as “a quality that may or may not obtain in international politics”, which he disassociates from “the merits of any particular vision of order”³⁵. In other words, to speak of relations among states as being in a state of order, certain conditions must be met – but they need not be ideological conditions. This is a particularly practical way of conceptualising the concept, redefining international order as a benchmark: a standard of behaviour, based on the extent to which states adhere to a set of agreed common rules, and the promotion of common objectives inspired by common values and interests.

Ordering Principles: Order as a Benchmark

Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann’s framework of order further refines the idea of a benchmark³⁶. Their research refers to “foundational ordering principles” as the fundamental core pillars of order in the contemporary international system. Ordering principles “stipulate general rules of conduct”, contributing to a more predictable international environment, and they do this by setting out widely accepted rules and expectations for how states should behave, thereby setting a standard of behaviour among states. We could treat this as the normative dimension of order: arrangements structuring relations between states based on common interests and objectives. Ordering principles are “constitutive” of international order, they represent the baseline level of this standard, and if they were to be “systematically violated” this would signal a breakdown of order – or disorder.

At the same time, ordering principles “leave considerable scope for contestation and renegotiation of specific norms and agreements”, acknowledging that despite common interests, states retain space to nonetheless pursue competing policies within the boundaries of these agreed arrangements³⁷. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann do not quite elaborate on this second dimension in great depth. Nevertheless, they outline what could be described as a more political dimension of order, consisting of prevalent “features” of order often identified in research. These are not necessarily a product of agreement

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See Glaser (2019) pp.57-58

³⁵ Bull (1977/2012) pp. xxxii-xxxiv

³⁶ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Hofmann (2020) pp.1078-1079

³⁷ Ibid.

amongst states, reflecting characteristics of an international order at the political level rather than the organisational level: the promotion of certain policies and interests, aspirations, values, and ideologies.

Corresponding with this dual-track framing, Goddard et al. put forward their interpretation of an “ideal-type” liberal international order consisting of both “institutional” properties as well as “ideational” properties³⁸. In this respect, they assess that “liberal orders rest on largely aspirational principles that clash with the concrete political practices of creating and sustaining order”. Consequently, one could foresee a two-pronged benchmark emanating from this understanding – with one facet centred upon the extent to which aspirational principles are achieved, and another facet centred upon the extent to which political practices are respected. Eilstrupp-Sangiovanni and Hofmann also acknowledge aspirational elements associated with the Liberal International Order but question the degree to which they are representative of order – and therefore the degree to which they may represent a benchmark of order.

Helal also puts forward an understanding of global order utilising the concept of ordering principles, though his use of the term is somewhat more expansive. Referring to literature³⁹ on worldviews in international relations, Helal highlights the influence of the Great Powers by traditionalists as well as the political and ideological values driving their policies. He suggests⁴⁰ that such principles are “in essence, a world view; a lens through which the Great Powers understand the world, interpret history, and lay out a normative road map for how international life ought to be managed and governed”. The issue with this interpretation is that there is insufficient differentiation between types of principles, making it difficult to operationalise as a benchmark.

It is worth noting that the concept of ordering principles is not new. Notably, Waltz posited that anarchy is the primary ordering principle in international politics – a principle in the sense of a prevalent arrangement shaping relations amongst states⁴¹. However, taking into account a normative critique, perhaps more than an ordering principle, an arrangement such as anarchy would be better denoted as a *systemic* principle, or a feature of the system. In this case, a benchmark would be possible solely from the standpoint of questioning if such systemic principles are contributing to more predictable relations amongst states. From a functionalist standpoint however, considering questions of legitimacy and responsiveness this would be difficult to operationalise.

Taking things in a different direction, arguably one of the most comprehensive attempts to formulate a benchmark of order is that by Mazarr et al.⁴² who sought to measure the health of the post-Cold War

³⁸ Goddard, Krebs, Kreuder-Sonnen, and Rittberger (2024) p.3

³⁹ Notably he refers to Griffiths (2007) ‘International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century’, where a chapter is dedicated to this subject.

⁴⁰ Helal (2019) p.496-497

⁴¹ Waltz (1979) pp.88-93

⁴² Mazarr et al. (2017) pp.5-9

order. They propose that the main “elements of order” are driven by six “engines of order”. They then identify specific indicators for each element of order which are then used as a benchmark against which to compare adherence to norms, and the policies of rising powers in relation to the post-Cold War Liberal order. The benchmark used in the study is heavily oriented towards a US perspective. Nonetheless, the study proves the utility of operationalising the concept of order as a benchmark against which to assess the health of global order, even if according to a particular ideological perspective.

This study goes in the same direction as this overall body of research, focusing instead on the functionality of order. Bearing in mind such framing, the value of the normative approach to global order is precisely that the arrangements organising relations between states are treated as performing specific functions: they are there to guide international relations in a certain direction, towards the achievement of certain common objectives, cultivating a shared standard of behaviour, which is in some way seen by them as representative of international order. In this sense global order could be described as a functional concept.

The main points of contention with the normative interpretation of order relate to the extent to which these arrangements or “ordering principles” are agreed upon, whether they are purely procedural in that they organise relations amongst states, or whether they are political. The risk here is that if the threshold for order is set too high it may become unattainable, particularly if it is loaded with unrealistic, aspirational ideals, or potentially divisive political values and objectives, such as global democracy, or a world government. The range of normative positions also varies. Some theorists may favour a minimalist point of view focusing on neutral objectives oriented towards predictability, whereas others may favour a maximalist perspective including political values oriented towards conceptions of a morally good and just endpoint.

2.2: Functionality

Functionality: Legitimacy & Responsiveness

There is no cut and dry method for assessing the functionality of global order. The closest off-the-rack exploration of this theme is arguably Keohane’s functional regime theory⁴³. He posits that international regimes are created to facilitate cooperation amongst self-interested states in an anarchic system. In

⁴³ Keohane (1982), (1984)

such a system - where collective action is necessary but challenging to sustain, governments are driven by a rational incentive to cooperate. And in such a system characterised by mistrust, where information asymmetry can amplify such mistrust, regimes can play an important role to reduce uncertainty by enabling the sharing of information in the interests of facilitating agreement.

In this regard, a Keohanian interpretation of functionality would be oriented towards the functions a regime performs and its existence: facilitating collective action, minimising transaction costs, enabling information exchange, and keeping actors on the same page to arrive at mutually beneficial agreements⁴⁴. International regimes exist and persist because they meet the demand for this particular function. In Keohane's words, "regimes are valuable to governments not because they enforce binding rules on others (they do not) but because they render it possible for governments to enter into mutually beneficial agreements with one another"⁴⁵. All this is not entirely dissimilar from my own argument that states coalesce around principles serving the function of establishing shared expectations of behaviour, as well as my framing of global order according to a dynamic of supply and demand. But there are crucial differences separating this interpretation of functionality from the functionality discussed in this thesis.

Though Keohane flirts with several aspects of global order throughout the study, he does not explicitly address the topic⁴⁶. Undoubtedly, he does discuss the dynamic between power, patterns of cooperation, and the drivers/motivations of collective action in great depth - he discusses rules, norms, and principles, as well as the interaction between power and policy. However, his analysis is focused on regime-level dynamics, rather than on a system-wide collection of regimes. Citing Krasner⁴⁷, he defines a regime as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations." Were it not for its limitation to "a given area" of IR, this could just as easily refer to global order. Ultimately, there is a gap between the space Keohane's analysis occupies, and the research domain of this thesis. This makes it quite difficult to apply Keohane's perspective on functionality to global order because it needs to be scaled up and applied to a subject that is adjacent to what he writes about, but different.

Whereas Keohane looks at international regimes enabling cooperation in relation to specific issue areas, this thesis looks at principles of global order, where the scope of order is to mitigate anarchy. Keohane also acknowledges that regimes may constrain anarchy, but this is presented as a by-product of agreement being found⁴⁸. Perhaps global order could be seen as a vast collection of regimes, though

⁴⁴ Keohane (1984) pp.80-88

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.13

⁴⁶ So much so, Keohane explicitly distances regimes from the topic of international order in *After Hegemony* (p.63).

⁴⁷ 1983, p.2

⁴⁸ 1984, p.332

this would be quite a creative re-interpretation. Keohane also highlights the role of regimes as a vital element in the context of long-term cooperation - something I do not dispute, however as I argue throughout the thesis, this would need to be seen alongside the political will of governments to engage in such long-term cooperation.

Furthermore, and of particular relevance to the conceptual underpinning of the methodology of this study, Keohane does not elaborate in terms of how we can systematically assess the functionality of a regime and what the precise criteria would be. In this sense, for Keohane the main criterion to assess functionality would appear to be a regime's effectiveness in facilitating mutually beneficial cooperation under conditions of anarchy. This resembles my emphasis on the responsiveness of arrangements. However, it is still difficult to quantify and track to what extent a regime has effectively facilitated or not facilitated agreement. This is not to suggest that regime-level functionalism is irrelevant to global order, however it represents one component of a broader discussion, far more zoomed-in on the specificities of how arrangements may contribute towards facilitating collective action.

This study follows a more birds-eye view of global order. For these reasons, despite Keohane's fully-fledged theory, I find Ikenberry's definition to be a more robust starting point. Ikenberry defines functionality as "the ability of an international order to solve problems that states want solved...a question about the practical capacity of an international order to get things accomplished"⁴⁹. Based on this definition, it could be said that in some ways the functionality of order reflects the very *raison d'être* of global order: it relates to the ability of the arrangements of order to address the needs, interests, and concerns of states, to deliver the results that members of an order want.

Though this is a strong foundation which captures the essence of the concept, in my view there is scope to elaborate more. Throughout the discussion so far, we have been confronted indirectly by two themes beneath the surface. The first matter pertains to the legitimacy of the arrangements organising relations between states: meaning the extent to which they are agreed upon by states, and whether they are supported or contested. The second matter relates to the level of expectations assigned to these arrangements of order beyond predictability, and how responsive they are to these expectations: meaning the extent to which they are perceived to be responsive to their needs, interests, and values. To a certain degree it could almost be said that the approach to these two dilemmas also differentiates the traditionalists from the normativists.

Delving deeper in this respect, there is an important trade-off to consider in relation to these two criteria, as the legitimacy and level of expectations of an international order influence the depth and attainability

⁴⁹ Ikenberry (2014) pp.102-103

of order⁵⁰. A thick order where states agree on a more comprehensive package of arrangements is theoretically going to be more responsive to the expectations of its members, capable of having a greater impact on the behaviour of states. However, the more comprehensive the arrangements are, the more intrusive they become, and the more difficult it is to attain and maintain agreement amongst states on these arrangements due to diverging interests and perspectives.

In turn, the less states agree on the arrangements of order, the less they can be said to be legitimately representative of the members of that international order, and as a result such arrangements are less likely to be complied with, making such a thick order less attainable. Some may also openly challenge such arrangements if they do not consider them to be legitimate. It is more feasible to pursue a thin set of arrangements that are less intrusive to generate agreement. Though such arrangements would be less comprehensive, they would be more likely to be complied with. In sum, how functional an order can be depends on the balance found between the legitimacy of arrangements, and the responsiveness of these same arrangements.

Regarding legitimacy, Ikenberry's understanding is that the arrangements organising relations between states should be "settled" or "explicit", adding that "a stable political order does not necessarily require normative agreement among its members"⁵¹. But a stable order is not necessarily a functional one. Using the hypothetical example of a world in a state of constant war again – this may be a predictable, stable state of affairs, but hardly a situation that is likely to align with what states desire out of international affairs. A more tangible example aligning with Ikenberry's understanding would be the concept of a multipolar concert of powers taking decisions on behalf of everyone else – a concept sometimes resurrected as a solution for today's woes⁵².

A concert-based order may undoubtedly produce some form of stability and predictability, including more far-reaching achievements like peace and security. Yet, a stable order that is premised upon arrangements that reflect the expectations of some actors, but which run counter to the expectations of many others does not reflect a functional global order. The first issue is that if decisions are imposed by great powers upon weaker powers then such an order would lack legitimacy⁵³. The second issue is that even in practical terms some degree of agreement is necessary for a functional order, because if actors do not feel that their interests are adequately represented by these arrangements then they would be less inclined to follow them, as their interests are not represented. As a result, over the longer term such stability is likely to be diminished, as those who do not feel represented by these arrangements will resent them, and will not comply with them.

⁵⁰ Mearsheimer (2019) p.16

⁵¹ Ikenberry (2001) p.23

⁵² See Haass and Kupchan (2021) and the rebuttal on behalf of Popescu, Alexandroff, and Bradford (2021). See also Lemke (2023)

⁵³ So much so, Bull (1977/2012, p.89) refers to this top-down form of order as a "systematic injustice".

As such, Patrick disputes Ikenberry's point of view, noting that beyond a balance of power, historically speaking international orders have required "some basic consensus among nations, especially the most important, on principles of conduct", continuing that "such normative agreement helps to temper the structural anarchy inherent in a system of independent states"⁵⁴. It is worth underlining that the emphasis in theoretical discussions related to the legitimacy of global order is not primarily in terms of how an arrangement was created, but rather the level of consensus that exists regarding such arrangements. The critical factor is the extent to which arrangements are endorsed; the extent to which members within an international order perceive them to be representative of their interests⁵⁵.

In this spirit, Mearsheimer foresees agreement at least amongst great powers on such arrangements⁵⁶. Meanwhile, Acharya considers that legitimacy depends on "the extent to which an order represents the wider segment of the international system", including emerging actors and those who might have different expectations of order compared to the great powers⁵⁷. An example of an arrangement fitting Acharya's description would be the United Nations, as it enjoys global membership. An order which is more representative of its members and generates a higher level of buy-in on its main parameters would be more functional than one with less buy-in.

Supply and Demand

Considering the discussion so far, perhaps a more approachable way of explaining the concept of global order is according to the logic of supply and demand. It is not uncommon for research on global governance to utilise such a framing of analysis, typically with a focus on other strata of order such as the international environmental order, the international economic order, or the international cyber order⁵⁸. It would be fair to suggest that the same holds for political order. Considering that states have coacted at the very least to agree on the principle of sovereignty we can infer that states do indeed seek arrangements which produce certain desired results, arrangements contributing to a type of preferred behaviour, the achievement of common goals, and which are responsive to their expectations. There is in this sense demand for a supply of order.

Reflecting this, Sørensen's interpretation of the concept of order in international politics⁵⁹ places emphasis on this idea of a demand emanating from states, defining order as "a governing arrangement

⁵⁴ Patrick (2023) p.4

⁵⁵ For a more comprehensive (yet, concise) discussion on legitimacy in relation to the arrangements of order, see Binder and Heupel (2015) pp.240-242

⁵⁶ Mearsheimer (2019) p.9

⁵⁷ Acharya (2018) p.7

⁵⁸ See for example Acharya (2016, pp.2-15), who remarks upon new areas of demand for global governance in the fields of: "protection against genocide, climate change, financial meltdowns, and the abuse of the Internet". See also Rosenau, 'Strong Demand, Huge Supply' (2004)

⁵⁹ Sørensen, (2006) p.344

among states, meeting the current demand for order in major areas of concern”. At the level of specific arrangements, Keohane’s analysis of the creation and function of international regimes is predicated upon the argument that there is a demand for agreements, and in turn, a supply of regimes to facilitate arriving at such agreements⁶⁰. Similarly, in his research on the provision of global public goods in contemporary order, Nowak also contextualised the analysis from the perspective of the supply and demand. Notably, he reflected on the fallacy that assumes governments simply cooperate and work together in the interests of supplying these global public goods simply because it is rational, which does not reflect the realities of international politics, and which ignores the sovereign agency of the main actors⁶¹.

Particularly from the perspective of a functional global order, framing this discussion in terms of supply and demand is sensible in my view. Consistent with the notion that there are expectations for a certain type of order, it would follow that these expectations are indicative of a *demand* for a certain type of order. The demand is two-fold. Firstly, states demand a certain supply of arrangements which are responsive to their expectations in the sense that they reflect their preferences of how relations amongst themselves ought to be organised. Secondly, states also demand a supply of arrangements which are responsive to their expectations in the sense that they are capable of producing results according to their needs and interests.

Turning to expectations of order in this respect, as already touched upon, scholars dispute whether global order should simply result in predictable international relations without considering the expectations of states (a pattern), or whether order should result in predictable international relations in line with common objectives and adherence to common rules (a pattern of a particular sort). Understanding the expectations held by governments is an important factor in terms of investigating whether the supply of order is meeting the demand for a certain type of order, and if governments perceive the arrangements of order as being responsive to their expectations.

As I have already explained, scholars today largely agree that global order goes beyond predictability, managing behaviour amongst states based on agreed arrangements, norms, and rules, and facilitating cooperation amongst states in pursuit of common interests⁶². This does mean a total overlap of interests but an alignment at a broad level. Previous research on the development of norms is particularly instructive in this respect. Writing about the legitimisation of norms and their characteristics, Finnemore and Sikkink write that typically the evolution of such arrangements is guided by “a clear direction if

⁶⁰ Keohane (1984)

⁶¹ Nowak (2017) pp.38-40

⁶² Mearsheimer (2019) pp.9-11; Sorensen (2006) p.344; Bull (1977); Wendt (1992)

not a final endpoint”⁶³. The notion of shared interests is central to the English School approach to global order. Buzan writes that international society pertains to “the institutionalization of shared interest and identity amongst states”⁶⁴. The arrangements of order are therefore a reflection of such shared interests and identity.

Taking this premise a step further, it follows then that the supply of order is produced by those who are demanding a certain type or direction of order. What this also means is that though the collectively authored arrangements of order may take on a life of their own once they are created, they cannot themselves produce legitimacy, nor can they be responsive in and of themselves, unless they are empowered to do so by states in the first place. In an anarchic system, unless arrangements are empowered to operate autonomously, the agency of such arrangements is subservient to the agency of states.

In sum, the mere existence of certain institutions, norms, or rules does not automatically mean that they will necessarily contribute to a functional order, nor that they will successfully organise relations amongst states in a way that meets their expectations. Legitimate arrangements alone are thus a necessary but insufficient contributor to a functional global order. Given that actors on the supply side and the demand side are one and the same, the onus is ultimately on states to fashion arrangements capable of generating adequate widely held endorsement, and to adequately pursue their implementation to enable them to be effective.

2.3: A Functionalist Approach to Global Order

Incorporating key points highlighted in the previous section, my functionalist approach to global order primarily reflects the normative viewpoint but accommodates the descriptive perspective, combining and elaborating upon previous contributions. Furthermore, I build on the discussion regarding functionality, expectations, and legitimacy, defining a specific threshold according to which order could be said to be functional or dysfunctional on the basis of criteria relevant to these two main considerations. This approach does not re-invent the wheel but adapts it to new terrain in the interests of a practical understanding of global order which can be applied to investigate its alleged dysfunctionality.

⁶³ Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) p.906

⁶⁴ Buzan (2001) p.475

At the outset, I would propose that the functionality of order may be defined as follows: the ability of the organisational principles of a (global) order to organise relations between states in a manner that is both legitimate (generating buy-in on behalf of its members) and responsive (to the expectations, needs, and interests of its members). As such, we may assess the functionality of global order according to two criteria: buy-in and responsiveness.

Buy-in relates to the ability of the arrangements organising relations amongst states to generate endorsement: if they are supported or contested, reflecting expectations of how relations ought to be organised – whether supply is tailored towards demand in the first place. Responsiveness relates to the ability of the arrangements organising relations amongst states to deliver the results that states seek: if they are perceived to be meeting expectations in terms of tangible deliverables – whether supply is meeting demands in terms of addressing the needs, interests, and aspirations of states. In this sense, responsiveness may be understood as the subjective interpretation of effectiveness held by states, as ultimately only states themselves can adjudicate as to whether their expectations are being met or not.

Despite flagging shortcomings with the assumptions underpinning the implications of anarchy vis-à-vis international order, I would concur that the international system remains anarchical. Nonetheless, it is also important to acknowledge that states do coact together to collectively shape arrangements of order in the interests of organising relations amongst themselves within this anarchical context. Taking these perspectives into account, I believe that the arrangements shaping relations amongst states could be understood according to two dimensions: the organisational (normative) dimension, and the anarchical (descriptive) dimension⁶⁵.

The organisational dimension can be visualised according to two categories of formal arrangements which I categorize as ordering principles, and aspirational principles. This understanding aligns with and combines two existing interpretations of how contemporary order is constructed, which I have already introduced. Firstly, that of Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann who place ordering principles at the core of their understanding. Secondly, that of Goddard, Krebs, Kreuder-Sonnen, and Rittberger who refer to the arrangements of contemporary order as institutional properties and ideational properties. I attempt to define and explain the differences between the two herewith.

Ordering principles refer to the shared understandings amongst states in an international order about how relations amongst themselves are to be organised. Ordering principles manifest through the norms of behaviour, rules, institutions, and mechanisms that they collectively endorse to facilitate orderly interaction amongst themselves. Ordering principles set out widely accepted expectations for how states

⁶⁵ Haass (2017) speaks of “the other order”, the organisational dimension of multilateralism in parallel to systemic characteristics.

ought to behave, establishing the broad parameters within which states are expected to engage with one another. Collectively, they represent what may be understood as a widely held *modus operandi*, a shared code of conduct or an accepted set of ‘rules of the game’. Adherence to, or widespread contestation of these principles designates the dividing line between relations being in a state of order or disorder.

Ordering principles are “procedural” rather than substantive – establishing how states should behave, and the limitations of acceptable conduct. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann illustrate this by citing the principles of sovereignty and multilateralism as examples⁶⁶. Referring to multilateralism, they explain that states may disagree with each other on the substance of a topic, however they would still negotiate with each other at the multilateral level. Even if no agreement is found, they engage with each other according to clear parameters and known procedures, such as through the United Nations or similar fora. In other words, there is a shared understanding amongst these states that despite disagreement, relations should be conducted in line with commonly recognised parameters.

Aspirational principles refer to shared aspirations and goals that states within an international order widely subscribe to, common objectives which they agree that their behaviour should be oriented towards pursuing or achieving. Whilst ordering principles directly set out expectations for how states should behave, aspirational principles are less prescriptive, more flexible, shaping behaviour indirectly. In this sense, aspirational principles organise relations amongst states based on the assumption that if they are committed to achieving certain goals, then they would behave in a certain way in the interests of those goals.

Unlike ordering principles, where there is a high degree of agreement expected on how such principles should be implemented or adhered to, this is not necessarily the case for aspirational principles. There is a general level of agreement amongst states on the end goal, but not necessarily on how to arrive at their common destination, or what this entails. Examples of aspirational principles would be the promotion of international development, the promotion of international peace and security, and the promotion of human rights. What defines these principles is their aspirational nature; they are forward-looking, indicative of the direction in which the members of an order wish to take the sum of their relations, what they want to achieve together – but they leave more room for interpretation as to what constitutes the limitations of acceptable behaviour. Such principles can be political, but not necessarily so.

The anarchical dimension is populated by systemic characteristics, which are descriptive rather than normative. Systemic characteristics refer to the prevalent features of international life that emerge

⁶⁶ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann (2020) pp.1078-1080

organically from the structure and dynamics of the international system, and which contextualise and influence relations amongst states. Systemic characteristics encompass both the structural conditions shaping international relations emphasised by traditionalists alongside other more dynamic elements which shape the system.

This interpretation builds upon the Waltzian interpretation of ordering principles referred to earlier, which are arguably more concerned with systemic structures, fused with Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann's reference to general "features" of the political environment. I classify these features generically as "characteristics" rather than "principles" because whereas the organisational arrangements are the product of some degree of agreement amongst the members of contemporary order – products of "collective authorship" – systemic characteristics are not. They are best understood as characteristics that evolve organically, adding flavour and context to relations amongst states.

By way of illustrating the most apparent examples of such phenomena, systemic characteristics range from structurally entrenched anarchy and the prevailing distribution of power to more fluid system-influencing variables, such as the presence of international threats, challenges, and opportunities which may be relevant to the decisions of policymakers, to phenomena at the national level, including domestic issues and public perceptions, the promotion of particular ideologies and doctrines, to the personalities of world leaders.

Considering the variety of system-level features that may influence relations between states alongside order-level arrangements the definition I advance is deliberately quite expansive in this respect. In particular, I pay great heed to research by Mazarr et al. emphasising the value of understanding the character of global order and the system. They note that despite certain mechanisms contributing to global order as a structured pattern of relations, simultaneously "order grows out of the broad character of the international system"⁶⁷. I incorporate this broad component of systemic characteristics within this functionalist framework precisely to cater for this relationship.

Though such systemic characteristics may certainly inform the behaviour of states, they do not actively set out expectations for how states should behave, nor are there any expectations assigned to them – they lack functional intentionality⁶⁸. Such characteristics do not serve a normative function. For this reason, contrary to the view of traditionalists who consider that such arrangements may contribute to orderly relations – even if they lack legitimacy or intentionality – I would not consider them to be constitutive of global order from a functionalist standpoint, precisely because they do not serve a functional purpose. However, by saying that, I am not downplaying them. To the contrary, whilst states

⁶⁷ Mazarr et al. (2016)

⁶⁸ Mazarr et al. (2016) p.9, see footnote 3

may coact to formulate principles organising relations amongst themselves, their behaviour cannot be divorced from the wider context within which they behave.

Systemic characteristics influence relations amongst states in parallel to the collectively authored arrangements of order. It could be said that to a great degree, the effectiveness, success or failure of an order is also dependent on such characteristics. Incorporating the anarchical dimension within this framework is an attempt to accommodate the descriptive approach to international order, to factor in the endless variables that influence relations amongst states alongside the ordering and aspirational principles, and the variables that influence the attitudes and perceptions of states regarding these same principles. The organisational and anarchical dimensions are intrinsically connected in this respect.

On the one hand, the principles of the organisational dimension serve to organise relations amongst states so that despite the influences of the anarchical dimension a standard of general behaviour and relations amongst states is maintained in the interests of international society as a whole. On the other hand, regardless of the principles of order, states still retain the agency in an anarchic system to behave as they deem fit. It would be naïve to conduct this research as if governments dogmatically follow such principles without letting other considerations influence them, and it would be contrary to the emphasis placed upon the agency of the primary actors in international relations in this research to presume that such principles negate their agency in any way⁶⁹.

A Framework to Assess the (Dys)functionality of Order

The purpose of differentiating between the organisational and anarchic dimensions of the arrangements shaping relations amongst states is not simply a theoretical exercise. As I noted earlier, the normative approach treats the concept of order as a benchmark. In this vein, I shall now sketch out a framework according to this functionalist understanding which could be applied to investigate the functionality of a global order, based on the several elements that have been discussed so far. In this respect, it has practical value to make a distinction between the organisational dimension which contributes to a functional order, and the anarchical dimension which does not.

By drawing a line between the organisational and anarchical forces influencing relations amongst states – the arrangements that are a product of collective authorship and those that aren't – it is possible to identify which type of arrangements should meet the criteria of buy-in and responsiveness, and which should not be expected to meet this threshold. Thus, features of international politics which simply exist

⁶⁹ As noted by Mazarr et al. (2016, p.9) "An order need not exercise decisive, or even dominant, influence on the preferences and behaviors of states".

are sidelined. At the same time, such a framework also retains the capacity to account for such features, as well as the wider context within which the arrangements that should be functional exist.

A functional global order is an order where the ordering principles and the aspirational principles are both legitimate and responsive. The principles of a functional order generate buy-in and support from the members of that international order, and they receive positive assessments in relation to their responsiveness, indicating that the way they are being implemented and pursued is meeting expectations, responding to their needs and interests. A dysfunctional order is an international order where one of these criteria is not met: principles are either lacking legitimacy and not generating buy-in, or they lack responsiveness, perceived as not producing results or meeting expectations. In other words, a dysfunctional order would be one where a critical mass of relevant actors challenge these principles or assess their responsiveness negatively.

A functional order would suggest that the anarchical dimension is to some degree subjugated by the organisational dimension⁷⁰, the product of a conscious and collective effort by states to “coact”, concentrating their behaviour in a shared direction. This is why the organisational dimension requires agreement to be found amongst states in terms of their interests and expectations. If anarchical tendencies prevail and states are unwilling to coact, this may firstly lead to a breakdown of agreement and ‘buying-out’ from the ordering principles and aspirational principles. Secondly, a lack of coercion would suggest an underlying political unwillingness to work together according to common expectations of behaviour or in the interests of common aspirations reducing the responsiveness of such principles.

It is in this spirit of recognising the constant condition of anarchy that I reduce my analytical framework to “principles”, deviating from Ikenberry’s preferred terminology of “arrangements” which incorporates rules and institutions. In a system absent overarching authority, the arrangements organising relations amongst states lack mechanisms to compel or enforce compliance independently. Their organisational effect lasts as long as the willingness of states to adhere to these arrangements persists, which means there is a dependency upon states continuing to agree on the principle underlying such arrangements. If they no longer subscribe to the underlying principle upon which an arrangement is based, then the organisational quality of that arrangement is nullified.

Of course, how the criteria of buy-in and responsiveness are applied to real world events is open to interpretation. They differ in substance, and their implications vary slightly according to whether they relate to an ordering principle or an aspirational principle. The former set explicit expectations of

⁷⁰ Patrick (2023, p.4)

behaviour, the latter set implicit expectations, and whilst the former rely on a high degree of agreement, the latter may generate agreement on the ends but not the means. Thus, there is a case to be made that from the standpoint of a functional order, ordering principles should be given more weight than aspirational principles. The upcoming table sums up these criteria and considerations.

Organisational (Normative) Dimension		Anarchical (Descriptive) Dimension
Ordering Principles	Aspirational Principles	Systemic Characteristics
Principles organising relations amongst states: parameters within which states are expected to interact with each other	Common aspirations guiding relations amongst states in the interests of achieving these objectives	Prevalent features of international politics which contextualise relations amongst states
Explicitly set out expectations of behaviour	Implicitly set out expectations of behaviour	Do not set out expectations of behaviour
<i>To assess the dysfunctionality of order:</i> 1. Are the ordering principles and aspirational principles legitimate? Do states express buy-in: do governments express support for them or contestation against them? 2. Are these principles responsive? Do states assess that they are meeting their expectations? Do governments assess that they are delivering results and/or responding to their needs/interests?		

Figure 1 - A functionalist understanding of order.

In practical terms, whilst we can arrive at an approximation of the buy-in generated by arrangements based on a combination of tracking discourse and behaviour, responsiveness may be more difficult to map because it is dependent on state perception. Though observable data can be utilised in both cases to substantiate an analysis, in the latter case, whether a state feels that their needs are being met or not is ultimately a value judgement by the government of that state. For this reason, again reverting to the departure point that order is what states make of it, I would consider that it is up to states themselves to judge if their expectations are being met or not, both at the level of legitimacy and of responsiveness.

Another relevant question is which states should be accounted for when assessing the buy-in and responsiveness of global order. I would consider this to be dependent upon the aims of the analysis on a case-by-case basis. If analysis is oriented towards affirming whether an order is dysfunctional, I would suggest that this is quite straightforward. In this instance, the scope is to disqualify the possibility of a functional order, so what we are looking for is the threshold of buy-in and responsiveness *not to be met*. In this case, a restricted sample focused upon key players may be sufficient. In contrast, seeking to demonstrate that global order is functional is more complicated without some major qualifiers.

In an ideally functional global international order, arrangements would generate buy-in and would be responsive to the entirety of the order's membership – meaning positive assessments of buy-in and responsiveness globally. Therefore, to ascertain this a study would need to incorporate a global sample. However, few would disagree that this is perhaps an overly ambitious threshold – to expect a globally legitimate and globally responsive order, particularly considering the diversity of interests, agendas, and perspectives held by governments around the world, coupled with the chaotic nature of global affairs. In this spirit, a more nuanced approach may be appropriate for a more general analysis.

It is conventionally accepted that the anarchic international system is characterised by a degree of hierarchy amongst states. Though states themselves may have differing perspectives on where they fit in within such a hierarchy, some states have the capacity to influence events and principles more than others, and the views promoted by certain actors carry more weight than others, even if the system of sovereign states means that they are nominally equal. Following Acharya's lead as a rather critical voice, I would concur that in such cases analysis should seek to incorporate the 'wider segment' of the international system.

Closing this segment, I would underscore again that this framework represents an initial foray towards understanding global order from a functionalist perspective, incorporating several theoretical elements in the interests of a practical method of assessing the functionality of global order. For the most part, literature on the concept of global order does not resonate with the idea of a functional order, reflecting a state of the art where functionality is an abstract concept. This is understandable. A century ago, the League of Nations proved to be an idealist project, shattered by the Second World War. Similarly, the United Nations was born in the shadow of the Cold War. Yet today, politicians, academics, think tanks, and civil societies all expect more. The idea of a functional global order has become mainstream: a legitimate, responsive order catering to the needs of the wider population of sovereign states.

Much of the criticisms and concerns regarding contemporary order reflect exactly these points though absent an appropriate framework and the appropriate vocabulary it is difficult to investigate them. Inspired mainly by the English School, my approach therefore adapts previous literature to cater to contemporary needs and to fill this gap. This functionalist framework therefore represents my theoretical contribution to this young discussion: an interpretation of order reflecting normative considerations but accepting anarchical realities, setting out how the different arrangements of order could be understood as part of a larger whole, together with tentative parameters of what constitutes a functional order; the criteria of buy-in and responsiveness.

2.4: Contemporary Order, The Liberal International Order

Setting the scene to discuss the apparent crisis of contemporary order, I shall briefly introduce the main perspectives regarding what contemporary order consists of in this section. The prevailing understanding centres around the popular concept of the Liberal International Order (the LIO). One might almost say that this is used as shorthand for the ordering principles and aspirational principles of a post-Cold War order shaped by the dominant US-led Western powers. Yet, again, despite the popularity of the term what the Liberal International Order entails could be quite confusing, particularly given the varying expressions of liberalism associated with the idea⁷¹.

Prior research indicates a credible degree of consensus on the main parameters of this concept: a combination of principles originating in the post-WW2 era, packaged within the context of a Western-led distribution of power. These arrangements are primarily ordering principles which structure relations between states according to agreed processes, specifically the principle of sovereignty, the open economic and financial system, and multilateralism, particularly the United Nations. Though the post-Cold War order is also associated with more political elements of liberalism, like human rights and democracy, these generate some controversy.

According to Lake, Martin and Risse, the liberal element of the Liberal International Order “is the most difficult and controversial term in the LIO concept”⁷². This is because of the different meanings associated with the term: from sovereign equality between states, to the protection of human rights, to economic liberalism and principles of market capitalism; to liberal internationalism and multilateralism. They observe that “from a historical perspective, the LIO of the 1950s has different features than the LIO of the 2010s”⁷³. This predicament could be quite problematic. If a concept represents different things simultaneously it may lose meaning, and likewise if liberalism means different things at different points in time it becomes difficult to understand what is being referred to exactly when referring to the ‘Liberal’ International Order.

In this sense, Ikenberry remarks that while the 20th century form of liberal order was characterised by principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, today “liberal order is increasingly defined in terms of

⁷¹ Glaser (2019) p.82

⁷² Lake, Martin, Risse (2021) pp.4-8

⁷³ Lake, Martine, Risse (2021) p.3

the reverse”⁷⁴. This is where the added value of differentiating between ordering principles, aspirational principles, and political characteristics is relevant given that the various liberal elements associated with the contemporary order represent different strands of liberalism and could be classified according to such different arrangements.

Kundnani⁷⁵ explains that the original form of liberalism at the core of the Liberal International Order is derived from the agreements of the post-WW2 era. Liberalism in this sense relates to pluralism and sovereign equality between states, inspired by the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia – liberalism in the organisational sense. Meanwhile in the post-Cold War era the form of liberalism attracting most attention relates to the promotion of liberal foreign and domestic policies, human rights and open markets – which is liberalism in the political sense, the promotion of an ideology. Yet for the most part, relations amongst states remain based on the principle of sovereignty. This paradox is a product of the LIO being a “fusion” of two forms of liberal order, even if this fusion may include contradictory elements.

An Ambitious (Maximalist) Approach

The ambitious approach to the Liberal International Order could be summarised as follows. In the post-1945 era, Western democracies aligned with the US shaped their own version of a liberal order, taking it in a direction characterised by “economic openness, multilateral institutions, security cooperation and democratic solidarity”⁷⁶. Given the bipolar international system during the Cold War this was a *bounded* international order confined to the limits of the US and its allies. When the Cold War came to an end, the bounded US-led liberal international order characterising relations amongst Western democracies became an international order with global reach. The growth and expansion of the Liberal International Order was propelled by Western ideological power and hard power.

This maximalist approach is premised on three trends. Firstly, there was de facto no competitor to the vision of a “New World Order” promoted by the US and its allies post-1990. Secondly, driven by US hegemony the balance of power was shifted entirely in favour of the Western bloc – a “Unipolar Moment”⁷⁷. Thirdly, the liberal ideology spread across the globe: the number of democracies around the world increased and countries, including other major powers, were integrated within liberal economic and financial institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and the WTO⁷⁸.

⁷⁴ Ikenberry (2009) p.71

⁷⁵ Kundnani (2017) p.2-6

⁷⁶ Ikenberry (2018) p.7

⁷⁷ Krauthammer (1990)

⁷⁸ Ikenberry (2010) pp.535-551; Ikenberry (2018) pp.9-11; Krauthammer (1990); Mearscheimer (2019) pp.21-27

The key drawback to this interpretation is that scholars advocating this point of view tend to assign aspirational, forward-looking policies as the main principles of the LIO, reflecting the overarching foreign policy preferences of the established Western powers at the turn of the century⁷⁹. These far-reaching claims do not quite align with observed realities, making it easier to undermine the wider concept. The first claim relates to the role of the US and its allies in promoting liberal values at the heart of the West's Cold War era bounded international order, in the post-Cold War era. The second claim concerns the global reach of the LIO, an issue complicated by maximalist claims about the success of the US and its allies in their endeavour to promote liberalism.

Based on developments between 1990 to 2019 Mearsheimer highlights three main pillars of the Liberal International Order: liberal institutionalism, economic interdependence, and the democratic peace theory⁸⁰. He outlines the LIO's overall objective in no uncertain terms: "to spread democracy across the globe, while promoting greater economic intercourse and building increasingly powerful and effective international institutions". Mearsheimer adds emphatically that the goal is "to create a world order consisting exclusively of liberal democracies that are economically engaged with each other and bound together by sets of common rules"⁸¹.

Similarly, Ikenberry suggests that at the heart of the Liberal International Order is the concept of liberal internationalism. And in turn, central to liberal internationalism is "a commitment to liberal democracy"⁸². Liberal internationalism could be understood according to five underlying assumptions: that open economies contribute to international peace; that the promotion of a rules-based multilateral approach would facilitate international relations; that states would pursue an element of security cooperation, though not necessarily formal alliances to enhance their own security; that states may behave in a liberal rather than realist manner; and perhaps most importantly, that a liberal international order would promote democratization⁸³.

He suggests quite ambitiously that "by the end of the 1990s...the organizational logic of the Western order built during the Cold War was extended to the global level", referring to a "liberal moment" characterised by democratization and globalisation⁸⁴. However, portrayed in this light, the concept unfortunately risks falling victim to its own ambition⁸⁵. So much so, Glaser refers to such an

⁷⁹ Huang (2021) p.2; Ikenberry (2010)

⁸⁰ Mearsheimer (2019) pp.21-23

⁸¹ Ibid p.14

⁸² Deudney and Ikenberry (2012) p.3

⁸³ Ikenberry (2018) p.11

⁸⁴ Ikenberry (2010) pp.535-537

⁸⁵ Glaser (2019) pp.64-66; Acharya (2017) p.271

understanding as “misguided”, referring notably to China as a non-democracy⁸⁶, and others classify this conception of the LIO as a “myth”⁸⁷.

Undoubtedly, there was a unipolar moment and a liberal moment, but notwithstanding these system-level characteristics the principle of liberal democracy never had global buy-in, and the US and its allies did not promote this principle consistently or globally. These assessments portray the Liberal International Order as if it was the natural progression to a global version of the bounded order carved out by the US and its allies in the Cold War era. They prioritise a set of liberal aspirational principles promoted by certain actors without accounting for the perspectives and expectations of other actors. There is no consideration for the buy-in generated by these principles, nor their responsiveness to the needs and interests of non-Western actors. Ultimately, this approach to the principles of contemporary order as a truly global order is difficult to defend.

A Prudent (Minimalist) Approach

A prudent approach may be a more honest reflection of the parameters that define the global version of the Liberal International Order. Endorsing a distinction between organisational and aspirational dimensions of the LIO, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, posit concisely that the post-Cold War order consists of three “foundational ordering principles: national sovereignty, economic liberalism and inclusive rule-based multilateralism”⁸⁸. Sovereignty forms the basis of this global order. It is liberal in terms of the economic and financial system which promotes open markets and fosters interdependence. Multilateralism serves as a framework for rules-based interaction. These are recurring and uncontested themes throughout literature on the LIO. Lake, Martin, and Risse propose a similar three-pronged definition, revolving around the concept of liberalism: political liberalism, within which they combine the principle of sovereignty together with human rights and democracy; economic liberalism; as well as liberal internationalism, which they treat as the equivalent of multilateralism⁸⁹.

In sync with my earlier remarks on conflating the order and the system, advocates of a prudent approach question the relationship between US hegemony and the post-Cold War Liberal International Order, cautioning against simply seeing this order from the US perspective⁹⁰. Lake, Martin, and Risse go so far as to argue that “it is a historical myth that the most intrusive and distinctive parts of the LIO have all been introduced by Western democracies, let alone by US hegemony”, citing the human rights regime and R2P in this regard⁹¹. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann point out that though the US played

⁸⁶ Glaser (2019) p.56

⁸⁷ Allison (2018)

⁸⁸ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Hofmann (2020) pp.1078-1079

⁸⁹ Lake, Martin, Risse (2021) pp.4-9

⁹⁰ Glaser (2019) p.56

⁹¹ Lake, Martin, Risse (2021) pp.9-10

a leading role in the LIO, US involvement at the multilateral level and US promotion of liberal values has often been inconsistent⁹². Looking at recent behaviour, others write about the challenge to the US-led Liberal International Order posed by the US itself⁹³.

Alcaro takes a more subtle approach⁹⁴. He acknowledges the “inherent tension between US power and the order that emanates from it” and refers to the “paradox” posed by the inconsistency of US support for the liberal order, most notably when Washington undermines the promotion of democracy by supporting authoritarian regimes. Still, US power enabled the Liberal International Order to expand and to persist essentially unchallenged as a *modus vivendi* for international politics after the Cold War. It would be more accurate to say that US power ensured that the post-Cold War order has been constantly a “US-centred order” because it has proved itself to be “a systemic ‘pole’, the hub around which global state interactions revolve”. Alcaro’s nuanced interpretation reflects an attempt to reconcile the organisational dimension with the anarchical, showing the value of such differentiation.

Certainly, since the end of the Cold War the US and its allies have maintained a certain ‘hegemonic’ alliance. And whilst they may not have always acted in accordance with the liberal values and ideals they promote, they have dominated and defined international politics in the post-Cold War era. However, this does not mean that a successful transition from a bounded ideologically liberal order to a globalised order in the sense being conveyed by Ikenberry took place in the aftermath of the Cold War, nor that such a Western vision of order had global buy-in. Adopting a minimalist standpoint comes across as a safer, more grounded point of departure.

A Rules-Based Order: An Observational Approach

Prior to concluding this segment, I believe it is also appropriate to briefly discuss the concept of a rules-based order, which has gained prominence in recent years. This approach eschews the ideological underpinnings of order. Instead, the approach is observational, framed according to the recognition that relations amongst states today are at least loosely rules-based, and identifying prevalent norms of behaviour in this respect. Admittedly, this notion is open to criticism because it is still politically loaded, frequently invoked by Western governments⁹⁵ and derided by non-Western counterparts who point to the selective application of certain rules⁹⁶. Still, there is value in introducing the term in a somewhat neutral form.

⁹² Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Hofmann (2020) pp.1078-1082

⁹³ Cottle, Keys and Costigan (2019)

⁹⁴ Alcaro (2018) p.5, see also Zakaria (2008) p. 42-43

⁹⁵ Wouters (2024)

⁹⁶ Gewirtz (2024)

Firstly, it is important to clarify that “rules-based does not mean fully rules-determined”⁹⁷. Recent papers⁹⁸ by Stewart Patrick represent a convenient entry point in this respect, identifying norms based on the observation of state behaviour and prevalent characteristics of international politics. In brief, he refers to rules across four domains: rules in terms of the promotion of peace, stability, and reducing violence; rules in terms of economic development; rules in terms of transnational challenges; and rules in terms of the promotion of liberal values, notably democracy and human rights⁹⁹.

Patrick highlights respect for sovereignty and non-intervention as the “bedrock principle” of contemporary order, while acknowledging prominent threats to the principle¹⁰⁰. The norm of not using force without the approval of the UN Security Council has similarly been undermined, though actors doing so have admittedly sought to justify their behaviour, which indicates at least a “normative pull”¹⁰¹. He also refers to the success in terms nuclear non-proliferation efforts, as well as the obligation to combat terrorism, even if the latter has faded off the agenda and the concept of counter-terrorism has also been manipulated and taken advantage of to serve interests unrelated to this, such as cracking down on political opponents, or indeed undermining the principle of sovereignty¹⁰². It is notable that such principles are not really factored in by the maximalist and minimalist approaches to the Liberal International Order, which shows the value of a more observational method.

The second main theme is financial. Emphasising the role of the WTO in particular, Patrick refers to preserving an open multilateral trading system, as well as the promotion of sustainable development and financial stability as the main norms¹⁰³. Thirdly, in a nod to the maximalist approach Patrick notes that contemporary order implies “a universal commitment to human rights and to the principle that all governments derive their legitimate authority from the consent”. However, in sync with the minimalist critique, Patrick also notes the selective democracy promotion pursued by Western actors, something which other global actors are acutely aware of.

Patrick’s analysis also refers to transnational and planetary challenges such as combatting climate change, global health security, migration, peace in outer space, the cyber domain, and regulating AI. The incorporation of such elements reflects the far more operational understanding of order which can be achieved through an observational approach. Patrick looks at how contemporary order manifests in practical terms, how governments around the world perceive the world around them, and how their

⁹⁷ Jentleson (2023) p.84

⁹⁸ Patrick (2016); (2023)

⁹⁹ Patrick (2023) p.3

¹⁰⁰ Patrick (2023) p.5-6

¹⁰¹ Patrick (2023) p.6-7

¹⁰² Patrick (2023) p.8-10

¹⁰³ Patrick (2023) p.10-13. It is of note that whilst in 2016 Patrick assessed that the rules related to the international economic and financial system “are the most-well established”, in 2023 his updated analysis emphasises the fragmentation of the world economy.

behaviour over time begins to reflect certain patterns and norms. This is, in my view, a more mature approach to understand contemporary order, and a more practical method.

Literature on the state of contemporary order is arguably quite limited precisely because of the tendency to politicise the concept of order, at the cost of something operational which reflects the wider interests and perspectives of international society as a whole. Unless one arrives at a somewhat neutral benchmark of order which adequately reflects expectations of order from states around the world, beyond the Western powers, it is difficult to discuss contemporary order holistically, much less assess its functionality. As chapter three outlines in more detail, my study caters precisely to this consideration.

2.5: A Crisis of Order?

Global Order in the 21st Century

Regardless of the approach one adopts, many would agree that contemporary order is in some form of crisis¹⁰⁴. Going back to the notion of a supply and demand for global governance, Hurrell sums up¹⁰⁵ that today “gridlock, stagnation, fragmentation, contestation, and, most recently, backlash have become the dominant frames within which to analyse global governance”. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and the renewed Russo-Ukrainian war, global order appeared to be in disarray¹⁰⁶. In such a context, it is quite justified to question if contemporary order is dysfunctional.

There is little research dedicated specifically to the functionality of order, or which utilises the same criteria of buy-in and responsiveness referred to previously, thus I focus here on research which covers the broader sense of a crisis of order. Much of this research is restricted to a shift in the global distribution of power and its implications. Nonetheless, such analysis covers the topic of the functionality of order indirectly, pointing in the direction of a dysfunctional order. Two general arguments can be extracted from previous research which support such a conclusion.

Firstly, the major powers are dissatisfied with contemporary order. Western powers feel that they have been the losers of globalisation; governments have turned their back on the promotion of political liberalism. Conversely, emerging powers consider that global order does not represent their interests. It would appear that buy-in on both sides is quite hesitant in this respect. The second theme relates to the consequences of a fragmented political landscape which complicate coaction. Before delving into these particular claims, it is worth looking briefly at the evolution of international politics in the meantime.

¹⁰⁴ Duncombe and Dunne (2018) p.27; Ikenberry (2011); Ikenberry (2018), Huang (2021) p.2

¹⁰⁵ Hurrell (2018) p.91

¹⁰⁶ Haass (2017)

The Rise of the Rest and the Decline of the West

Going back to my earlier point on the relationship between order and the system, some important developments linked to globalisation have conditioned the context of relations amongst states. Firstly, globalisation has been accompanied by a new era of connectivity and integration amongst states. Societies have become reliant on a global infrastructure linking countries together. From supply chains and shipping routes to internet cables and international financial services, energy grids and raw materials – countries are interconnected and linked together at different levels like never before. As aptly summed up by Bridges¹⁰⁷, “infrastructure is remaking geopolitics”. This unprecedented level of integration has brought countries together, but it means they have no choice but to work together.

Secondly, some would argue that globalisation has perhaps gone too far, it has metastasized into hyper-globalization, producing a world “riddled with uncertainties”¹⁰⁸. Local, national problems quickly become international. Amadi’s review of literature on globalization and its relationship with contemporary order is particularly enlightening in this respect. Notably, he suggests, as do others, that due to the USA and Western states being considered losers of globalisation, this has led to their governments departing from policies conducive to the spread of political liberalism and globalisation.

In this context, there is a large volume of analysis explaining the evolution of international politics in the 21st Century under the heading of the decline of the West and the rise of the ‘Rest’. And inasmuch as it is problematic to lump countries together with such terms, this phraseology covers the general idea being conveyed quite well. It kicks off in 2008, in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Studies emphasised the strong economic growth and recovery by non-Western countries in contrast to the sluggish economic performance in the West¹⁰⁹.

The ‘rise of the rest’ was backed by long-term projections of “economic multipolarization” suggesting that the most prominent emerging economies would eclipse the economic strength of the West within the coming decades¹¹⁰. While it should be noted that emerging players have faced their own setbacks¹¹¹, few can dispute that the constellation of power today and the characteristics of global politics post-2008 are profoundly different to those of the immediate post-Cold War era. China, in particular, is widely recognised as the most likely candidate to be in a position of challenging a Western-led international system¹¹².

¹⁰⁷ Bridges (2024)

¹⁰⁸ Amadi (2020), Colgan and Keohane (2017)

¹⁰⁹ Zakaria (2011) pp.2-5, 42-45

¹¹⁰ Kupchan (2014) p.75, Hawksworth and Chan (2015)

¹¹¹ Hurrell (2018) p.91; Ikenberry (2011) p.341

¹¹² Stuenkel (2016) pp.66-67, Schweller and Pu (2011)

Considered in tandem with the decline of the West, this trend is even more vivid. Zakaria's¹¹³ assessment of the USA paints a picture of a superpower consumed by “dysfunctional politics”, leading to mismanagement of domestic and foreign policy, capped off by deeply unpopular behaviour on the international scene following the September 11th terrorist attacks. Commentary abounds on the demise of Pax Americana and diminished US influence, even if it were to remain the strongest of the great powers¹¹⁴. Nevertheless, it is not only America that appears to be struggling.

In the years following the invasion of Iraq, Western credibility crumbled as one crisis after another ushered in what has been termed a “post-Western” world¹¹⁵. In 2008 the financial crisis decimated Western economies. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring instability in the Middle East and migration flows brought the EU to its knees, with the question of how to manage migration a seemingly perpetual Achilles' heel for the organisation. Then in 2014 Russia's annexation of Crimea ruptured relations with the G7 and liberal Western states. In 2016 the United Kingdom voted in favour of Brexit, whilst the USA elected Donald Trump as President, advocating policies which defied the very heart of the liberal vision of the New World Order attacking the UN and multilateralism. The costs of European strategic miscalculations and energy dependencies came to the fore following the decoupling from Russian oil and gas in 2022.

In recent years, Western governments appear to have lost their way somewhat, not quite sure what they want, suffering from a crisis of identity. The term “Westlessness” was aptly coined to describe this process¹¹⁶. Once characterised by a commitment to liberal democracy and human rights, multilateralism, and open markets – Western states are now just as closely associated with populism, unilateralism, illiberal democracies, xenophobia, impotent foreign policies, stagnant economies, and divided societies¹¹⁷. The return of Trump to the political scene in 2025, coupled with a worldview that diverges from European aspirations amplified this sense of a Western bloc which is collapsing internally.

It would be a step too far, I believe, to label the shift in the distribution of power as a crisis of order. However, this evolution is significant because it provides valuable background to understand the issues which are relevant to discussing the functionality of contemporary order. These developments fuelled three analytical viewpoints: (i) divergent “visions” of international order among the contemporary great powers, coupled with (ii) the abandonment of the vision of the post-Cold War “New World Order” by

¹¹³ Zakaria (2011) pp.217-223, pp.250-251

¹¹⁴ Beckley and Brands (2022), Kupchan (1999), Layne (2012), Layne (2018), Nye (2024)

¹¹⁵ Maull (2019), Stuenkel (2016)

¹¹⁶ Munich Security Conference (2020), Flockhart (2021)

¹¹⁷ Niblett and Vinjamuri (2021); Amadi (2020); Duncombe and Dunne (2018); Mahbubani (2018); Adler-Nissen and Zarakol (2020)

the established Western powers, and (iii) emerging powers also contesting these ideals, having never bought into this narrative in the first place¹¹⁸. What is significant here is that the explanations for these trends, or their implications, all relate to buy-in and responsiveness.

Dissatisfaction from Inside, Challenge from Outside

Explaining this evolution of affairs, Mearsheimer describes 1990 to 2004 as “the golden years” of the Liberal International Order¹¹⁹. However, it soon became evident that there were limitations to this vision. Democracy promotion was not only a tremendously arduous task, but it was pursued in a manner “almost certain to provoke fierce resistance”. He argues that eventually rather than integration within the Liberal International Order, democracy promotion prompted opposition. China and Russia emerged as competing non-liberal poles, challenging Western foreign policy from the outside. Meanwhile, discontented Western electorates who felt that they lost out through globalisation caused Western governments to also turn against such liberal policies¹²⁰.

For Ikenberry¹²¹ the root of this evolution lies at the moment of the liberal order’s triumph at the end of the Cold War. He explains that when the initially bounded international order became a global international order it incorporated additional actors and non-Western states with varying and competing ideologies, interests, and perspectives. These developments led to a crisis of authority, as the Liberal International Order no longer reflected the interests of its members. It also led to a “crisis of purpose”, its members were no longer necessarily liberal and democratic, nor united in their beliefs of what international order should look like.

Cracks beneath the surface of the Liberal International Order began to appear, because this liberal order no longer catered to the interests of its members, simply because of its diversity. Ikenberry argues that over the longer term, these crises were exacerbated by the shift in the distribution of power empowering non-Western actors, while liberal democracies faced internal strife, economic stagnation, and a loss of identity. The sense one gets is that for the established Western powers the Liberal International Order is no longer representative of their expectations, while rising non-Western powers never really felt represented from the start.

These conclusions point towards a lack of buy-in, a crisis of legitimacy. It would be an omission not to refer to research in this domain, ranging from commentary on how “nobody wants the current world

¹¹⁸ Ikenberry (2018); Mearsheimer (2019); Bremmer (2012), Haass (2017), Kupchan (2012)

¹¹⁹ Mearsheimer (2019) pp.26-27

¹²⁰ Mearsheimer (2019) p.31-43

¹²¹ Ikenberry (2018)

order”¹²², to links between legitimacy and justice¹²³, to studies on specific elements of the Liberal International Order, including financial institutions¹²⁴ and the UN Security Council¹²⁵. But there appears to be no research so far which systematically assesses if states support or contest clearly defined principles of contemporary order at a holistic level, encompassing a variety of principles and actors.

Mearsheimer and Ikenberry are amongst the most outspoken of academics on the topic of global order, hence the focus on their respective arguments. However, their central argument has been supported by others¹²⁶ reaffirming argumentation in terms of the impact of the emerging powers from beyond the Western liberal bloc, representing a political challenge from the outside, and on the other hand the decline of Western powers, and a crisis of liberal identity, representing a challenge from the inside. The notion that some degree of contestation is produced as a result of the “self-undermining” elements of contemporary order is also quite accepted¹²⁷.

Whilst it is perhaps too early to comment on longer-term implications, policies pursued by the USA under the second Trump Administration have further underscored the sentiment that America in particular is buying out from the order it helped build¹²⁸. The USA is buying out from the promotion of political liberalism which for Mearsheimer and Ikenberry defined the liberal order; the Trump administration is buying out from procedural liberalism, promoting policies undermining the UN and multilateralism, including sanctioning members of the International Criminal Court; and buying out from economic liberalism – with an agenda shaped by tariffs.

Though the topic of the functionality of contemporary order is not covered directly, these conclusions are nonetheless significant and can be adapted to the criteria outlined earlier. They point in the direction of collective frustration, dissatisfaction, and the overarching claim is highly relevant: central components of global order seem to lack buy-in, and it is clearly not responsive to the needs of its members. Western electorates and governments feel like they are losing out, they feel that contemporary order is no longer responsive to their needs. Conversely, major non-Western powers consider that their interests and political values are not represented either, that they do not have the voice they deserve. The net conclusion is that both established and emerging powers are dissatisfied with contemporary order, with questions raised both in terms of buy-in and responsiveness.

¹²² Menon (2022)

¹²³ Reus-Smit and Zarakol (2023)

¹²⁴ Kentikelenis and Voeten (2018), Nogueira Batista Jr. (2024)

¹²⁵ Binder and Heupel (2015)

¹²⁶ Duncombe and Dunne (2018); Cooley and Nexon (2021)

¹²⁷ Goddard, Krebs, Kreuder-Sonnen, and Rittberger (2024)

¹²⁸ Cooley and Nexon (2025)

A Fragmented World

This background on the decline of the West and the rise of the rest is valuable. Nevertheless, such research does not quite explain why contemporary order appears to be so incoherent, so ineffective. From the standpoint of looking for explanations as to why contemporary order may be dysfunctional, of more significance is the consequences of the diffusion of power at the centre of such analysis. This diffusion of power is often framed in terms of an evolution from unipolarity to some sort of other polarity, such as multipolarity,¹²⁹ nonpolarity,¹³⁰ and regiopolarity¹³¹. The recurring theme throughout such literature is the notion that this diffusion of power at the system level has led to an increasingly fragmented world, both in terms of power, and politics: political interests and ideologies.

It is this political fragmentation which is fuelling the apparent dysfunctionality of order. Nowadays the upper echelon of international politics consists of actors with profoundly different interests. Even if they are not necessarily revisionist¹³², the most influential players have diverse ideological backgrounds, they prioritise different norms, promote a myriad of interests and values, driven by unique domestic motivations. They have varying attitudes and expectations of what they want from international order, and what path they want international politics to follow.

There appears to be a remarkable degree of consensus amongst scholars on the overarching assessment that as a result of this diversification of actors, influence, and interests contemporary order is lacking direction. There are more relevant actors, more voices, but less leadership to galvanise common and collective action¹³³. Hence the perception of an incoherent (dysfunctional) international order. In an interdependent, hyper-globalised world where challenges are likely to be relevant to numerous states and stakeholders, even the greatest of the great powers must work with other partners if they wish to successfully pursue their own interests and objectives¹³⁴.

In fact, we appear to be seeing the opposite. Buzan writes about the risks posed when the members of an international society “fail to uphold *raison de système*”, where actors collectively fail to see the bigger picture, obstinately pushing forward with their own interests with little consideration for how this impacts the wider whole, creating a breakdown of trust¹³⁵. Similarly, Schweller characterises this state of play as “an age of entropy”, where international affairs become “more erratic, unsettled” due to the knock-on effects of a diffusion of power producing a diffusion of disagreements¹³⁶. Some have

¹²⁹ Kupchan (2014)

¹³⁰ Haass (2017) Schweller (2021)

¹³¹ Acharya (2008)

¹³² See Schweller (2015), Kim and Kim (2022)

¹³³ Kupchan (2012) pp.3-5, p.183; Bremmer (2012); Kupchan (2014); Haass (2017); Ikenberry (2018); Munich Security Conference (2020) p.23; Onis and Kutlay (2020); Huang (2021), Menon (2022), Alterman and McElwee (2024); Munich Security Conference (2025)

¹³⁴ Keohane, R. and Nye, J. (1977), Nye and Goldsmith (2011), Schweller (2021), see also Hurrell (2018) p.97-100

¹³⁵ Buzan, in Chu and Zheng (eds.) (2021) p.177

¹³⁶ Schweller (2014)

referred to the emergence of a new “Cold War” today¹³⁷. And whilst such terminology is quite loaded, it is clear that contemporary international society is divided and politically fragmented¹³⁸.

Referring again to Ikenberry, he writes that “among the many impacts of Russia's war on Ukraine, the most consequential may be that it marks the moment – the tipping-point – when history reversed course”. He argues that international politics is now contested by three broad groups, or “Three Worlds” – the West led by the USA and Europe, the East led by China and Russia, and the South led by India and Brazil, amongst others. Each pull in different directions, promoting different narratives based on their own interests and perceptions¹³⁹. Whilst the emergence of “*à la carte* multilateralism” and “minilateralism” may be a silver lining¹⁴⁰, whether such trends can overcome the implications of such fragmentation is yet to be seen. A spiral of selective or miniature multilateral endeavours can also complicate matters, substituting a lack of action with divisive action.

The implications are not only political. Those looking at the intersection between politics and economics raise similar concerns. The lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic and a deterioration of relations amongst several major powers, capped off with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and controversy regarding the use of sanctions have led to “policy driven reversal of integration”¹⁴¹. As a result, “there is a growing risk of a world fragmented into distinct economic blocs with different ideologies, political systems, technology standards, cross-border payment systems, trade systems, and reserve currencies”¹⁴².

Such warnings are understandable, given the current “strategic competition” between the USA and China¹⁴³, the EU's aim to achieve “strategic autonomy”¹⁴⁴, the rise of an “axis of upheaval”¹⁴⁵, and a resentful segment problematically classified as the Global South who want their views to be accounted for¹⁴⁶. The movement towards a more fragmented, politically divided world appears to have picked up pace. Additionally, persistent conflict in the Middle East may well continue to fuel division. At a time when there is an increased demand for international cooperation purely due to the world we live in and the interlinked challenges being faced today, governments are failing to find common ground, moving away from each other politically¹⁴⁷.

¹³⁷ Minghao (2019), Ferguson (2025)

¹³⁸ ISPI (2023), Fasulo and Gili (2024)

¹³⁹ Ikenberry (2024), see also Kutlay and Onis (2024)

¹⁴⁰ Patrick (2015), Dee (2024) p.5. Panda and Park (2024)

¹⁴¹ Aiyar and Ilyina et al. (2023) p.5

¹⁴² Pankki (2024) p.4

¹⁴³ Winkler (2023), Bo (2024), Nagy (2023)

¹⁴⁴ Varma (2024)

¹⁴⁵ Kendall-Taylor and Fontaine (2024), Stanovaya (2023), Economy (2024)

¹⁴⁶ Suzman (2023), Spektor (2023), Spektor (2025) See also Ero (2024)

¹⁴⁷ Patrick (2023) p.2

It is not that governments *cannot* cooperate. The problem is that they are choosing not to or pursuing policies that discourage cooperation. And when they do cooperate, this comes at a cost, it is increasingly transactional. Key players today have contrasting expectations of the direction they want international politics to move and frequently what appear to be irreconcilable interests. There is a notable space for relations to continue to deteriorate, an unwillingness to cooperate, to compromise, and thus an increased likelihood that there will be less coaction. In such a context, it is highly likely that contemporary order is slowly suffocated, becoming increasingly dysfunctional.

2.6: Concluding Remarks

What I have sought to accomplish in this chapter is to present literature which would enable a reader to understand a discussion on the functionality of contemporary order, together with the relevant background to understand why this particular topic is relevant today. I began with the fundamentals: order and functionality. I moved to the context, the post-Cold War segment of the Liberal International Order, the evolution of international affairs over the past couple of decades, and the apparent crisis being faced today. I concluded with potential explanations for this crisis, and how these relate to the functionality of order.

In as much as the compendium of research presented so far would be interesting for anyone studying the evolution of contemporary order and the state of contemporary international affairs, there is a notable lack of research on the functionality of order, and no studies specifically oriented towards assessing the functionality of order. Debates tend to focus more on questions like the balance of power and other anarchical characteristics of order, perhaps because this is more gripping, more sensationalist. There is, therefore, a notable gap which I target through this study.

Literature on the apparent crisis of contemporary order can nonetheless be used to somehow answer the question of whether contemporary order is dysfunctional. Notably, despite lacking an appropriate theoretical framework, prior research does suggest that perhaps contemporary order may be dysfunctional. Mearsheimer and Ikenberry point clearly towards a lack of buy-in and responsiveness. The overall body of work in terms of a fragmented international society also suggests a certain dysfunctionality. The claims are credible, the theoretical explanation adds up, indicating that an international order which relies upon coaction, is increasingly paralysed by a lack of coaction due to political fragmentation.

With that said, there appears to be a certain disconnection between these two strands of research though. If we look at the issue of the contemporary major powers buying-out and feeling dissatisfied with the responsiveness of contemporary order, it initially appears that the problem lies with the principles of order not being representative of wider interests. But then the explanation in terms of a more fragmented world suggests that the problem is primarily political not structural. Fragmentation does not explain the lack of buy-in or lack of responsiveness identified by Mearsheimer and Ikenberry. There are three main claims related to the functionality of contemporary order which merit further investigation in this regard.

- The first claim is that the established liberal Western actors have withdrawn buy-in from the principles of order, and that the emerging powers never signed up to them in the first place. It is worth scrutinising to what extent the principles of contemporary order are lacking buy-in, if levels of buy-in have decreased over the years, and if it is indeed the case that established and emerging powers alike are contesting them, and to what extent they may be doing so.
- The second claim relates to the general dissatisfaction which appears to characterise attitudes to contemporary order. Here, the question is whether governments are indeed dissatisfied, if they feel that contemporary order is not responsive to their expectations, needs and interests.
- The third claim relates to the consequences of the shift in the distribution of power, and if the policies and positions promoted by influential actors are so diverse that they are obstructing collective action and leading to an international order which may seem functional on paper, but which is increasingly quite dysfunctional in practice.

Concluding, research on global order is growing at a rapid pace, reflecting growing interest in the field, so it is unsurprising that there are certain limitations. Looking specifically at the question of whether contemporary order is dysfunctional, several studies suggest that it is, putting forward credible claims. Yet, despite the emphasis upon different perspectives and interests promoted by key stakeholders, there is scope to bring more data to the table. Moreover, the topic itself has remained largely ignored. In this respect, by targeting a specific under-studied aspect of the subject – the functionality of order – and by delivering a nuanced analysis based upon systematically sourced data, my project seeks to demonstrably elevate the current state of the art, bringing systematically sourced data and rich content to the conversation.

Chapter 3: Data & Methods

This chapter explains the methods employed in this study to systematically investigate whether contemporary order is dysfunctional. The chapter consists of two parts. In the first section, I open by briefly outlining the methodological needs of this study, and how I settled upon the approach of content-focused discourse analysis to gather relevant data. I then introduce the specific material opted for as an expression of this discourse – namely speeches delivered by the members of the G20 at the United Nations General Assembly from 1990 to 2022. The latter half of the chapter unpacks, step by step, the approach taken in terms of gathering data from these speeches via content analysis. This covers three phases.

- i. The initial preparatory phase relates to familiarization with the data being used, and the preparation of an appropriate coding scheme. The coding scheme combines the functionalist framework of order outlined in the literature review with the requirements of the content analysis, informed by previous literature, but primarily an iterative inductive process.
- ii. The subsequent data collection phase walks through the process of coding transcripts of relevant speeches in order to identify and track positions in relation to the main ordering principles and aspirational principles characterising the post-Cold War order, the justification for the positions taken, and general assessments regarding the state of international order. Coding was done with the use of Atlas.ti, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.
- iii. The third phase overviews the processing of data, meaning how the data gathered was put to use, to evaluate if contemporary order is dysfunctional: mapping positions promoted by governments in relation to the criteria of buy-in and responsiveness, tracking trends of dispersion and intensity in the positions being promoted, and identifying themes which may contribute to explaining the current state of order.

Particularly given the various competing interpretations regarding the concept of international order, the characteristics of the post-Cold War order, and my theoretical proposal regarding a functionalist understanding of order careful attention was given to the conceptual coherence of the overall research design of this project given that so much depends upon the conceptual rigour of what is being discussed¹.

¹ Braun and Clarke (2022)

In this sense, the data and methods employed are heavily informed by the conceptual and theoretical observations in the literature review.

Notably, a prominent shortcoming with previous research is that though analysis revolves around elements of dissatisfaction and how states perceive contemporary order, there is often little empirical evidence to back up these claims. The voice of the major powers themselves is largely inaudible. Particularly given the breadth of the subject and the depth of such claims, it would be expected that there is more data brought to the table. The methodology opted for in this study is oriented towards overcoming this deficiency, systematically tracking levels of buy-in and responsiveness both to test and to build upon these claims.

3.1: Political Discourse

Considering my research question and the background introduced so far, an approach was required that enabled the identification of government positions regarding global order. Appropriate material and methods were needed, which would allow me to capture the perspectives of different actors towards contemporary order in a systematic manner, particularly their assessments, preferences, expectations, interests and attitudes towards the principles of order. With these requirements in mind, and consulting previous research seeking the same form of data, I opted to study the content of political discourse employed by governments regarding the principles of contemporary order. Specifically, as I expand upon in the following segment of the chapter, this thesis employs a qualitative content-focused analysis of official intergovernmental discourse – statements by the members of the G20 at the UN General Assembly – to examine how they articulate, support, contest, and evaluate the principles of global order.

Arguments within IR scholarship in favour of studying discourse to enhance our understanding of government preferences, policies, and perspectives in relation to world politics are well established, particularly within constructivist and interpretive approaches. Discourse of a political nature – or political discourse – can take many forms: ranging from official speeches, communiques, and statements by a government or public officials to interviews, propaganda, political advertising, pamphlets, party rallies, online talks, and discourse featuring on the radio or TV². However, regardless of form, political discourse serves a key function: communication³.

² Yongtao (2010) p.92; Van Dijk (1998) p.18

³ Van Dijk (2001) pp.356

Of course, researchers should be cognisant that political discourse is not necessarily honest discourse. Criticisms abound that discourse by political actors is blighted by a lack of truthfulness characterised by doublespeak and deceit. Bertolini⁴ notes that philosophical behemoths such as Plato, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes have all discussed the relationship between truth and politics – alongside more contemporary 20th Century names, George Orwell and Hannah Arendt, who both argued that political discourse is increasingly disassociated from facts and reality. In a post-truth world, this is ever more difficult to deny.

Indeed, such discourse does not necessarily reflect actions or widely accepted facts. Rather, such political rhetoric outlines a reality as presented or perceived by that actor “without presuming to voice a historical truth”⁵. After all, a government is likely to deliberately misrepresent its actions if decision-makers believe it to be in their interest. The US ‘war on terror’⁶ and Vladimir Putin’s decision to describe Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 as a ‘special military operation’⁷ are cases in point. The use of social media to promote disinformation at a large scale also underlines this danger. Nonetheless, regardless of whether actors convey their genuine interests or otherwise, if they engage in earnest or in bad faith, their discourse is strategic and imbued with meaning.

Risse⁸ writes that “players have the choice of lying or telling the truth, of revealing or concealing their preferences. They choose according to these preferences and strategies”. So much so, intergovernmental discourse often supplements what are classified as “strategic narratives”. Strategic narratives have been defined broadly as “a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors...they are narratives about both states and the system itself, both about who we are and what kind of order we want”⁹. More concisely, strategic narratives may be understood as “a tool through which states can articulate their interests, values and aspirations for the international order”¹⁰.

While strategic narratives serve as a tool employed by governments to sell policies to their peers and publics, studying them would provide more insight regarding how governments *frame* their discourse and their positions regarding global order through broader overarching narratives, rather than the positions, policies, and preferences themselves. The aim of this analysis is more surgical, focusing more narrowly on the *content* of discourse within which such narratives are embedded, the specific positions,

⁴ Bertolini (2021) pp.1271-1276

⁵ Shenhav (2006) p.246

⁶ Romarheim (2015)

⁷ Aspriadis (2023) pp.33-35

⁸ Risse (2000) pp.8-9, Yongtao (2010) pp.94-95

⁹ Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2013) p.2; Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2012); Antoniadis, Miskimmon, and O’Loughlin (2010)

¹⁰ Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2012); Antoniadis, Miskimmon, and O’Loughlin (2010)

policies, and preferences promoted, as well as relevant justifications. The aim of this project is not to arrive at an accepted truth, but to investigate perspectives on global order.

In this regard, it is worth highlighting that much has already been written about the role of discourse to interpret and shape rules and norms associated with international order. The emphasis here is on how discourse at the UN General Assembly is utilised by governments to express how they interpret rules and norms, and in turn to shape rules and norms. In this respect, Kratochwil¹¹ posits that “rules do not apply themselves; they have to be interpreted and argued about” and similarly, Wiener¹² highlights that “norms are not stable objects but are continuously interpreted, contested, and renegotiated through social interaction”. At a broader systemic level, Ruggie¹³ argues that “international orders are underpinned by shared social purposes that are expressed and sustained through institutionalised discourse”.

These arguments each allude to the two-way relationship between discourse as well as the rules and norms, of international order – what I understand to be reactive discourse that interprets, and proactive discourse that shapes. In this sense, official speeches are not only valuable to understand how governments interpret the world around them. Over and above this, discourse is an entry point for researchers to understand how governments actively seek to shape the arrangements of order, relevant policies and preferences advocated in this context; to observe variations in the information being communicated, as well as to compare convergences and divergences in their discourse interpreting and shaping order.

In sum, commentators on the subject of global order often refer to “visions”¹⁴, “versions”¹⁵, and “perspectives”¹⁶ of order – implying that there is a plurality of perceptions, understandings and long-term ambitions regarding global order. Ultimately, “there is more than one form of reality in IR”. This takes us back to the earlier discussion on the constructivist approach, theorising that the arrangements of global order are the product of intersubjective knowledge and collective authorship, a question of competing perceptions and realities, based on how individual actors see the world. The question we are faced with is how to study this plurality of views and realities in a systematic manner. Discourse is widely recognised by scholars as a method through which governments seek to shape the arrangements of order according to their own perceptions and interests – and thus, a content-focused analysis of discourse is appropriate precisely as a window into this plurality of perspectives: to understand how

¹¹ Kratochwil (1989) p.11

¹² Wiener (2014) p.1

¹³ Ruggie (1998) p.22

¹⁴ See for example, Schweller and Pu (2011); Colgan (2019); Kaczmarek (2019)

¹⁵ Kupchan (2012) pp.3-5, p.183

¹⁶ Stares et al. (2020)

governments interpret and perceive global order, to increase our understanding of the positions that they advocate for, and their interests in this context.

Previous Research

Several recent works at the intersection of research on great powers and global order illustrate the value of studying official government discourse, notably Kaczmarek's analysis of divergence and convergence in Russian and Chinese narratives¹⁷, Binder and Heupel's analysis regarding the legitimacy of the UN Security Council, as well as research by Stuenkel and by van Noort regarding the BRICS¹⁸. These works illustrate how researchers can arrive at nuanced conclusions through a systematic analysis of statements issued by governments and organisations as well as speeches delivered by world leaders, serving as blueprints for further research focusing on the same material. While the body of literature presented in the previous chapter suggests a certain automatism between shifts in the global distribution of power and changes in the character of international order as if the former necessarily equates to the latter, research on the perspectives promoted by some of the most prominent emerging powers challenges this view.

Kaczmarek¹⁹ contributes to this debate through an analysis of convergence and divergence in Russian and Chinese visions of order, analysing joint declarations issued by Russia and China as well as individual statements by their political leaders. While his research identifies numerous points of agreement in this regard, such as a transition towards multipolarity (or polycentrism) and condemnation of Western interference, Kaczmarek also refers to the different tone of speeches delivered by Putin and by Xi. Whereas the former presents Russia as a traditional “bulwark against US dominance and unipolarity”, the latter conveys a suave image of China as “the locomotor of globalization”.

In this regard, Kaczmarek argues that while the two promote a joint narrative, they see themselves occupying specific roles and identities in international politics, and they both promote specific individual narratives to serve their interests²⁰. This study also demonstrates how an analysis of official discourse may allow researchers to delve deeply into a specific topic identify micro-level data, forming part of broader macro-level arguments and trends, providing insight into both how actors see the world, and how they see their role within the world – exemplifying the ability to observe the two-way relationship between discourse and the norms, rules, and principles of order referred to earlier.

¹⁷ Marcin Kaczmarek (2019)

¹⁸ van Noort (2017); van Noort (2019); Stuenkel (2016)

¹⁹ Kaczmarek (2019)

²⁰ Romanova (2018) follows the same approach, using discourse analysis of the 2016 Russian Foreign Policy Concept and speeches by President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov to identify foreign policy positions taken by Russia, and its perception of the post-Cold War order. Miskimmon and O'Loughlin (2017) take a similar approach based on National Security Concepts, and Foreign Policy Concepts.

Binder and Heupel's investigation into the perceived legitimacy of the UN Security Council²¹ merits particular attention given the overlap with this project. They focus on a specific arrangement – the Security Council; a criterion relevant to the functionality of that arrangement – legitimacy; outlining a systematic approach to investigating attitudes towards this arrangement. They conclude that whilst the Security Council does enjoy a “rudimentary degree of legitimacy” there is nonetheless a legitimacy deficit, with negative assessments outnumbering positive statements. They note that such negative statements are driven by criticism primarily regarding procedures, secondly regarding transparency, thirdly regarding participation, and fourthly regarding accountability.

Stuenkel's study tracks the positions promoted in joint summit communiqués issued by the BRICS on a yearly basis since the first BRICS summit was convened. Based on the positions promoted in these communiqués Stuenkel concludes that while the BRICS share uncertainty regarding the extent to which they should “embrace” or push for “reform” of the liberal order, they “lack a clear common revisionist agenda”²². He cautions that though the BRICS may criticise western exceptionalism, they are “increasingly seeking special treatment themselves”²³. The analysis is primarily descriptive as a “historical biography” of the BRICS. Nonetheless, his findings are notable, showing how even a relatively small but systematic mapping exercise of the positions promoted by a segment of stakeholders can enhance our understanding of their attitudes and policies towards global order.

Van Noort also devotes her attention to BRICS summit communiqués²⁴. Though van Noort's analysis is primarily oriented towards the strategic narratives employed by the BRICS to frame positions taken by the group, her findings provide similarly nuanced conclusions. Building on the belief that these communiqués are ultimately produced to try influence other actors, her case study outlines “how the BRICS group gives meaning to the international system, their collective identity and the issue area of infrastructural development”. Van Noort classifies the narratives according to themes, sub-themes, and different levels of narrative, and following this approach, she notes three clear narratives emerging from the communiqués: “a system narrative of global recovery; an identity narrative of inclusive participation; and an issue narrative of infrastructural development”.

Beyond the findings themselves, such studies show the value of analysing government discourse in a systematic manner. Van Noort's and Kaczmarek's findings reflect conclusions that ‘traditional’ analysis focusing on behaviour may well overlook. Binder and Heupel also demonstrate that it is possible to extract very specific findings from such research material, in this case using speeches from

²¹ Binder and Heupel (2015)

²² Stuenkel (2015) pp.155-158

²³ Stuenkel (2015) p.165-167

²⁴ Van Noort (2017)

the UN General Assembly. The ability to shift from macro commentary on a general lack of buy-in to a micro-level of analysis with granular detail reflects precisely the type of data necessary to elevate research in the field, and thus why studying the content of official government discourse brings added value to the academic debate on global order.

Additionally, Kentikelenis and Voeten's study on the legitimacy of the liberal international economic order based on UN General Assembly speeches from 1970 to 2018 stands out for the scale of their endeavour²⁵. The timeframe and sample size encompassed in their analysis are outliers, given that the majority of studies are inclined towards smaller projects. They found that despite the idea of the liberal order's decline (in political terms), there is less outright criticism of it. Given that the study focused on the liberal *economic* order the extent to which these findings could be applied in terms of buy-in and responsiveness of political order is limited.

Another study of note is that by Mazarr, Heath, and Cevallos²⁶ who compare China's views of order to a benchmark standard of order, scrutinising China's behaviour alongside documentary evidence such as official documents and statements, amongst other sources of information. Their research indicates that China makes a clear distinction between a global order based on sovereignty and multilateralism as opposed to the US-led international order. China's attitude changes depending on the order being interacted with, and while China has sought to challenge US hegemony this does not mean that China necessarily challenges the rules-based order, even if this implicitly limits China's ability to wield power²⁷.

The benefits of research structured around governments discourse – speeches and statements – as the basis for evaluating the functionality of global order are apparent in my view. These studies illustrate that the relationship between global order and the great powers seeking to influence order can be studied systematically using official speeches as a source of data. They show that through appropriate content analysis researchers may identify the positions promoted by different actors on subjects relevant to international order, and the principles of order, to track these positions over a period of time, compare positions, and uncover insightful trends and findings which are not necessarily as visible from an analysis of behaviour alone.

The studies also show that it is possible, based on such data, to assess the extent to which governments promote positions which embrace or challenge specific aspects of order, and to investigate government perceptions of responsiveness based on positive or negative attitudes that they may express in terms of

²⁵ Kentikelenis and Voeten (2021)

²⁶ Mazarr, Heath and Cevallos (2018) pp.58-63, p.122

²⁷ Mazarr, Heath and Cevallos (2018) pp.4-5

their expectations being met. Furthermore, given that this approach remains fairly novel in terms of scholarship related to international order, the methods employed in this study further accentuate the findings being put forward.

3.2: Methods, Part 1 – Data & Evidence

UN General Assembly (UNGA) General Debate Speeches

Taking the aforementioned studies into account, this research focuses upon the speeches delivered by the members of the G20 at the United Nations General Assembly General Debate. The speeches covered in this analysis range from 1990 to 2022, on a biennial basis, covering positions taken from the end of the Cold War until the present day. Copies of the statements are available online via the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld library. Surprisingly, despite being at the top of the agenda for the diplomatic and foreign policy community as the most high-profile venue for governments to deliver key messages and national positions to a global audience, these debates seem to be rather neglected in terms of research on international order²⁸.

There is a valid debate to be had as to whether such rhetoric reflects cheap talk or serious political signalling²⁹. Cynics may argue that the UNGA represents a lot of empty talk and posturing without substance, where what is discussed in the margins is more important than what is discussed on stage. Muammar Gaddafi's 2009 rant lasting over an hour and a half, culminating in him ripping apart a copy of the UN Charter exemplifies how the platform provided by the General Debate could be instrumentalized. Yet even in such instances, there is thought behind the theatrics, and for most participants the scope of the rhetoric being employed is deliberate, and the speeches are drafted with purpose³⁰. Such discourse – performative or otherwise – serves a key communicative function. These speeches represent a conduit through which governments and world leaders transmit messages and exchange information with one another, and with their intended audience³¹, they are “a vehicle through which interests are constructed, communicated, and contested”³².

On this latter point, there is indeed a strong case to be made that UNGA speeches are perhaps the most comprehensive resource for the study of policies and perspectives regarding the arrangements shaping

²⁸ Batur, Dasandi and Mikhaylov (2017)

²⁹ Panke (2014), Ramsay (2011), Gibson (2025) p.122; Trager (2016)

³⁰ Goddard and Krebs (2015) p.6; The Guardian (2019); Politico (2019)

³¹ Risse (2000) p.8

³² Schmidt (2008) p.305

relations amongst states, and international affairs more generally. The scale and convening power of the UN General Assembly remains unchallenged. The General Assembly brings together all UN Member States and observers on a yearly basis, allowing governments an equal platform to speak at any length about any subjects of interest, regardless of size or political and economic influence.

Speeches may range from a presentation of national interests and policy objectives to an overview of aspirations and accomplishments, from justifications for certain domestic or external policies and behaviour, to general thoughts, stocktaking, and observations on international affairs, covering an entire spectrum of topics. Thus, according to Baturo, Dasandi and Mikhaylov, who curated a dataset of UN General Assembly speeches, the properties make the General Assembly debates a controlled environment, “ideal for using text analysis to derive estimations of state preferences”, enabling researchers to track the positions and preferences expressed by any and all states on different themes in a systematic manner³³.

Here, emphasis is made on the term “estimations”. The number of times a government takes a certain position may be enlightening in terms of the *intensity* of a certain position. However such speeches, informative as they are, were not intended as shopping lists outlining a list of things governments support, and moreover, leaders deliver statements in different ways. As became clear when collecting data, some are telegraphic keeping their statements short, some embellish their speeches, some tend to be more descriptive, some take direct positions while others hint at certain preferences indirectly, and others may focus on accomplishments at the national level due to domestic considerations. As a result of such variety, while the UN General Assembly establishes a level field for actors to make their voice heard, this does not mean that the presentation of positions is necessarily uniform. The data derived from these speeches should therefore be treated appropriately.

Presenting positions taken in UNGA speeches numerically can present a distorted view, and care was taken when gathering and processing data accordingly. The fact that ‘State X’ expresses support for a principle once, and ‘State Y’ expresses support for that same principle twice does not necessarily mean that the latter supports this principle more than the former does. A government may well support a principle, but for any number of reasons the point may not feature in their speech. This was mitigated to some degree firstly by not giving too much weight to individual sessions, and secondly by looking at a wider range of sessions across the years to see if a preference is indicated consistently.

³³ Baturo, Dasandi and Mikhaylov (2017)

The G20

Whilst this study could have covered a larger sample of actors, to keep the project manageable it was considered appropriate to focus more narrowly on a segment of contemporary major powers, also considering that the positions promoted by such actors do carry a little more weight. My study is therefore restricted to the members of the G20, a group self-described as – “a strategic multilateral platform connecting the world’s major developed and emerging economies”. At the time of writing, the G20 members together represent over 80% of global GDP, 75% of global exports, and 60% of the global population³⁴. The group’s profile has grown substantially since the first G20 summit in 2008, representing a “global governance hub” today³⁵.

The G20 is an ideologically and geographically heterogeneous mix of established and emerging powers, comprising both ‘the West’ and ‘the Rest’, ensuring a healthy level of diverse narratives being covered by this sample of great powers. It would be incorrect to claim that membership of the G20 is the threshold to be met for an actor to be considered a great power, and the inclusiveness of the forum may be controversial, however the properties of the G20 are such that it delineates an informal concert of “systemically significant” players at the forefront of international politics and the global economy today³⁶. These characteristics make the G20 a well-suited focal point for the purpose of this research³⁷.

With the intent of replicating mainstream references on the schism between the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’ – as well as the emerging powers from the Global South – this study further categorizes the members of the G20 according to membership in the G7, BRICS, the OECD and the G77. There is admittedly an arbitrary element here in that governments are being assigned a ‘team’ they may not openly subscribe to. And of course, there is a very valid argument to be made against pigeon-holing countries and governments along such broad lines. That said, some categorisation was required to move from broad labels without clear parameters, towards more tangible affiliations which could be studied empirically.

The G7 is arguably the most accurate off-the-rack manifestation of ‘the West’. Formed in 1975 amidst shocks to the global economy due to the OPEC oil embargo the first summit included France, the USA, Japan, the UK, Italy, and (West) Germany, before incorporating Canada in 1976, and the European Economic Community in 1977. Russia was a member between 1998 until 2014, when the rest of the G7 membership opted not to attend a G8 summit following Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Though the G7 was originally oriented towards economic and financial affairs, the members of the forum also share

³⁴ G20 (2025)

³⁵ Layne (2018) pp.99-100; Berger, Cooper, and Grimm (2019)

³⁶ Viola (2020); Slaughter (2019) pp.37-53; Berger, Cooper, and Grimm (2019)

³⁷ It should be noted that in September 2023 the African Union was made a member of the G20, however the data collection phase of the study was already almost complete by this point.

certain political characteristics as liberal democracies³⁸. Additionally, the G7 (not including the EU) consistently generated between 65-68% of global GDP between 1970 to the turn of the millennium³⁹.

Similarly, the BRICS also rose to prominence in the context of economic challenges, with the first ministerial meetings taking place in 2008 amidst the financial crisis – initially with Russia, China, India, and Brazil, before incorporating South Africa in 2010. Admittedly, BRICS membership is less cohesive than that of the G7 – its own website highlights that “relations between BRICS partners are built on the UN Charter, generally recognised principles and norms of international law and the following principles, which were agreed by member countries at their 2011 Summit: openness, pragmatism, solidarity, non-bloc nature and neutrality with regard to third parties”.

Much has already been said about the inability of the group to live up to the hype. The IMF’s data mapper demonstrates that apart from China and India the BRICS is still lagging far behind the G7 in terms of economic prowess⁴⁰. Yet, the BRICS has nonetheless become synonymous with the sentiment of an emerging group of powers counterbalancing the G7, and a symbolic challenger to Western dominance of international affairs. So much so, that the past couple of years have been rife with reports of additional members joining the group – including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Ethiopia, Iran, and Egypt⁴¹.

Categorizing the rest of the countries being assessed required more active researcher involvement. For the non-established powers affiliated with the West, consideration was given to several groups, namely NATO, the Western European and Others (WEOG) regional group within the UN, and the OECD. The issue is that Turkey is a NATO member, but not a WEOG member, and vice versa for Australia. The Republic of Korea is a member of none, but it would be odd to have Japan and Korea in different groups. The OECD includes these three, as well as Mexico⁴². Incidentally, when Mexico joined the OECD in 1994 it also withdrew from the G77, which served as grounds to see the latter as a representation of the rest of the G20 members being studied, being Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Argentina⁴³.

Beyond the West and the Rest, the study also accounts for debates on the division between the established and emerging major powers. Whilst typically the Liberal International Order is seen as a ‘Western’ led order, with the implication that the established powers are Western powers, the approach taken in this study is that the P5 including Russia and China are considered as established powers, alongside the G7. The justification for this is that it would be odd to treat two of the elites in international politics, permanent members of the most significant international political institution as somehow *not*

³⁸ Press and Information Office of the Federal Government (2025), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy (2025)

³⁹ Council on Foreign Relations (2024)

⁴⁰ IMF (2025)

⁴¹ Reuters (2024)

⁴² OECD (2025)

⁴³ G77 (2001), G77 (2025)

established powers. From a political perspective, if not economic, there is no question that these are established powers. The different groups within the G20 can thus be broken down as outlined in the table hereunder.

Established Major Powers	
The P3 (West)	The US, the UK, France
The P2 (Rest)	Russia, China
The G7 (West)	The EU, Germany, Japan, Italy, Canada (plus the P3)
Emerging Major Powers	
BRICS (Rest)	Brazil, India, South Africa (plus the P2)
The G77 (Rest)	Argentina, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia
The OECD	Mexico, Australia, ROK, Turkey

Figure 2 - Table classifying the members of the G20 according to established and emerging major powers.

3.3: Methods, Part 2 – Coding & Content Analysis

Conceptualisation

From the perspective of ensuring that this study has the appropriate conceptual underpinnings as a piece of research on the functionality of contemporary order within the broader academic debate on the evolution of contemporary order the literature review plays an important preparatory role. The previous chapter situated the position of this study in relation to previous research, outlining the theoretical and contextual inspiration for this study, discussing the definition of international order, different understandings of what contemporary order entails, and ballpark theories on why contemporary order appears to be in crisis and potentially dysfunctional. I also identified prominent claims meriting further scrutiny, pitfalls in previous research, lessons learnt, and the potential added value of information which could be gained from a systematic analysis of great power narratives in this context.

These conceptual and theoretical considerations all contributed towards an informed understanding of the appropriate research methods for this study, with some clear requirements emerging. Firstly, to be able to assess the functionality of order an understanding of the concept of order was required which can be operationalised and used in practical terms. Secondly, that a clear metric must be established in order to assess any specific aspect of order that one wishes to analyse – in this case, the functionality of order. My functionalist understanding of order consisting of ordering principles, aspirational principles, and systemic characteristics fulfils the first requirement. The criteria put forward in terms of buy-in and responsiveness to gauge the functionality of order fulfil the second requirement.

Additionally, the literature review pointed towards a lack of an agreed understanding of what contemporary order consists of, as well as a gap in research in terms of studies giving a voice to the main actors shaping international order. A method was needed which allowed me to extract the perspectives promoted by key stakeholders in order to address these shortcomings. Citing the additional studies presented in this chapter, content analysis of official speeches at the UN General Assembly was opted for.

Content analysis may be understood broadly as “a method designed to identify and interpret meaning in recorded forms of communication by isolating small pieces of the data that represent salient concepts and then applying or creating a framework to organize the pieces in a way that can be used to describe or explain a phenomenon”⁴⁴. Hsieh and Shannon define content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”⁴⁵. Krippendorff’s introduction to the subject defines content analysis succinctly as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”⁴⁶.

The key takeaway is that content analysis is an interpretative approach, though conducted within the confines of an explicit framework or system. The scope of content analysis is to extract data and evidence on the basis of specific criteria, through which we can make inferences and put forward claims or explanations regarding the subject being researched. Content analysis may incorporate various techniques. Considering the needs of this study, coding was most appropriate. Coding is a technique employed by researchers to record, track, and map out data relevant to answering a research question by assigning codes or labels to specific parts of this data – such as phrases, sentences, and paragraphs – in accordance with “observer-independent rules”. In this regard some have also referred to coding as indexing, or labelling⁴⁷.

In his manual for coding Saldana explains that “a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data”⁴⁸. There is no fixed template on how coding should be done, as a highly content-dependent and context-dependent process, and as explained by Elliot⁴⁹ in her own introduction to coding, there is no lack of debate on the most appropriate techniques employed when coding data. The studies cited previously served as natural reference points in this respect, notably Van Noort’s methodology and Binder and Heupel’s coding scheme.

⁴⁴ Kleinheksel, Rockich-Winston, Tawfik, and Wyatt (2020) p.127

⁴⁵ Hsieh and Shannon (2005) p.1278

⁴⁶ Krippendorff (2004) p. 18

⁴⁷ Krippendorff (2004) p.126, Elliot (2018) pp. 2851-2852

⁴⁸ Saldana (2013) p.3-4

⁴⁹ Elliot (2018)

Van Noort's research design⁵⁰ follows a six-step structure: organising the documents; designing the coding framework; descriptive coding; thematic analysis; narrative analysis; and constituting themes and narrative structures with the aim of creating a coherent report. Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni⁵¹ similarly follow a six-step approach, structured as follows: familiarization; selection of keywords; coding; theme development; interpretation of keywords, codes, and themes; and development of conceptual model.

This research design is inspired by such approaches. Even if extracting themes and narratives was not the main scope of the research, this was nonetheless replicated to some degree given that my study sought to not only identify positions being promoted and the different justifications for such positions, but also areas of convergence and divergence. At a conceptual level, though the development of a conceptual model was not an end goal of this project, the analysis nonetheless makes use of a bespoke conceptual model derived from previous research in order to assess the data gathered, namely the framework to assess the functionality of order outlined in the literature review.

Taking these examples into account, I present my research design according to three phases below: (i) the 'preparatory phase' encompassing familiarization and preparation of the coding scheme; (ii) the 'data collection phase' which includes consolidating the coding scheme and expanding this towards the rest of the sample being analysed; and (iii) the 'data analysis/processing phase', including the assessment of data according to the buy-in and responsiveness parameters, descriptive tabulations, and analysis of selected discourse.

The Preparatory Phase: Developing a Codebook

The scope of coding is not simply to label data but to do so with a deliberate purpose, according to precise guidelines, to collect data systematically. Thus, clear rules setting out the basis upon which codes are being applied are compulsory. These are commonly outlined in what is referred to as a coding manual, a coding frame, a coding scheme, or a codebook. Saldana defines the scope of a codebook concisely as "a compilation of the codes, their content descriptions, and a brief data example for reference"⁵². Braun and Clarke provide a slightly more detailed definition: "Codebooks typically consist of a definitive list of codes/themes, a coding label and definition for each code/theme, instructions on how to identify each code/theme, including any exclusions, and examples of each code/ theme". The

⁵⁰ Van Noort (2017) p.123

⁵¹ Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., and Ranfagni, S. (2023), see also Braun and Clarke (2008)

⁵² Saldana (2013) p.21

use of a codebook also represents a “pragmatic compromise” between structured guidelines for coding vis-à-vis coding as a subjective, exploratory exercise⁵³.

A codebook provides added value in that it provides enough structure to collect data systematically, though it is also a living document even throughout the data collection phase, allowing the researcher enough space to refine the guidelines as necessary, incorporating information being gathered, and adapting to it. The added benefit of a codebook is that it not only allows one to conduct their research in an organised manner – but it also allows other researchers to replicate the exercise. Clear coding guidelines allow other researchers to review the integrity and coherence of the process, build upon, or borrow the guidelines. The nature of a codebook is such that it provides the necessary bridge between the conceptual and theoretical dimension, with the practical dimension – meaning, it bridges debates on the subject being investigated, and the objective of the investigation, with the question of how one will gather the data to conduct the investigation. For this study, the codebook is tailored specifically towards enabling a systematic, empirical investigation regarding the functionality of contemporary order, via an analysis of discourse on the subject.

Much of the background work setting the parameters for the codebook can be traced back to the scope of this research project, as well as the literature review – with the main queries and variables utilised in the codebook emerging organically. The functionalist framework of global order presented in the previous chapter already sets out an initial skeleton for the coding scheme, outlining an understanding of international order consisting of ‘ordering principles’ and ‘aspirational principles’, as well as the ‘buy-in’ and ‘responsiveness’ criteria. More open-ended questions round off the queries shaping the coding scheme: why actors take certain positions – referring to justifications for positions; and whether they provide any additional assessments regarding the state of global order.

Reflecting the above, constructing the codebook was quite linear at a conceptual level, with the overarching objectives of the exercise being well defined:

- i. *To identify the ordering principles and aspirational principles of the Post-Cold War international order,*
- ii. *To track the level of buy-in accorded to these principles by the members of the G20 and to track how they perceive the responsiveness of these principles,*
- iii. *To map the justifications for these positions,*
- iv. *To record assessments regarding the state of global order.*

⁵³ Braun & Clarke (2022)

Considering that there is a healthy body of work on this subject, it would have been easier to use a set of fixed codes to identify principles and justifications – a deductive approach. Yet, this would have undermined the aim of this project to really bring into focus the voices of the main actors themselves. Therefore, a primarily inductive approach was opted for, which is more of an iterative, interpretative process. “Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions”⁵⁴.

The coding process was nonetheless clearly guided by previous literature, and the codes are certainly heavily informed by previous studies. However, the codes assigned to text were not pre-defined. They emerged from the text being analysed, resulting from the accumulation of data and the frequency and consistency with which principles were referred to in the speeches being assessed. Settling upon specific codes involved a back-and-forth rhythm, which is often the case with inductive coding. One must first ascertain the codes being used before delving deeply into the data collection phase, and even then, codes, their definitions, and how they are applied can still be refined. The exceptions to this were the codes in terms of ‘buy-in’ – support or contestation – and ‘responsiveness’ – positive or negative.

Care was taken to follow best practices when coding document-based data. In line with recommendations related to data management and the storage of administrative data the relevant documents being studied were assigned labels documenting their “generic attributes”⁵⁵. Speeches were classified according to the actor on behalf of whom they were delivered and according to the year that they were delivered. Furthermore, turning to the substance, Richards recommends that as a minimum when coding extracts of text, researchers should assign labels covering the source of the discourse, labels covering the subject of discourse, and labels covering the content of analytical interest⁵⁶. As I outline in the upcoming section, the coding scheme therefore also incorporates codes in terms of (i) the subject of the position – referring to the principle being referred to; and (ii) the content of analytical interest – referring to the position taken and the justification for that position.

The preparatory phase of the coding process began with an initial exercise to become familiar with the material and data being studied. This consisted of reading a sample of the content to be coded, namely the UNGA speeches delivered in 1990 and in 2022 by members of the G7. These actors were selected given the notion of the G7 as a representation of the established Western powers. The extremes of 1990 and 2022 were selected to ascertain that the content and delivery style remain compatible from the start point to the end point. My focus at this stage was on how governments refer to, identify, and present the ordering principles and aspirational principles, how they may describe the principles being referred

⁵⁴ Nowell et al. (2017) p. 8

⁵⁵ Saldana (2013) p. 70

⁵⁶ Richards (2015) pp. 106-107

to, and how the commonalities and differences in these descriptions cumulatively cluster together in different ways, differentiating one principle from another.

Following these initial readings, preliminary codes were drafted: ordering principles and aspirational principles were earmarked, and an initial set of justifications for positions regarding buy-in and responsiveness was prepared. I must emphasise here that previous literature on the subject already provided useful cues in terms of seeking positions in the UNGA speeches which referred to principles typically associated with the post-Cold War order as well as differentiating between ordering principles and aspirational principles. In this regard, though the principles that I identified in my content analysis emerged out of the data being studied, this exercise was guided heavily by previous literature on the arrangements of the post-Cold War order.

Assigning codes in terms of the position taken regarding a principle (in terms of buy-in and responsiveness) and the justification for that position was a somewhat more delicate process, more in sync with an approach referred to as “evaluation coding”. Citing Rallis and Rossman’s definition, Saldana describes evaluation coding as “the application of (primarily) non-quantitative codes to qualitative data that assigns judgements about the merit, worth, or significance of programs or policy” – and indeed the segment of the codebook on national positions and the justifications for them relates to the development of indicators according to the various judgements and evaluations within the statements themselves⁵⁷.

Having reviewed this initial set of codes, the next step was to expand the reading to the rest of the members of the G20, to assess the level of coherence in discourse. Initially restricted to 1990 it was already apparent that there was a healthy degree of overlap with governments largely referring to the same principles and freely indicating relevant policy positions. This second set of readings provided enough confidence in the initial draft codes to begin consolidating the codebook, whilst also making further changes to the codes. This exercise was then repeated for 2022 with the same back and forth, with further refinements introduced.

The Data Collection Phase

Once the codebook was consolidated enough to be applied to the discourse being studied, attention was turned to the data collection phase. It should be stressed, as the process of gathering data evolved, so did the coding framework. Moving on to further UNGA sessions beyond 1990 and 2022, definitions, indicators, and guidelines were further revised as necessary. There was no point at which any decision

⁵⁷ Saldana (2013) p.119

was taken to stop refining the codes being used. There is therefore an inevitable spillover between the preparatory phase and the data collection phase, such that the codebook was only truly consolidated after several UNGA sessions were coded, with recoding of certain sessions and speeches taking place if necessary. The codebook supplementing this study⁵⁸ provides more details and should be perused in complementarity to this chapter.

As elaborated upon in the glossary of variables within the codebook, definitions of ordering principles and aspirational principles followed the same informal style deployed by governments in their speeches. They are somewhat less rigid than academic definitions of the same terms as it would have been counterproductive to use definitions of terms which do not align with how states themselves understand them. The coding of relevant text was done on the basis of such definitions. The iterative process followed to arrive at such definitions has the added benefit that to some degree this sidestepped the potential risk of governments referring to the same concept but meaning different things as such variation was likely incorporated within the definition, if such an interpretation was highlighted within the initial sessions of the code UNGA debates. Though on the flip side, the definitions are rather broad.

In this respect, inevitably, the coding process included a certain degree of subjectivity, given that such discourse is open to interpretation. Krippendorff⁵⁹ captures this element quite poetically, writing that “there is nothing inherent in a text; the meanings of a text are always brought to it by someone”. Each code applied represents a decision taken by the researcher when analysing such discourse, and each coded national position reflects four decisions taken. Firstly, (i) if the text is referring to a general assessment on the state of order, or a specific principle. In the case of the latter, (ii) what principle is being referred to; (iii) if the position taken is in support, contesting, a positive assessment, or a negative assessment; and (iv) the justification for that position.

Data collection was done with the use of Atlas.ti⁶⁰, a form of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Such “software efficiently stores, organizes, manages, and reconfigures your data to enable human analytic reflection”⁶¹. This product was selected due to the ease of use and user-friendly interface. Documents could be uploaded simply in ‘pdf’ format. The program included the option of pre-grouping documentation; in this case, according to the G20 member who delivered the speech, as well as the year speeches were delivered, thereby facilitating organisation of documents. Having set out relevant groups according to actor and year, the initial set of codes were inputted manually into the program. Coding was done entirely independently – reading the speeches one by one, line by line, and

⁵⁸ Appendix I

⁵⁹ Krippendorff (2004) p.22

⁶⁰ <https://atlasti.com/>

⁶¹ Saldana (2013) p.28

manually assigning codes to specific quotations within the program, covering the principle referred to, the position taken, and the justification for that position.

As an additional note, throughout the data collection phase, it was also necessary to consult additional material to inform myself of the particular topics being discussed throughout the years. Such extra background research was necessary given that such coding required a baselevel awareness of what was being talked about, prominent controversies, which issues were of particular interest to which governments, and awareness of the biases held by them.

Additional Remarks

Given the limitations of a lone researcher, measures were taken to keep the data collection process manageable. Whilst coding all references to the ordering and aspirational principles would have provided a more accurate reflection of the emphasis and priority given to certain principles and positions, this would have been unmanageable. A decision was taken to code positions the first time a position regarding a principle was taken, with additional coding of that same position only if a new justification for that position was referred to. For example, if ‘Actor 1’ supports ‘Principle A’ on the basis of ‘Justification X’, that position of support regarding ‘Principle A’ would not be coded again on behalf of that actor unless ‘Actor 1’ cites a different justification in support, ‘Justification Y’. If the USA were to express support for international peace and security and to accuse Iran of undermining peace, then this expression of support for peace and security would only be coded the first time. Another justification would be needed to code a second expression of support for peace and security – for example, supporting peace because it is necessary for economic development.

Similarly, it also became apparent that one of the main problems being faced was a limitless set of justifications for policy positions. As such, a decision was taken to aggregate codes with a set of umbrella terms, grouping certain justifications together. The downside to these measures is that the coded positions for each speech are not a true 1:1 reflection of the positions taken. As a result, though certain actors may repeat a particular perspective over and over again to make a point and hammer home how important that position is to them, such emphasis is not fully captured. Likewise, the full breadth of justifications invoked by actors when taking positions is not covered either. However, such steps were essential in order to stop the number of coded positions from spiralling out of control. Moreover, these shortcomings are partially compensated for by coding based on new justifications for a position and the relatively large sample of speeches.

The entire process of coding each speech delivered by the members of the G20 at the UN General Debates spanning the past three decades was an admittedly laborious process, totalling 332 speeches⁶². Each relevant section of discourse was located within a pdf file incorporating numerous other statements delivered by other speakers during the same plenary session as the one being analysed. The decision was taken in this respect to code speeches delivered on a biennial basis – 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, and so on – rather than the full range of speeches from 1990 to 2022.

This means certain significant sessions are missed out, such as 2001 (9/11) and 2011 (the Arab Spring, Libya). Moreover, while the timeframe being studied covers the end of the Cold War until the present day, this approach means that only half the speeches delivered during this period are accounted for in the study – so there may in fact be positions in such speeches which, if they were coded along the same lines, might uncover information which takes the conclusions arrived at in the study in a slightly different direction. On the other hand, given the wide range of sessions which have been coded, there is a case to be made that the data has been sourced from a long enough period to be able to make prudent observations and inferences. It should be noted that the 2024 session was not coded as the first draft of the analysis had already been completed.

On another note, there is an important caveat to be made that the data does not assign different weightings to the narratives of different G20 members depending on how influential they are. As I discussed briefly in the literature review, in an ideally functional order all members of that order would convey positive sentiments regarding buy-in and responsiveness, however it is difficult to argue against the fact that more powerful states wield more influence and thus the narratives of some count more than others. It would be possible to denote a hierarchy of powers even within the G20 – great powers, middle powers, regional powers and the like. One could certainly argue that the narratives of certain actors such as the US and China merit a greater weighting than others.

This is a fair point and hinting at this same consideration I also refer to established and emerging powers. Yet, in my view it would be quite problematic to quantify and measure this difference in weighting; in terms of how much more influential the narratives promoted by some actors are compared to the narratives promoted by others. To delve deeply into a mechanism of this sort would be quite beyond the scope of this analysis. At the same time, it should also be highlighted that even if the views of these actors hold more sway, it does not mean others will necessarily support their perspectives. In this respect, whilst I am after all already making a distinction between actors by focusing on the G20 rather than a larger sample, I assign equal weighting to the national positions coded on behalf of each actor.

⁶² This does not add up to 340 in view of South Africa's suspension from UNGA, the Republic of Korea becoming a member of the UN in 1991, instances where the Presidency of the Council of the European Union was held by a G20 member (France, Germany, Italy, the UK), a missing speech on behalf of Saudi Arabia, and a session where Saudi Arabia chose not to deliver a speech.

The Data Analysis Phase

This final segment on the methodology of the project provides an overview of the analytical phase, setting the scene for a presentation of the findings, explanations, and conclusions drawn through this content analysis. The analytical phase began with an initial cleaning of the raw data using tools inbuilt within Atlas.ti, generating matrixes and tabulations. This provided descriptive feedback. In turn, this data was fed into bespoke models to track the buy-in and responsiveness generated by each principle over time, as well as trends of convergence and divergence in this respect. Finally, it was time to take a step back, to draw conclusions as to whether contemporary order is dysfunctional, and to identify relevant explanations explaining the conclusions.

It is worth remarking at this point that when dealing with content analysis via inductive coding, to a certain degree one is already assessing and analysing the data whilst gathering it. The researcher is an active participant in the process, and already has the space to form ideas, make observations, and to begin drawing initial inferences from the data being gathered. The researcher should therefore exercise restraint to avoid prejudicing the analysis, and to avoid directing the data in a certain direction to suit their initial or preferred conclusions.

As was highlighted already in the previous chapter, some of the added value derived from this study is that it provides a systematic, evidence-based contribution to academic debates on the evolution of contemporary order, specifically in relation to the functionality of contemporary order. My approach when analysing the data was therefore not to come up with an altogether new set of claims, but to either sustain or detract from the main perspectives in previous literature with robust findings and clear data sustaining my conclusions.

Beginning by cleaning and organising the collected data, basic Atlas.ti functions were utilised, notably the ‘code document analysis’ tool, and the ‘code co-occurrence analysis’ tool. The former creates a matrix indicating the frequency with which codes are assigned, per speech. The latter creates matrixes indicating the frequency with which two or more codes were assigned “in the same context” or overlapping each other. These matrixes were exported as excel spreadsheets. Using Microsoft Excel, a series of tabulations were then generated covering the codes assigned to each principle for each coded session. Tabulations are an easy way to organise and visualise such data, and indeed this is considered “by far the most common technique used to render data comprehensible”⁶³. There is little difference between a matrix generated by Atlas.ti as opposed to a tabulation generated via Microsoft Excel, though

⁶³ Krippendorf (2004) p.192

the latter enables the user to add certain refinements, such as sorting frequencies, and colourising frequencies which allow for more observational insight.

These matrixes and tabulations are presented within the discussion in the next chapter. Looking at frequencies alone provides only surface level data though. Delving deeper, a model was necessary to evaluate the level of buy-in and responsiveness generated by the principles of contemporary order – different degrees of buy-in and responsiveness – and whether the positions taken in this respect reflect convergence or divergence between the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’. I refer to these two dimensions as the intensity of a position, and the dispersion of a position respectively. These are intimately linked qualities.

Here, it should be highlighted that numbers can be deceiving. For example, a principle could be supported ten times in a session by two governments, with nobody else sharing that sentiment, while another principle may be supported eight times by eight different governments. The latter clearly has more support than the former as the positions are more widely shared amongst governments. In other words, to appropriately evaluate support/contestation and positive/negative assessments generated by a principle, and thus the intensity of buy-in and responsiveness generated by a principle, we must also track the dispersion of these positions in parallel.

Thus, two complementary scales were prepared in order to interpret the data. A scale was prepared to capture the *intensity* with which the G20 members express support/contestation and/or positive negative assessments regarding the principles of the NWO. Another scale was prepared to capture the *dispersion* of positions, how widely shared or dispersed a position is, or the extent to which the G20 members converge or diverge. These scales are based on the premise outlined earlier that government preferences elicited from UNGA speeches are best considered as estimations. And moreover, it should be stressed, the intensity or dispersion of the overall position taken by several countries is another subjective point. To enforce some sort of fixed criteria would be counterproductive.

As such, these scales are intended firstly to pragmatically translate raw data into digestible information, and secondly as a reference point so that descriptive vocabulary assigned to positions is anchored to a general number. The main goal of these scales is therefore illustrative, essentially serving the purpose of presenting vividly intense positions as opposed to weak positions, as well as positions which generate a high degree of convergence as opposed to minimal convergence, or divergence. In the interests of more granular detail this format of presenting information is then supplemented by quoted discourse.

Notwithstanding the above explanation, based on general observations when assessing the frequencies of positions, some elementary guidelines were factored in. Firstly, regarding the intensity of positions.

Looking at the fluctuation in the frequency of positions over the years and the contrasting attention given to certain principles compared to others, it is pragmatic to consider that if less than 25% of the G20 members pronounce themselves in a certain direction it would be a stretch to consider that position as being a significant one on behalf of the G20 because in fact hardly any of them would have taken a position, hence the term NEUTRAL.

On the other hand, it is unusual for 100% of the G20 members to pronounce themselves in a certain direction or to take a position on any given principle too. There is always the possibility that a government doesn't express a position for whatever reason. Hence the FULL classification is not indicative of literal full support. These two classifications – NEUTRAL and FULL are of value as they reflect the extremes – a negligible or high degree of attention given to the buy-in/responsiveness of a principle. The middle range of scales indicate that over 25%, 50%, and 75% of the G20 members took a certain position, with the DISPERSED, GENERAL, and STRONG descriptors accordingly.

In terms of evaluating dispersion, the scale to evaluate the convergence and divergence of positions is formulated according to the geopolitical groupings on behalf of the West and the Rest introduced earlier in the chapter. The point on the neutrality of a position made above still stands in terms of the strength or weakness of a position as a 25% threshold. Again, it would be inaccurate to speak of a convergence or divergence of views amongst different groups in relation to any principles if only a small minority outlined national positions in this regard.

The scale of dispersion is considered in this instance as a product of combinations of overlap or the lack of overlap reflecting progressively greater convergence or divergence. In this respect, convergence is a product of governments from different groups sharing a position, while divergence is as a product of governments on behalf of a certain group taking a position, and others on behalf of another group *refraining* from taking a position. It is extremely rare that a group takes a position while the other group takes the inverse position, with totally opposite views – to give an extreme example, where for instance the G7 expresses support for the UN while the BRICS countries express contestation.

The tabulations were evaluated on the basis of these scales, in combination, generating results in terms of the overall buy-in and responsiveness expressed regarding each of the principles being studied for each year. A write-up tracking the evolution of the buy-in and responsiveness over the years was prepared accordingly, highlighting specific trends of interest. Having interpreted the data through these scales, the next step was to conclude whether contemporary order is dysfunctional, either due to a lack of buy-in, lack of responsiveness, or both.

The final exercise was to take a step back, to look at the bigger picture, homing in on specific content of interest. Particular attention was given to content with explanatory value, those principles which generated most rhetoric, the extremes, the justifications for certain positions, the motivations for them, the overlap amongst actors. Thus, alongside positions regarding the specific principles, much time was also devoted to commentary on how members of the G20 perceived the state of contemporary order, general concerns, assessments and thoughts that they outlined. Combining frequency-based and discourse-based data in such a manner allowed me to achieve a more granular level of feedback in terms of explaining what could be causing the potential dysfunction of contemporary order.

Scales of Intensity and Dispersion

NEUTRAL	If 4 actors or less are represented, the aggregate position is considered to be NEUTRAL unless there is a difference of 4 between the groups.
GROUP	If 4+ actors are represented from a single grouping (G7/OECD, or BRICS/G77, or P5), the aggregate positions are considered to be indicative of GROUP support/contestation or positive/negative assessments.
DISPERSED (BASIC)	If 5-9 actors are represented across different groups, the aggregate position is considered to be indicative of ‘basic’ DISPERSED support/contestation or positive/negative assessments.
GENERAL	If 10-14 actors are represented across different groups, the aggregate position is considered to be indicative of GENERAL support/contestation or positive/negative assessments.
STRONG	If 15-17 actors are represented across, the aggregate position is considered to be indicative of STRONG support/contestation or positive/negative assessments.
FULL	If 100% or 18+ actors are represented, the aggregate position is considered to be indicative of FULL support/contestation or positive/negative assessments.

Figure 3 - Scale illustrating the intensity with which actors express support/contestation and/or positive negative assessments regarding the principles of the NWO.

EXTREME CONV	If G7 = 6+, OECD = 3+, BRICS/G77 = 6+
STRONG CONV	If common positions of W & R are 6+
CONVERGENCE	If common positions of W & R are between 3-5
WEAK CONV	If common positions of W & R are between 1-2, or 1-3 but gap 6+
NEUTRAL	If positions are 4 or less, unless these all represent one group of actors
WEAK DIV	If G7/OECD or BRICS/G77 = 4 & other group = 0
DIVERGENCE	If G7/OECD or BRICS/G77 = 5 & other group = 0, or 4 & inverse
STRONG DIV	If G7/OECD or BRICS/G77 = 6 & other group = 0, or 5 & inverse
EXTREME DIV	If G7/OECD or BRICS/G77 = 7+ & other group = 0, or 6+ & Inverse If G7 or BRICS = 6+ & OECD = 3+ and either G7 or BRICS = 0 or inverse

Figure 4 - Scale illustrating the dispersion of positions, the extent to which the national positions promoted by actors regarding the buy-in and responsiveness of the principles of order converge or diverge.

Chapter 4: A New World Order

In this chapter I present my findings regarding the principles characterising the post-Cold War global order. As I outlined in the review of literature on the subject of contemporary order, an agreed upon understanding of the arrangements of contemporary order is lacking. Analysis is framed primarily according to the Liberal International Order, and whilst the etymology of the concept is generally accepted, what this consists of exactly is often unclear. Some prefer a maximalist approach, whereas others take a minimalist stance. I favour a neutral approach outlining principles which are identified by the primary players in international politics, governments themselves, using the G20 as a sample.

The scope of this chapter is to introduce the concept of a new world order, which for a fleeting moment defined political discourse on the future of global order following the end of the Cold War. I therefore present an evidence-based set of ordering principles and aspirational principles derived from positions outlined in speeches by the members of the G20 at the UN General Assembly General Debates in the 1990s, following the same methods employed to track the buy-in generated by the principles of contemporary order, as outlined in the previous chapter. These are principles that governments collectively identified and supported in their speeches, which they promoted as part of the vision of a new world order that they envisaged for the 21st Century.

Putting forward this understanding of the contemporary order is in itself a valuable deliverable. What separates my definition of the principles characterising the post-Cold War order from other interpretations is that all the principles I refer to were endorsed publicly in the 1990s by governments from different areas of the geopolitical spectrum; governments which are today considered to have a certain degree of influence in shaping international relations. Furthermore, the support for these principles can be identified and cross-referenced explicitly in statements delivered at the UN General Assembly by the members of the G20 in their statements from 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1998. As such, this presentation diverges from the view that contemporary order is solely the result of a transatlantic initiative.

Across domains, almost unanimous buy-in from the established G7 governments and emerging powers alike is evident, with a few exceptions. My results are quite supportive of the minimalist interpretation of the Liberal International Order, centred upon a small core of foundational ordering principles, clearly discernible guidelines of behaviour which gain the support of the majority of G20 members. Simultaneously, the findings also accommodate aspirational principles associated with the maximalist

interpretation, recognising however that these are aspirational, and less consolidated than the ordering principles.

This chapter has two parts. I begin with some context on the idea of a ‘New World Order’ and what this refers to exactly. I explain that despite encapsulating the hope of a new beginning for international politics, the vision of a new world order is best understood not as a new way of doing things, and not as a global order promoting new ideals, but more of an attempted rebirth – a renaissance – of the post-1945 order ushered in following the Second World War. I then turn to the specific arrangements of the New World Order: the principles of international relations in the post-Cold War world as envisioned by the G7 in the 1990s.

Though many individual members of the G20 did not have the same international profile at the time as they do today, based on the positions taken by the rest of the group, these principles appear to have generated support both amongst established and emerging powers from around the world, which is indicative at least of a minimal level of buy-in. Sustaining these findings, I cite several specific quotes on behalf of governments amongst the G20 members demonstrating that these principles were not only acknowledged but supported as valuable elements of the emerging international order¹. In line with the functionalist framework of order put forward in the literature review, I classify the arrangements of the post-Cold War order in terms of ordering principles and aspirational principles. And I further divide the aspirational principles into three themes.

I first outline the ordering principles: the principle of (i) rules-based interstate relations, (ii) acceptance of the principle of sovereignty, (iii) the principle of multilateralism, as well as (iv) the special role assigned to the United Nations over and above participation within this institution. Turning to the aspirational principles, these relate to the themes of (i) international peace and security, (ii) prosperity, and (iii) political liberalism. Before closing off the chapter I briefly shift from specific quotes to a frequency-based overview of the principles as well as the justifications cited by governments for the positions taken by them at the time, through simple tabulations. These firstly serve as an additional level of evidence, and secondly, they help to visualise the support for these principles. I then conclude this chapter by packaging the above points into one consolidated diagram.

¹ For further information on the process of selecting these principles, it is recommended that the Methods section, and the Codebook are consulted.

4.1: The New World Order – An Unconsolidated Renaissance

Circling back to the end of the 20th Century, the vision of a new world order was anchored firmly in the discourse and narratives of key players shaping international politics. Governments engaged actively on the contents of this vision, and promoted principles, beliefs, values and objectives that they believed should be at the forefront of this emerging order. Alongside the *End of History* and the *Clash of Civilizations*, the idea of a New World Order is emblematic of the mood characterising international politics in the post-Cold War era. This initial section therefore explains how governments perceived the emergence of contemporary international order, providing background which sets the scene for the rest of the chapter.

Speeches delivered by governments at the UN General Assembly Debate in 1990 were the product of a specific context². On the one hand, a sense of optimism prevailed following the end of the Cold War, optimism for a more peaceful and stable international environment, spurred on by the spread of market economies, the third wave of democratization, the re-unification of Germany and Yemen, and the release of Nelson Mandela preceding the start of negotiations in South Africa to end Apartheid. On the other hand, this was offset by a sense of uncertainty, driven by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, an upward trend in civil wars, frozen conflicts, and coming to terms with transnational challenges from the threat of nuclear weapons and drug trafficking to environmental degradation, a debt crisis, and the AIDS pandemic.

As such, particularly on the political front, the positions expressed by governments in 1990 perform a dual role. They are forward-looking, representative of a vision of international politics in a post-Cold War world, but they also recognise an immediate challenge to this vision. Beginning first with the overarching narrative of a new world order, governments appear to have broadly supported or at least acknowledged the emergence of a new international order, as illustrated in the table below. From the seventeen³ speeches on behalf of the members of the G20 sampled in 1990, nine governments referred to some form of a ‘new’ order – Brazil, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the UK, and the USA, some expressing support for such an order, and some in a more matter-of-fact tone. Additionally in 1992 China, Indonesia, and the Republic of Korea also invoked such terminology.

² A/45/1 (United Nations, 1991)

³ ROK and South Africa were not present, while Italy spoke on behalf of the EU.

Country	Year	Statement
Brazil	1990	Every feature of the new world structure points to the growth of the United Nations. ⁴
Germany	1990	Thus a new community of mutual responsibility should emerge as the basis of a new world order . ⁵
Italy	1990	The first test has shown that the new world order works positively, but the serious problems of a social and economic order that threaten international stability are far from being resolved... ⁶
Japan	1990	Iraq's illegal invasion of Kuwait is a reminder that the future of the international community remains uncertain and a demonstration that even this new international order is fraught with peril. ⁷
Mexico	1990	The formation of economic blocs is shaping a new multipolar order . ⁸
Russia	1990	An act which we can unquestionably describe without exaggeration as an act of terrorism has been perpetrated against the emerging new world order . ⁹
Saudi Arabia	1990	Since we met here last year, there have been glimpses of hope and the emergence of the beginnings of a new international order . ¹⁰
UK	1990	There was an immense amount to do when the 2 plus 4 process was first dreamt of in Ottawa in February, but we worked swiftly, thoroughly and as partners and the 2 plus 4 Agreement signed this month in Moscow was a first major achievement of the new world order . ¹¹
USA	1990	It is in our hands to leave these dark machines behind, in the dark ages where they belong, and to press forward to cap a historic movement towards a new world order and a long era of peace. ¹²
China	1992	How the United Nations will adapt itself to the new international situation, address major international issues in a more positive, balanced, just and reasonable manner, promote world peace and development and play its role in the efforts to establish a new world order has become a major concern of the international community. ¹³
Indonesia	1992	We commit ourselves to the shaping of a new international order free from war and poverty, intolerance and injustice, a world order based on the principles of peaceful coexistence and genuine interdependence... ¹⁴
ROK	1992	A new world order is emerging on the basis of law and morality rather than in terms of power. ¹⁵

Figure 5 - List of references to some form of a 'new' world order in 1990 and 1992.

However, the description of a 'new' order can be misleading. As I outlined in the review of previous literature on the topic, it is generally agreed that the roots of contemporary order go back to 1945 and the end of the Second World War. This is clearly acknowledged by governments. In 1990, Saudi Arabia¹⁶ states plainly that "forty-five years ago, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia participated in the founding of an international order which emerged from the shattered ruins of the Second World War". When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, American President Barack Obama highlighted that this was a challenge to the "post-war order" in his remarks¹⁷ – a reference to the post-WW2 order. Likewise, in China's General Assembly speech in 2018¹⁸, Foreign Minister Wang Yi traced the beginning of contemporary order to the creation of the United Nations stating that: "the contemporary international order, which began with the founding of the United Nations, is based on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and is enhanced by the vision and practice of multilateralism."

⁴ A/45/PV.5, p.23

⁵ A/45/PV.8, p.23

⁶ A/45/PV.6, p.36

⁷ A/45/PV.7, p.22

⁸ A/45/PV.14, p.16

⁹ A/45/PV.6, p.43

¹⁰ A/45/PV.16, p.63-65

¹¹ A/45/PV.8, p.33

¹² A/45/PV.14, p.68

¹³ A/47/PV.8, p.49

¹⁴ A/47/PV.10, p.6

¹⁵ A/47/PV.6, p.28

¹⁶ A/45/PV.16, p.77

¹⁷ A/69/PV.6, p.11

¹⁸ A/73/PV.12, p.17

The question then is why governments would promote an old concept as something new. Perhaps this was not so much a change in substance, but a change in mentality and a recognition of a changed context. Whether this was a conscious policymaking decision, or a form of international groupthink carried away by optimism is unclear, but the speeches analysed in this study suggest that this was more of a collective attempt to press the reset button and relaunch the post-1945 order in a new post-Cold War context, rather than to introduce something new.

The two protagonists of the Cold War seem to converge on this sentiment with both reflecting on how the end of their great power confrontation unshackled key pillars of order, particularly the ability of the United Nations to perform its function. In this respect, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze assessed that, “we are speaking not so much of the Organization's maturity as of the beginning of its rebirth, its restoration according to the blueprints of 1945”¹⁹, whilst President Bush remarked that, “not since 1945 have we seen the real possibility of using the United Nations as it was designed”²⁰. Bringing this discussion back into alignment with academic terminology, I would therefore put forth the explanation that the New World Order represents the post-Cold War chapter of the Liberal International Order, an attempt to relaunch the old order in a new world.

What changed was not global order but the international system. The systemic characteristics influencing relations amongst states were fundamentally altered, no longer held back by rivalry between two superpowers, by proxy wars and a world separated into blocs and spheres of influence. Recognising this new dynamic, governments sought to give new impetus to a vision of order that had been put on ice by the Cold War. The common narrative of a new order set out in 1990 thus represents an attempted renaissance of the post-1945 order and should be considered as a continuation of this order. However there is a clear cut-off point where one phase of global order ends, and a different, new chapter begins – a recalibrated international order for a post-Cold War world. The difference between these two phases of order is the international system within which they each manifested, having totally different systemic characteristics by virtue of the end of the Cold War.

Despite ushering in this rebirth of an old order, governments also recognised that it was not yet consolidated. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 represented an open challenge to this order. Argentina²¹ describes this conflict as: “the first challenge to the order that has emerged since the ending of the cold war. This is a challenge that takes us back to a past we wish to leave behind - a past based on confrontation and the use of force...”. Similarly, amidst the positive mood at the time the British²² statement that same year also warned that “we should not be mesmerised by these happy changes,”

¹⁹ A/45/PV.6, p.63

²⁰ A/45/PV.14, p.62

²¹ A/45/PV.5, p.29-30

²² A/45/PV.8, p.33-35

warning that this “does not mean that the new order is safely or completely in place or universally accepted”.

To this end, it is worth underscoring that this vision of order was presented as something to work towards collectively. Illustrating this point, the US statement²³ in 1990 is self-explanatory: “As we look to the future the calendar offers up a convenient milestone, a signpost by which to measure our progress as a community of nations. The year 2000 marks a turning-point, beginning not only the turn of the decade, not only the turn of the century, but also the turn of the millennium.” Likewise, Indonesia highlighted that, “As we enter the last decade of the century we are again being presented with a unique opportunity to construct a radically new, more peaceful, just and prosperous global order. This opportunity must not be missed.”²⁴

I begin with these general findings because they provide valuable contextual background, which informs our understanding of the difficulties faced by contemporary order and provides important nuance. Too often, analysis on the subject leaves from a departure point which sees a dominant, established order being knocked off its perch. Such analysis is typically based on the view that when the Cold War ended, a uniquely transatlantic interpretation of order swept across the globe, or that a concerted effort was made to impose such a transatlantic interpretation of order, suggesting that the principles of contemporary order belong to certain countries and not others. This is a view which is incompatible with a functional understanding of global order as it eschews the importance of representativeness, and which mischaracterises the principles of contemporary order.

My findings do not support such an interpretation. To the contrary, my findings indicate a visible set of principles which were reaffirmed consistently and diversely in the aftermath of the Cold War, setting out the parameters of this order, supported by the members of the G20, regardless of geographical location, domestic political system, or foreign policy preferences. Even based on this initial set of findings, there is a case to dispute the claim that contemporary order lacked representativeness on behalf of emerging non-Western powers as there is an evident overlap in the principles promoted by representatives of these actors and those promoted by their established and Western counterparts.

Turning to this set of principles, governments would often outline broad visions of global order throughout the 1990s and perhaps unsurprisingly the most far-reaching of these is that of the US in 1990. My analysis began with this American speech in 1990, then the members of the G7, followed by the rest of the G20, before expanding this to the rest of the sessions. Having set the scene through

²³ A/45/PV.14, p.68

²⁴ A/45/PV.5, p.72

remarks on the Gulf War and its implications for global order, President Bush outlined a set of ordering principles and aspirational principles characterising the American expectations of international order. The below extracts illustrate key segments from this speech – with the principles of order marked in square brackets following the relevant text which is marked in bold.

- *The Iraqi regime has yet to face the facts. But as I said last month: **The annexation of Kuwait will not be permitted to stand** [sovereignty]. This is not simply the view of the United States. It is the view of every Kuwaiti, the Arab League and the United Nations.*
- *We have a vision of a new partnership of nations that transcends the cold war - **a partnership based on consultation, co-operation and collective action, especially through international and regional organization**; [multilateralism] **a partnership united by principle and the rule of law** [rules], and supported by an equitable sharing of both cost and commitment; a partnership whose **goals are to increase democracy** [democracy], **increase prosperity** [development], **increase the peace** [peace and security], **and reduce arms** [non-proliferation].*
- *I see **a world of open borders, open trade** [economic liberalism], and - most importantly - open minds; a world that celebrates the common heritage that belongs to all the world's people, taking pride not just in hometown or homeland, but in humanity itself.*
- *I see **a world where democracy continues to win new friends and convert old foes** [democracy], and where the Americas, North, Central and South, can provide a model for the future of all humankind - the world's first completely democratic hemisphere. And I see **a world building on the emerging new model of European unity** [multilateralism]; not just Europe, but the whole world - whole and free. This is precisely why the present aggression in the Gulf is a menace not only to one region's security but to the entire world's vision of our future. It threatens to turn **the dream of a new international order into a grim nightmare of anarchy, in which the law of the jungle supplants the law of nations**. That is why the United Nations reacted with such historic unity and resolve, And that is why this challenge is a test that we cannot afford to fail. I am confident that we will prevail. Success, too, will have lasting consequences - reinforcing **civilized standards of international conduct** [rules], setting a new precedent in international co-operation, brightening the prospects for our vision of the future.*
- *There are 10 more years until the century is out - 10 more years to put the struggles of the twentieth century permanently behind us; 10 more years to help to launch a new partnership of nations. Throughout those 10 years - and beginning now - **the United Nations has a new and vital role in building towards that partnership** [the United Nations].*
- *In June the United States and the Soviet Union signed a landmark agreement to halt production and destroy the vast majority of our stockpiles. Today United States chemical weapons are being destroyed. But time is running out....**We must also redouble our efforts to stem the spread of nuclear weapons, biological weapons and the ballistic missiles** that can rain destruction upon distant peoples [non-proliferation].*
- *The world remains a dangerous place. Our security and well-being often depend, in part, on events occurring far away. We need serious international co-operative efforts to make headway on threats to **the environment** [the environment], on **terrorism** [counter terrorism], on **management of the debt burden, on the fight against the scourge of international drug trafficking, and on refugees** [development] and peace-keeping efforts around the world.*

- *But the world also remains a hopeful place. Calls for **democracy and human rights** [democracy and human rights] are being reborn everywhere. These calls are an expression of support for the values enshrined in the United Nations Charter [rules].*

As shown above, discourse at the time is forward looking. Governments expressed support for specific principles that they believed should organise international politics and relations amongst each other, common goals that they wished to work towards over the following years. In this vein, the definitions I put forward for these principles do not necessarily conform with textbook academic definitions, favouring the same conversational language employed by governments in their discourse. The following section introduces these principles, presenting relevant evidence in support of each. It should be kept in mind, these are not codified principles, nor are they the only way of defining the principles of contemporary order – as outlined in the literature review, there are several alternative approaches to this exercise which are all relevant. However, the principles I propose are based on a systematic review of positions²⁵ that the leaders of a group of major powers in contemporary international politics have deliberately chosen to promote from the 1990s until the present day.

4.2: Ordering Principles

Ordering principles are shared understandings amongst states in an international order about how relations amongst themselves are to be organised, representing an agreed set of parameters denoting what constitutes appropriate behaviour, what are often summed up as ‘rules of the game’. The principles I identify closely resemble previous research on the topic, particularly the foundational ordering principles earmarked by Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann. Governments repeatedly refer to four closely related and complementary principles: rules, sovereignty, multilateralism, and the primacy of the United Nations.

By supporting these four ordering principles consistently, governments signal that they subscribe to a certain way of doing international politics, a willingness to conduct international relations according to these shared principles of engagement in order to constrain other influences upon international politics. This is something governments also recognise, with Russia referring explicitly to “principles for the regulation” of order²⁶. To remove any of these principles would be to alter the setup of global order substantially; and to challenge any of these principles in a sustained manner would be to challenge the very basis of contemporary order.

²⁵ In the interests of brevity, I restrict my overview for each principle to a general explanation accompanied by a selection of positions outlined by different governments demonstrating support.

²⁶ A/67/PV.16, p.22 (2012)

There is a hint of an aspirational tone associated with such principles. This is understandable given that these principles are driven by a desire and expectation to establish a certain standard of international relations – how things should be done – but the function of these principles is nonetheless organisational. Even if they were not new principles, adherence to them during the Cold War was not necessarily the norm. The tone is therefore forward-looking, a narrative of how states believe things ought to be now that the Cold War was over and there was a general consensus that a fresh start was needed. This corresponds to the discussion in the theoretical section where I reflect on the relationship between the organisational and anarchical dimensions of order, and how in a functional order the latter should theoretically be subjugated to some degree by the former. This was exactly what stakeholders sought to achieve through these principles.

Rules

The first ordering principle of contemporary order is the shared understanding that relations between states are organised according to common rules and norms: general expectations of behaviour premised on the basis of the UN Charter in particular, accompanied by the development and use of international law. The topic may differ, the stakes may change depending on the subject, but the motivation is the same – states support rules and see them as a necessity for a functional order, because they recognise that they need something – some sort of arrangement – to guide and govern their behaviour and their relations with one another. In short, governments express support for a rules-based order. The notion of such an order appears to be increasingly politicised and criticised in contemporary rhetoric, but this is a question not on the substance of the rules, but *the concept of rules*.

A rules-based order in this sense is a question of subscribing to what I refer to as a certain ‘way of doing international politics’, an agreed upon *modus operandi*. An order where relations amongst states are organised according to common rules is the first step in this direction, and buying-in to this approach lies at the very heart of contemporary order. Support for this principle typically manifests according to three genres. Firstly, and most frequently – the need for rules to organise international affairs and relations amongst states, support for rules broadly as a way of doing international politics. Secondly, support for the role of international law and the UN Charter specifically, and thirdly, support for rules in the interests of accountability.

States want a global order which responds to their needs, interests, and expectations, and they see the use of rules as the path towards such a responsive order. Amidst the zeitgeist of the 1990s, Indonesia assessed that “the primordial challenge of our time, therefore, is to devise a more effective system of

global governance in order to manage the demands and the vicissitudes of globalization and interdependence”²⁷. Australia explains that international law “provides in effect, a common language for interaction between States”, which takes us truly to the very scope of ordering principles²⁸. The most respected and frequently endorsed expression of this common language is the UN Charter, notably in relation to the promotion of international peace and security.

In 1990, Russia describes the Charter as the “global constitution”, observing that whilst it was ignored during the Cold War it has proven “to be indispensable for the most important and most necessary of our tasks, the maintenance of international peace and security”²⁹. Likewise, France labels the UN Charter as a “reference point” for global order³⁰, and Saudi Arabia states that “the principles and other foundations of our present international order derive their legitimacy and strength from the tenets of the United Nations Charter”³¹. States accord particular significance to the UN Charter because it codifies the common language that is central to contemporary order.

However, governments express support for the development and use of international law across domains. In the context of global development, Mexico³² stresses that “a tremendous and serious effort to coordinate economic policies and the explicit will to make international law the compulsory reference point governing relations among peoples are essential”, following up a couple of years later with the blunt assessment that “peace can be preserved only through the observance of law”. More generically, Brazil³³ refers to “the great advances in international law and in the political and ethical commitments to the issues that concern humanity — issues such as sustainable development, protection of the environment, respect for human rights, disarmament, non-proliferation and the fight against poverty, terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking”.

Finally, governments highlight the importance of accountability, notably in relation to human rights violations. For example, Germany³⁴ emphasises that “an effective international legal system must enable people to exercise their human rights, afford protection to those whose human rights have been violated, and consistently bring the perpetrators to account”. And similarly, expressions of support for war-crimes tribunals were also forthcoming from Canada³⁵ and France³⁶ in 1996 in relation to events in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Such comments point in the direction of a certain will to ensure a minimal degree of enforcement. Whilst the concepts of sanctions and intervention initially gain attention in the

²⁷ A/51/PV.14, p.9 (1996)

²⁸ A/49/PV.15, p.8 (1994)

²⁹ A/45/PV.6, p.47

³⁰ A/53/PV.11, p.19 (1998)

³¹ A/49/PV.17, p.13 (1994)

³² A/47/PV.9, p.54 (1992)

³³ A/51/PV.4, p.2 (1996)

³⁴ A/47/PV.8, p.61 (1992)

³⁵ A/51/PV.7, p.15 (1996)

³⁶ A/51/PV.8, p.20 (1996)

context of the Gulf War as a way to enforce rules and accountability, support for these potential principles flatlines over the course of the following UNGA debates, and it is only the broader concept of accountability which generates sustained support.

I refer to this principle as a shared understanding regarding a *rules-based* order, rather than a *law-based* order for a few reasons. Firstly, it would be an unfaithful reflection of discourse. Though governments frequently refer to examples of international law in their speeches, discourse in relation to rules manifests predominantly in relation to the principle itself: the narrative being promoted is that relations amongst states must be organised according to rules. As referred to in the speeches cited earlier it is about “civilized standards of international conduct” and establishing a “common language”. States support the intrinsic organisational purpose of rules.

Additionally, whereas international law is a type of rule, rules are not necessarily laws and to categorise this as a law-based order would be a potentially restrictive interpretation, given the awkward existence of soft-law, including General Assembly resolutions, non-binding agreements, and codes of conduct which may exert more of a political influence rather than a legal one³⁷. Moreover, at the theoretical level the immediate question is how a law-based order is possible in an anarchic international system, and the absence of law enforcement. Unlike law, a rules-based order does not quite imply that there is necessarily enforcement of rules. As opposed to the typically codified international law, the concept of rules is broader and opaquer, which is possibly also why states prefer such terminology.

Sovereignty

The second ordering principle of contemporary international order is the common understanding that relations between states are organised according to the principle of sovereignty and sovereign equality, respect for the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, the prohibition of the acquisition of territory through the use of force, as well as self-determination. The emphasis here is on external sovereignty: the principle establishes that states do not have the authority to interfere in the internal affairs of another state and that sovereign states are equal, regardless of their military or economic capabilities. Though it is a rule itself, the significance of sovereignty is such that it is treated as a standalone principle, considered by governments as the foundational principle of the contemporary international system, organised on the basis of sovereign states. In this regard governments reaffirm the utility of the principle of sovereignty because the sovereign state is “the basic unit” of the international system³⁸.

³⁷ See for example, discussions regarding the JCPOA (Talmon, 2020; Toubman, 2021)

³⁸ A/45/PV.8, p.36 (United Kingdom, 1990)

At least in theory, the principle of sovereignty enabled the reformulation of international politics from a global order based on power to an order based on common rules. The idea here is that a sovereign state is not any more or less sovereign than another sovereign state – they are equal and entitled to enter into relations with each other as equals. This principle is integral to contemporary order because it organises relations amongst states into a relationship amongst *equal* states, as a “democratic principle” making rules-based relations possible³⁹. In this regard, governments support the principle of sovereignty because of the role it plays in terms of the overarching push for a rules-based order, by placing actors on a level playing field. The principle is perceived as serving a linear means to an end, outlining a clear standard of conduct, governing behaviour, and thus contributing to international peace and security, so much so that Mexico describes the principle as “the basis for our civilized and peaceful coexistence”⁴⁰.

In light of this, support for sovereignty is also framed in more practical terms of peace and security, and how it is necessary for peaceful international relations. Summing this up, China’s Foreign Minister Qian Qichen remarked in 1990 that: “Normal international relations can be ensured only when all countries observe the five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence. Those five principles embody the most fundamental norms of international relations.” He adds that “the establishment of a new international political order on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence meets the needs of the times and is urgently desired by peoples of all countries”⁴¹. Indeed, these five principles highlighted by China are essentially different facets of the principle of sovereignty. Similarly, Türkiye⁴² calls for “compliance with the basic international norms – respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-intervention in internal affairs, and the need to resolve disputes by peaceful means rather than by threat or coercion”. The overarching message is clear: the principle of sovereignty as the basis of peaceful international relations.

With the de-colonialist trend which characterised the mid-20th Century fading out, it would be remiss not to mention that floating beneath the surface of positions regarding sovereignty are additional positions regarding the concept of self-determination and self-government. For example, in 1990 Australia welcomes the self-determination and self-government of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands⁴³. More broadly, support for Palestinian self-determination is also frequent throughout the sample of speeches studied. One such instance is Italy’s statement on behalf of the EU⁴⁴ stressing that

³⁹ A/45/PV.13, p.112 (India, 1990)

⁴⁰ A/47/PV.9, p.55 (1992)

⁴¹ A/45/PV.12, p.53

⁴² A/49/PV.12, p.25 (1994)

⁴³ A/45/PV.17, p.56

⁴⁴ A/45/PV.6, p.34 (1990)

the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “lies in the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and in that of the State of Israel to exist within secure, guaranteed borders”.

References to self-determination are less frequent than references to non-interference, and furthermore such references are heavily context dependent – reflecting national positions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Western Sahara and the like, dependent upon the particular situation being discussed. Discourse on self-determination as a component of sovereignty is far less consensual and widely shared than the components of non-interference and sovereign equality in this respect. Additionally, it would appear that self-determination appears to be a secondary component of this principle, taking a back seat. As noted by India, self-determination should not undermine national sovereignty and the territorial integrity of sovereign states⁴⁵. Due to such caveats, whilst acknowledging self-determination as an aspect of sovereignty, the usage of the term in this study refers primarily to the external dimension of sovereignty unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Multilateralism

The third ordering principle is multilateralism: the shared understanding that relations between states are organised according to the imperative of developing ‘friendly relations’ and international cooperation, as per the UN Charter⁴⁶. Multilateralism refers to an approach to international relations where coercion is a policy of first resort – where cooperation and collective action are habitual – including the promotion of dialogue and the peaceful settlement of disputes, investing in international, regional, and global institutions, promoting regional integration and multilateral treaties, and fostering what is colloquially known as a sense of an ‘international community’. The principle of multilateralism presupposes the existence of common rules, and the ability of the members of this international order to act freely and independently. Again, the significance of multilateralism is that it refers to a way of doing international politics, it is central to the functionality of the other ordering principles and the coercion that they seek to foster.

Capturing this sentiment, Australia⁴⁷ speaks of the need “to develop habits of mind which are cooperative rather than confrontational, and habits of actions which are instinctively multilateral”, Canada⁴⁸ argues that “cooperation is now the new realism and pragmatism is the only path to progress”, and India⁴⁹ assesses that “a shift in focus of international relations to strengthen multilateral cooperation based on genuine interdependence, mutuality of interests and shared responsibility, has become

⁴⁵ A/47/PV.13, p.40 (1992)

⁴⁶ Articles 1.2, 1.3

⁴⁷ A/45/PV.17, p.49-50 (1990)

⁴⁸ A/45/PV.9, p.24 (1990)

⁴⁹ A/47/PV.13, p.43-44 (1992)

indispensable”. Germany, speaking on behalf of the EU in 1994 refers specifically to the need for international cooperation “in the spirit of Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations”⁵⁰. These terms of ‘habits of mind’, a ‘shift in focus’, and working ‘in the spirit’ of the UN Charter reflect a shared willingness to coact in the post-Cold War era culminating in a collective effort to entrench a multilateral approach to international politics.

In more tangible terms, most often, governments advocate in favour of a multilateral approach to address common challenges. Positions and analyses put forward by speakers at the UN General Debates in the 1990s demonstrate an acute awareness that key challenges being faced were increasingly taking on a transnational character which could not be solved by countries acting alone. Illustrating this awareness, Russia highlights that “the central concepts of today’s politics are cooperation, interaction and partnership in solving extremely severe global problems, such as economic backwardness, poverty, social inequality and environmental protection”⁵¹. Likewise, Japan observes that “there are also numerous problems – such as those relating to the global environment and drugs – that affect all humankind and thus demand a common response”⁵².

The role of multilateralism in the emerging order is also referred to in relation to international peace and security. The US speech in 1994 eloquently outlined that “our peace is so interconnected, our security so intertwined, our prosperity so interdependent that to turn inward and retreat from the world is to invite disaster and defeat”⁵³. Reflecting the multilateral trend at the regional level, others also highlight the added value of regional organisations. In 1994 for example, South Africa⁵⁴ praised the Organization of African Unity for “actively addressing the issues of peace and stability” in Africa, Indonesia⁵⁵ expressed support for the launching of ASEAN, while France⁵⁶ underlined the great strides taken by the European Union.

The United Nations

The fourth ordering principle of contemporary global order is the shared understanding on the primacy and special role accorded to the United Nations as the focal point of contemporary order. The United Nations is of course an institution – not a principle in the sense of a norm – but as an institution it embodies an underlying principle that some form of entity is necessary to facilitate relations amongst states at a broad, global level. The United Nations represents the broad vision of order that governments

⁵⁰ A/49/PV.6, p.18

⁵¹ A/45/PV.6, p.43 (1990)

⁵² A/45/PV.7, p.26 (1990)

⁵³ A/47/PV.4, p.41-45

⁵⁴ A/49/PV.14, p.9

⁵⁵ A/49/PV.16, p.20

⁵⁶ A/49/PV.8, p.13

sought to cultivate following the Second World War and which they sought to relaunch following the end of the Cold War. The focus here is thus not on the UN simply as an institution, but on the essential underlying acceptance and promotion of the United Nation's role and the common understanding on the scope of the United Nations.

The United Nations is the physical manifestation of an idea of how to organise relations amongst states. States see the United Nations as a tangible expression of rules-based relations and the multilateral spirit that they subscribe to, bringing the ordering principles together. They also recognise the utility of the United Nations as a mechanism facilitating the achievement of aspirational principles. Indeed, a common denominator among the speeches delivered by political leaders in the 1990s is the overall perception of the United Nations as the fulcrum of the emerging international order. The irreplaceable role that governments expected the United Nations to play in the post-Cold War order is communicated emphatically by all G20 members throughout their speeches.

Both emerging and established powers alike placed the United Nations very much at the forefront of their visions for the emerging international order in the 1990s, placing an extraordinary amount of faith in the organisation, and calling for it to play a bigger role in the post-Cold War world. Demonstrating this expectation, South Africa argued that “the elaboration of a new world order must, of necessity, centre on this world body. In it we should find the appropriate forum in which we can all participate to help determine the shape of the new world.”⁵⁷ Likewise, Indonesia pledged “to seek that new international order through the central and irreplaceable instrumentality of the United Nations.”⁵⁸ When President Bush outlined the American priorities for the New World Order he emphasised the “vital role” of the UN in this endeavour.⁵⁹ These positions illustrate fervent endorsement of the United Nations as the beating heart of contemporary order.

Whilst the United Nations is certainly not a global government, the United Nations does contribute to global governance at an unprecedented and unparalleled level. It is arguably the closest approximation we have to the idea of a global government, and the furthest that international society has come towards mitigating anarchy through an institution designed to organise relations amongst states. To some degree it could be argued that it is not simply the UN that states support, but really the service that it provides. From the standpoint of organising relations between themselves, states value the United Nations because it combines the concepts of rules-based international relations, sovereign equality, and a multilateral approach to international politics – translating them from theory into practice.

⁵⁷ A/49/PV.14, p.8 (1994)

⁵⁸ A/47/PV.10, p.6 (1992)

⁵⁹ A/45/PV.14, p.71 (1990)

As aptly summed up by the Italian Prime Minister in 1990 the United Nations represents “the first major attempt to democratise the international system – that is to say, to apply to relations between sovereign States the principles on which the rule of law is based.”⁶⁰ Similarly, the Indian Foreign Minister remarked that “the United Nations is the foremost embodiment of multilateralism.”⁶¹ Particular importance is given to the contribution that governments wish the United Nations to make in terms of upholding international peace and security, with references to this as the UN’s “foremost obligation”⁶² and “its primary objective.”⁶³ In effect, the motivations for the support shown for the United Nations and the value of the United Nations echo the positions expressed previously in terms of rules, sovereignty, and multilateralism.

Some reading this may consider such discourse and such claims to be wild exaggerations. Attention is often on the apparent ineffectiveness of the United Nations and its inability to respond to crises, whilst media coverage typically shines a spotlight on politically charged General Assembly votes, as well as high-profile venues like the UN Security Council and the Human Rights Council. The United Nations is certainly flawed – and this is exactly why the underlying shared understanding amongst states on the role of the UN is so important, because they understand that beyond the institution and the need to resolve such shortcomings, there is a deeper need, which is to have an institution in place capable of organising relations amongst states.

There is indeed much more to the United Nations than the headlines. From the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), from the World Health Organization (WHO) to the International Labour Organization (ILO), from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to the World Bank Group: the wider UN ecosystem should not be underestimated, with a vast network of organisations and specialised agencies contributing to a more organised and orderly world.

Reflecting the wide array of domains where governments look towards the United Nations for leadership, in 1990 Japan expressed that: “never before have hopes been higher that the United Nations will play a leading role in the pursuit of world peace and stability; in the creation of a free and democratic society, where human rights are respected; in the achievement of lasting prosperity; and in solving the environmental and other global problems facing humankind.”⁶⁴ In the same vein, Brazil⁶⁵ observes that the United Nations is “the foremost, if not the only, forum of universal scope, to be able

⁶⁰ A/45/PV.6, p.38

⁶¹ A/51/PV.22, p.13 (1996)

⁶² A/49/PV.6, p.15 (Germany/EU, 1994)

⁶³ A/49/PV.14, p.16 (India, 1994)

⁶⁴ A/45/PV.7, p.41

⁶⁵ A/45/pV.4, p.26-30 (1990)

to respond to current challenges”. In this context, the speeches surveyed indicate clear appreciation for the work of the United Nations in different areas.

All in all, it is unsurprising that governments consistently return to their support of the principle that the United Nations should be the focal point of contemporary global order, and their readiness to propel this principle to the very forefront of the emerging order is understandable. The positions taken by G20 governments throughout the 1990s indicate that they place a high premium on the role of the United Nations as they recognise the functional potential of this arrangement. What they see is an institution which brings the other principles together, they see an arrangement which is global in reach and representative of its members, which exists to respond to their needs and to challenges which they cannot address on their own. They see a platform which allows them to work together, which allows them to pool resources together, and which brings the concept of a rules-based order and a spirit of multilateralism to life, as a catalyst allowing them to pursue the aspirational principles that they prioritise.

4.3: Aspirational Principles

Whereas the ordering principles represent common arrangements organising relations between states, aspirational principles represent the direction in which states want to take the sum of their relations: common aspirations, the desired end goals of order. States converge upon a clear set of such principles throughout their discourse at the General Assembly in the 1990s, which may be understood in terms of three categories. At the forefront is the promotion of international peace and security, including the promotion of non-proliferation and counter terrorism. Secondly, the promotion of international development, meaning the promotion of global economic and social development, the promotion of sustainable development, and the promotion of economic liberalism. Third is political liberalism, namely the promotion of human rights, and the promotion of democracy.

It is worth noting that these themes mirror the so-called ‘three pillars’⁶⁶ of the United Nations closely – peace and security, development, and human rights. This lends a further degree of confidence to these initial findings. In particular, the overarching themes pertaining to the promotion of international peace and security, as well as the promotion of international development stand out as the two aspirations that generate the most attention. They are frequently referred to in a manner suggesting that for governments these are mutually sustaining goals, that peace and security is necessary for development, and vice

⁶⁶ United Nations (2025)

versa. Indeed such themes are also frequently invoked as justification to support other principles. In contrast, the pursuit of political liberalism comes across as a little more subdued.

Generally, the aspirational principles identified in this study are framed as being shared objectives on the basis of being a common interest, common challenge, or common value. The statement on behalf of the Republic of Korea⁶⁷ in 1994 underscores how contemporary challenges are shared challenges, reflecting that: “in today’s world no country can remain unaffected by the havoc of another, whether caused by hunger, tyranny, environmental pollution or the proliferation of weapons. Similarly, every country can benefit from world prosperity, world peace and a cleaner world environment.” These principles are also often framed as being interlinked – contributing to the achievement of one aspiration contributes to the achievement of another. Mexican President Salinas de Gortari in 1994 sums up this perspective, outlining how democracy and freedom contribute to development, which in turn contributes to peace and security⁶⁸.

The way that aspirational principles are framed also reflects a clear relationship with the ordering principles. Taking non-proliferation as an example, governments roundly agree that they must promote non-proliferation in the interests of international peace and security. Because they each want to contain the threat of proliferation, they recognise that they need common rules to set standards for their behaviour on the matter, for a non-proliferation regime – such as the NPT. They further understand that they need to do this multilaterally, together, because it is a common challenge which needs a common effort, and because if some follow the rules but others do not then the common aspiration will not be achieved. That said, it is worth highlighting that there is a contradictory element between the promotion of certain aspirational principles in relation to ordering principles, and they in turn expose certain tension even within ordering principles.

The most conspicuous paradox is the promotion of human rights as opposed to the promotion of the principle of sovereignty and non-interference, as demonstrated by China’s commentary, pushing back against attempts to use human rights as a pretext for interference. Others emphasise the universal nature of human rights and refer to international law, making a link that also shows a further contradiction between rules and sovereignty when applied in this context. Such imperfections are unsurprising and should be seen in the background of a normative political order which is unprecedented in scope and reach. It is already quite remarkable to see such closely aligned positions being promoted by governments on these principles of order, it would be wildly optimistic to expect governments to have precisely aligning positions including in terms of how they are applied, particularly on more politically loaded principles.

⁶⁷ A/49/PV.14, p.21

⁶⁸ A/49/PV.4, p.10

International Peace & Security

The overarching aspirational principle is the promotion of international peace and security, the aim to reduce conflict between and within states, and to protect states from non-conventional threats to their security. It is widely accepted within International Relations scholarship that the pursuit of national security is a state's primary objective. Arguably, the pursuit of national security does not necessarily translate into the pursuit of international peace and security, and the two may at times be at odds with one another. Nonetheless, the security imperative is at the forefront of speeches, and governments present the quest for international peace and security as a primary objective of global order.

As such Argentina⁶⁹ expresses “hope of an international order of peace and harmony”, seeing it very much as the main deliverable of the post-Cold War order, just as speakers previously referred to the maintenance of international peace and security as the main task of the United Nations. In this respect, the pursuit of this aspiration comes across as a common priority which is innate within visions of global order, frequently accompanied by little explanation or justification. Each actor has an interest in promoting international peace and security because this substantiates national security.

Nonetheless, over the course of the 1990s, there is somewhat of a departure from traditional conceptions of security. This re-evaluation of international peace and security was driven by several considerations. Firstly, increased awareness amongst governments that they were increasingly incapable of responding to security challenges alone, that in an interdependent and globalised world the international impact and spillover effects of instability increased⁷⁰. Thus, political leaders highlight that the pursuit of international peace is a “collective responsibility”⁷¹ and a “shared aspiration”⁷² requiring them to all pull in the same direction. Secondly, increased acceptance that challenges to peace and security were increasingly diverse⁷³, and that problems in other areas such as development and human rights could also transform into questions of international security. As explained by Canada in 1990⁷⁴, “security has ceased to be something to be achieved unilaterally. Security has ceased to be something to be attained through military means alone. Security has become multidimensional and it has become co-operative.”

With this in mind, the mood regarding the general state of international peace and security in the 1990s was not necessarily positive. For example, in 1992 China assessed that “the genuine peace that the

⁶⁹ A/49/PV.6, p.11 (1994)

⁷⁰ A/51/PV.7, p.8 (Japan, 1996)

⁷¹ A/47/PV.4, p.12 (Brazil, 1992), UK 1994,

⁷² A/47/PV.8, p.40 (China 1992)

⁷³ A/45/PV.5 p.66 (Indonesia, 1990), A/49/PV.8, P.5 (UK, 1994), A/49/PV.14, p.13 (India, 1994)

⁷⁴ A/45/PV.9, p.24

people of the world have longed for has not come with the end of the cold war. On the contrary, the world remains uneasy, with new problems added to the old ones and armed conflicts erupting one after another”. Likewise, Ireland on behalf of the European Union observed in 1996 “that the level of conflict, economic disparities and humanitarian crisis in our world was increasing, not diminishing. We had witnessed a series of open and bloody intra-State conflicts and the resurgence of old antagonisms in many regions of the world, resulting in death and injury to millions of innocent civilians, many of them women and children”.⁷⁵ And indeed amidst the conflicts in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia, amongst others, a more people-centred approach to international peace and security emerged as the dominant rallying cry for this aspirational principle⁷⁶.

Non-Proliferation

A prominent component of the promotion of international peace and security is the promotion of non-proliferation. At the broadest level, governments refer to this in terms of the promotion of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, including chemical and biological weapons, the promotion of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (the NPT) and other non-proliferation initiatives, together with the promotion of disarmament, the non-proliferation of small weapons, and combatting arms trafficking.

The threat of nuclear war is quite synonymous with the Cold War and, as a result, the subject of non-proliferation and disarmament in the nuclear realm is a particularly salient theme under this heading. This particular element of international peace and security was given such importance within the frame of mind of the emerging new world order at the time that Brazil⁷⁷ assessed that “the starting-point for a rethinking of the international system lies in the acknowledgement that peace, security and disarmament are inseparable”. If we consider from the previous section that peace and security is treated as a main objective of order, then the emphasis on disarmament as the starting-point of this endeavour is quite telling.

Sustaining this point, in 1990 Canada⁷⁸ outlines that “there is one persistent security problem above all others that the international community has failed to address satisfactorily. That is the problem of proliferation: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and proliferation of their means of delivery, as well as conventional weapons which have become so destructive”. Russia⁷⁹ similarly asserts that, “among the issues assuming a critical importance for the future of mankind are the non-proliferation of

⁷⁵ A/51/PV.6, p.7

⁷⁶ A/47/PV.4, p.28 (USA, 1992), A/49/PV.15, p.7 (Australia, 1994), A/49/PV.4, p.2 (Brazil 1994)

⁷⁷ A/47/PV.4, p.11 (1992)

⁷⁸ A/45/PV.9, p.27

⁷⁹ A/45/PV.6, p.48 (1990)

nuclear, chemical, bacteriological and missile technologies and, more generally, the disproportionate growth of the military sector”. In this sense, main the motivation for promoting non-proliferation is peace and security itself.

In parallel, there is a large degree of support for the principle of non-proliferation based on the perspective that this contributes to the kind of rules-based order that governments were seeking to cultivate. Despite having recently acquired nuclear weapons, India⁸⁰ expresses the view that there should be a drive for such actors “to abjure the use of nuclear weapons through an international accord on the non-use of those weapons”. On the same note Australia⁸¹ stresses the need “to obtain universal membership” of the NPT, as well as the need “to strengthen the nuclear safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and tighten export controls on nuclear and nuclear-related dual-use items”. In the same vein, governments⁸² “welcome the conclusion of negotiations on the non-proliferation convention banning chemical weapons”.

Counter Terrorism

The next aspirational principle under the heading of maintaining and promoting international peace and security is the principle of countering terrorism. As an overall principle, this could be understood as the promotion of policies to counter terrorism and associated threats to international peace and security, including religious fundamentalism, and the harbouring or aiding of terrorists and/or terrorist organisations. Initially, this common goal generates rather lukewarm attention, referred to in passing as a challenge amongst others⁸³ – such as development issues, drug trafficking, and the like. However, this should not diminish the salience of the subject. As assessed by Saudi Arabia⁸⁴ in 1996 “the issue of international terrorism was the main topic throughout last year”. Throughout the UNGA sessions in the 1990s a dispersed level of support is evident, showing that the prioritization of this challenge was not simply a reaction to 9/11.

Given that the subject is one which evokes strong emotions, it also evokes strong positions. In both 1992 and 1994 Argentina fell victim to terrorist attacks, against the Israeli Embassy and against the Jewish community respectively. Presenting their cause to the General Assembly, Argentina⁸⁵ stresses that: “as for terrorism, there can be no questions, only an answer in the form of the strongest, most determined and implacable commitment of each State to struggle against it until it is eradicated. Its activities are always deadly and cruel...Our country will support all steps or processes that will

⁸⁰ A/45/PV.13, p.120 (1990)

⁸¹ A/47/PV.15, p.22 (1992)

⁸² A/47/PV.8, p.62 (Germany, 1992), A/47/PV.17, p.62 (Saudi Arabia, 1992)

⁸³ A/45/PV.14, p.72 (USA, 1990)

⁸⁴ A/51/PV.17, p.11

⁸⁵ A/47/PV.5, p.77 (1992)

strengthen law and the respect for standards of coexistence among nations”. In 1994 India⁸⁶ refers to terrorism as a “toxin” against which “the international community must come together to defend itself”, whilst in 1996 Germany⁸⁷ refers to it as “a cancer” underscoring that this common challenge cannot be stopped without international cooperation. It is worth highlighting that the approach advocated here again shows the functionality behind the ordering principles. The recourse is back towards standards of coexistence, to strengthen rules, to work multilaterally as an international community: the route towards achieving this goal is through the ordering principles.

International Development: Global Economic and Social Development

The promotion of global economic and social development refers to the objectives of increased standards of living, reducing global poverty levels and global inequality, and targeting relevant challenges with socio-economic implications (such as debt burdens, humanitarian crises, migration flows, transnational crime, and pandemics). In the context of globalisation in the 1990s, the theme of international development acquires particular value. The way governments perceive this principle is multifaceted, overlapping with other aspirations, notably international peace and security, as well as a host of specific common challenges related to development.

In sync with the concept of a new world order for the 21st Century, governments express both a palpable sense of discontent, and a collective wish to refocus attention on this common objective. Articulating this sentiment, Indonesia⁸⁸ stresses that “the new international agenda must be shaped within the broad context of socio-economic development, guided by a moral conscience”. The appeal to morality here is not an empty one, much like the demand for security, the demand for development is treated as one which justifies itself and needs no explanation, it is a demand driven by beliefs in concepts of justice, prosperity, human dignity, and better living conditions⁸⁹. The mood amongst governments, setting out this goal as a priority in the emerging international order was clear: more had to be done.

As such, India⁹⁰ remarks that, “this period will determine whether the world carries over into the twenty-first century the present legacy of poverty, underdevelopment and stagnation, or whether it embarks on a more productive era, aiming at qualitatively higher levels of human welfare, affording all countries and all peoples an equitable opportunity to prosper in a stable and predictable external environment”. In the same frame of mind, Türkiye⁹¹ similarly comments that, “on the threshold of the last decade of

⁸⁶ A/51/PV.14, p.16

⁸⁷ A/51/PV.8, p.7

⁸⁸ A/45/PV.5, p.72 (1990)

⁸⁹ A/45/PV.4, p.11 and p. 18 (Brazil, 1990)

⁹⁰ A/45/PV.13, p.121 (1990)

⁹¹ A/45/PV.9, p.101 (1990)

the twentieth century we observe that economic and social problems related to population, poverty, unemployment, uneven income distribution, environmental degradation and the over-exploitation of natural resources not only have grown worse but have become more interlinked and globalized. These problems are especially acute in the developing world, and the debt burden in that world renders the task of surmounting poverty and its interrelated issues all the more difficult”.

As these comments hint towards, this principle reflects a source of division amongst the members of this global international order, not an ideological divide but a very tangible schism in development levels. Throughout the statements on the topic, there is a tension which cannot be ignored: on the one hand, this is a challenge faced primarily by less developed economies, and on the other hand, the more developed economies are perceived as not doing their part. This is something recognised by developed economies.

For example, from amongst the G7 members, Germany⁹² also calls for a new start in the development agenda, commenting that “the third world is meeting its responsibility in the one world and for the one world. The industrial countries must respond to this signal”. Further down the line, the UK⁹³ openly criticised the EU, the US, and Japan for restricting imports and undermining this common goal. Speeches on behalf of the developed group of countries show that this perspective is incorporated consistently. France’s Mitterrand⁹⁴ underscores that, “we must renew the unfinished debate on North-South relations between the rich and the poor, between the highly industrialized countries and those that lack the means to pay their debts or to revitalize their anaemic economies”, and Japan⁹⁵ assesses that “if the international community is to achieve sustained growth we must strive to ensure that developing countries share in it”.

At the same time, the specific interlinkage between development and peace and security is recalled repeatedly, by both the developed and the developing economies. In 1990, the Russian Federation⁹⁶ warns that, “security can hardly be lasting unless it is supported by economic growth...a new “poverty curtain”, this time between North and South, must not be allowed to descend. If it does, the resulting division of the world may prove fatal to our civilization”, and Canada⁹⁷ echoes this sentiment, assessing that “in a world where poverty and underdevelopment plague most of the planet, the developed world cannot pretend to be secure simply because it alone is prosperous...the development of prosperity

⁹² A/45/PV.8 p.27 (1990)

⁹³ A/51/PV.6, p.19 (1996)

⁹⁴ A/45/PV.4, p.43-45 (1990)

⁹⁵ A/45/PV.7, p.26 (1990)

⁹⁶ A/45/PV.6, p.57

⁹⁷ A/45/PV.9 p.24 (1990)

throughout the world is not a question of charity but a question of security”. As summed up more concisely by China⁹⁸ “peace and development are mutually supportive”.

Environmental Protection

The aspirational principle of environmental protection relates to the promotion of *sustainable* development, protection of the natural environment, including addressing climate change and its implications, and the promotion of what are colloquially referred to as environmentally friendly ‘green’ policies. This subject is a vital component of the wider development agenda, such that it merits being treated as a standalone principle, generating a critical mass of attention throughout the 1990s. Since then, the topic has only received more attention.

Discourse is consistent with the positions outlined regarding development: the need to have this particular issue at the top of the agenda, the need for collective action, as well as a certain tinge of antagonism, with the developing economies openly accusing and criticising the developed economies. In this vein, Argentina⁹⁹ notes that “some serious problems, which have not, in general, been caused by the developing countries, are of global nature, and we are committed to the common effort to halt deterioration and bring about environmental recovery”. Somewhat more explicitly, Indonesia¹⁰⁰ insists that “the developing countries should not be penalized for the development excesses of the industrialized countries. Rather, the linkages between environmental concerns and the legitimate development needs of developing countries should be fully recognized”.

This need for redress is nonetheless framed within the same mindset that frames the ordering principles; a conscious effort to work collectively and to establish shared parameters, in the interests of achieving this common goal. As outlined in the Mexican¹⁰¹ speech in 1990, “environmental degradation...whose origin and consequences extend across national frontiers, demands a multilateral solution”. In this regard, the UK¹⁰² puts forward the position that, “there are the hugely varied problems of our environment, the ozone layer, global warming, and many others. These are problems which have to be tackled, and quickly. But they can be tackled only if the world community acts together, and undoubtedly the United Nations and its agencies offer the best way of pooling these efforts”.

⁹⁸ A/47/PV.6 p.46 (1992)

⁹⁹ A/45/PV.5, p.36 (1990)

¹⁰⁰ A/45/PV.5, p.69 (1990)

¹⁰¹ A/45/PV.14, p.27

¹⁰² A/45/PV.8, p.43 (1990)

Economic Liberalism

The third component of international development is the principle of economic liberalism, referring to the promotion of liberal economic values and policies, including open markets, free trade and free competition, as well as safeguarding economic rights and freedoms. This principle also includes the consolidation of the role of the Bretton Woods institutions, notably the IMF and the World Bank, in the interest of global economic growth. This concept lies at the crossroads where the international economic and political orders meet. Whilst it is the case that certain expressions of support for economic liberalism are driven by political liberalism – these are arguably in the minority¹⁰³.

Promotion of this principle carries with it an accusatory element against protectionism, striking a note of caution notably in response to the trend towards trade bloc formations at the time. Even as governments bought into the free trade movement – with NAFTA, MERCOSUR, and the European Community's internal market all taking shape in the early 90s, emerging economic powers in particular were concerned that such trade blocs would also pose a threat to such potential. Foremost amongst these, China¹⁰⁴ states that “in the interest of common development, we call for the abolition of protectionism and of discrimination in international economic relations and trade. Neither global multilateral trade arrangements nor regional economic and trade cooperation should be exclusive”.

Yet, overall, the positions vocalised by G20 governments convey a consensual calculation that the achievement of a more liberal international economic environment serves as the best route towards economic growth, prosperity, and development. As the implications of globalization – globally interdependent economies and supply chains – gained recognition throughout the 90s, governments openly endorsed liberal international trade policy. Illustrating this, Italy¹⁰⁵ on behalf of the European Economic Community puts forward the assessment that “the strengthening of the multilateral trade system provides the best guarantee of international equilibrium and of sustainable development”, and Brazil¹⁰⁶ remarks that “in an increasingly open and interdependent international community, the leverage from international trade is extraordinary”.

The underlying motivation driving support for the ordering principles is again evident, with governments converging upon the need to organise their international trade relations according to agreed rules, and to work together to achieve economic growth. Amidst negotiations on what would

¹⁰³ For example, Germany (A/49/PV.6, p.19, 1994) explains that “the European Union is supporting the countries of Central and Eastern Europe on their way to democracy and the establishment of market economies. The peoples in the reformist States fought for their freedom. We encouraged them in their struggle and we will not now abandon them”. Similarly, Russia (A/47/PV.6, p.64, 1992) reminisces that “development cannot be achieved without ensuring full political and economic rights and freedoms, without releasing human creative potential in a market environment. Russia has learned this from its own experience”.

¹⁰⁴ A/49/PV.8, p.10 (1994)

¹⁰⁵ A/45/PV.6, p.37 (1990)

¹⁰⁶ A/47/PV.4, p.17 (1992)

eventually become the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), governments speak out against protectionism, their hopes for a rules-based economic order, emphasising that international cooperation is a pre-requisite for collective prosperity.

Thus Indonesia¹⁰⁷ outlines expectations that the ‘Uruguay Round’ of negotiations at the time would “provide the long-sought assurance of a rule-based and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system, free from the arbitrariness of unilateral action”, and similarly Japan¹⁰⁸ emphasises that the international community’s “most urgent task is to ensure that the Uruguay Round is concluded successfully, stemming the tide of protectionism and restructuring the international trading order for the twenty-first century”. The Australian speech¹⁰⁹ in 1992 reflects on this shared awareness, citing a statement by the Non-Aligned Movement which “illustrated beyond a doubt that this is a view shared equally by developed and developing countries”.

Political Liberalism

Arguably, the principles most associated with contemporary order – accurately or not – are those which are most closely associated with political liberalism, namely the promotion of human rights and democracy. I treat the two as separate principles in this study, however positions on the two often overlap, or are outlined as consecutive positions, recognising their interlocked relationship. By way of an example in terms of expressions of support for both principles, in 1990 the US¹¹⁰ remarked that “calls for democracy and human rights are being reborn everywhere. These calls are an expression of support for the values enshrined in the United Nations Charter”, meanwhile Mexico¹¹¹ refers to “human rights and democracy as the foundations of peace, freedom and human dignity”. At the same time, there are sufficient variations in support which necessitate treating these principles as being separate, with a tendency for governments to support human rights slightly more than democracy¹¹².

Human Rights

This aspirational principle refers to the promotion of human rights. Though treated in this study as an aspirational principle, governments refer to the promotion of human rights as a norm which is well established according to agreed rules, notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this regard, delivering South Africa’s speech¹¹³ following re-admittance to the United Nations in 1994,

¹⁰⁷ A/49/PV.16, p.23 (1994)

¹⁰⁸ A/45/PV.7, p.35 (1990)

¹⁰⁹ A/47/PV.15, p.18

¹¹⁰ A/45/PV.14, p.72

¹¹¹ A/47/PV.9, p.54 (1992)

¹¹² Differences are noticeable in terms of the frequency of support for each of these principles between 1990 and 1998 in the cases of Australia which supports human rights as an aspirational principle 11 times, in contrast to 1 expression of support for democracy, likewise France (7:3), Germany (15:9), the Republic of Korea (7:2), and South Africa (9:3).

¹¹³ A/49/PV.14, p.9

Nelson Mandela outlined that, “among other things, we have this morning acceded to the covenants and conventions adopted by this Organization, which address various matters such as economic, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights, and the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, to say nothing of our irrevocable commitment to the realization of the objectives contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”.

There is a clear majority of governments promoting the universality of human rights in this regard, on the basis that they are universally agreed rules. Illustrating this point, France refers to human rights on different occasions as “the underlying principle of international law”¹¹⁴, and “as a major principle of international relations”¹¹⁵. As put bluntly by Brazil, “respect for human rights must be universal in scope, just as the 1948 Declaration is universal and just as the provisions of the basic covenants and conventions on this matter are universal”¹¹⁶.

A notable exception to this view is China, which sometimes contested such an understanding, stating in 1994¹¹⁷ that “we always hold that the principle of universality of human rights must be viewed in the context of the actual conditions of a given country. Conditions vary from country to country. It is inevitable and normal that there is divergence of views on human rights issues”. China implies that the cause of human rights is being instrumentalised to interfere in internal affairs, arguing “against using human rights as a pretext to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries”. However, at least in the 1990s, the Chinese voice is quite an outlier amongst the G20 on this issue.

Governments respond to such positions clearly. Whilst Germany¹¹⁸ acknowledges that value systems should not be forced upon others, it is also pointed out that “there is a body of human rights universally binding under international law which no one should seek to erode, not even on grounds of differing cultural traditions”. The Republic of Korea¹¹⁹ underscores that “the violation of fundamental human rights cannot be justified under any pretext. The protection of these rights is our collective responsibility”. Directly addressing critics who describe the promotion of human rights as “so-called Western values”, Australia¹²⁰ responds that to the contrary these are “internationally accepted, universal standards of practice”.

The increase in civil wars in the 1990s also provoked a certain awareness on the link between human rights and international peace and security. Russia¹²¹ argued that these two principles are “inseparable”,

¹¹⁴ A/49/PV.18, p.15 (1994)

¹¹⁵ A/51/PV.8, p.20 (1996)

¹¹⁶ A/47/PV.4, p.16 (1992)

¹¹⁷ A/49/PV.8, p.11

¹¹⁸ A/47/PV.8, p.59 (1992)

¹¹⁹ A/47/PV.6, p.33-34 (1992)

¹²⁰ A/47/PV.15, p.21 (1992)

¹²¹ A/45/PV.6, p.62 (1990)

remarking that “the time has also come to look at regional conflicts from the standpoint of human rights”, whilst Australia¹²² called for “a wider application of the notion of security”, noting that at the time intrastate conflicts imperilled “human security” more than traditional interstate conflicts. Additional elements of note under this heading include positions promoting the rights of women¹²³ and the rights of children¹²⁴, the latter gaining particular attention following the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990.

Democracy

This principle refers to the promotion of democracy, particularly the promotion of free and fair elections, open civil societies and free media, notions of justice, equality and representation at the domestic level, and the promotion of popular sovereignty. Considering that the established Western powers are associated with liberal democracies their support for this principle is as expected, but there is no shortage of support on the part of the emerging powers either. The main driver of support for this principle as a feature of the post-Cold War order is that democracy is in the interests of ‘the people’, in the interests of representation.

As explained by Brazil in 1992¹²⁵, “in a democracy the rules of the game relate to the sharing and limitation of power. Government must belong to the many, so that it can resist imposition by the few. Power must be constrained by law, so as to avoid the arbitrary discretion of those who wield it”. Indonesia¹²⁶ welcomes the “growing trend towards democracy” and Mexico¹²⁷ comments that “democracy is certainly the best way to facilitate development with justice; it is also the system which best guarantees respect for human rights”.

The importance of democracy in the emerging global order was particularly palpable when spoken of in the context of the fall of communism and the spread of democracy. The Russian speech in 1990¹²⁸ lauds “the emancipation of all the peoples and all the citizens of our country, their active involvement in the political arena”. Later, the Russian statement¹²⁹ again highlights that “Russia, which has rejected communism, has, perhaps more than any other country, learned from its own experience that there can be no alternative to democratic development”.

¹²² A/49/PV.15, p.9 (1994)

¹²³ A/47/PV.10, p.72 (Canada, 1992)

¹²⁴ A/45/PV.5, p.71 (Indonesia, 1990)

¹²⁵ A/47/PV.4, p.8

¹²⁶ A/47/PV.10, p.17

¹²⁷ A/49/PV.4, p.11

¹²⁸ A/45/PV.6, p.52

¹²⁹ A/47/PV.6, P.57 (1992)

Similarly, speaking in the context of a country at the epicentre of the divide between ‘the free world’ and the ‘Eastern Bloc’ the German¹³⁰ statement explains that “the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe chose the path of peaceful revolution leading to freedom and democracy. Each of their decisions was a decision in favour of Europe. Through their peaceful revolution the Germans now uniting with us have demonstrated to the whole world their belief in freedom, in unity and democracy, and hence in Europe”. In the same vein, the USA¹³¹ remarks that “banished by the peoples' undying thirst for freedom, imperial communism has collapsed in its birthplace, and today Russia has awakened democratic, independent and free; the Baltic States are free; and so too are Ukraine, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and the other independent States joining the nations of Central and Eastern Europe in freedom”.

4.4: Macro Data

The previous sections of this chapter presented each of the ordering principles and aspirational principles of contemporary order, citing specific extracts of discourse to support them. To further substantiate these claims, the next section zooms out, looking instead at the wider sample of frequencies of support for these principles in the speeches on behalf of the members of the G20 in 1990, 1992 1994, 1996 and 1998, together with the justifications cited in support of such principles. As explained earlier in the methods chapter, these frequencies should be treated as approximations of a country’s policy positions. For example, it would be a wild stretch to claim that Germany supports the United Nations more than France does simply because coded data indicates fifteen instances of German support for the UN in their five speeches, as opposed to eleven instances of French support. However, this quantitative data can help to visualise information and illustrate a few additional points.

In this respect while there are limits to the conclusions we can reach from such data, crucially, this information does allay a chief concern. Looking at the frequencies with which these principles are supported, it is clear that over the course of these initial five UNGA debate sessions these ordering principles and aspirational principles that I have identified generate healthily dispersed support. The evidence gathered in this initial stage indicates a degree of support from the established ‘West’ as well as the emerging ‘Rest’. As such, considering the evidence presented in the previous sections together with this additional evidence, I believe that my interpretation of the ordering principles and aspirational principles characterising contemporary order can be put forward with a certain level of confidence.

¹³⁰ A/45/PV.8, p.11

¹³¹ A/47/PV.4, p.27

	THE UN	MULTILATERALISM	RULES	SOVEREIGNTY
Argentina	6	9	5	3
Australia	14	7	9	2
Brazil	9	10	8	6
Canada	15	9	3	1
China	9	9	5	12
EU	11	12	7	5
France	11	7	11	3
Germany	15	15	10	4
India	12	7	2	5
Indonesia	16	11	5	6
Italy	15	6	7	4
Japan	16	12	2	0
Korea	12	6	6	0
Mexico	13	10	15	9
Russia	17	11	8	0
Saudi Arabia	18	9	17	5
South Africa	10	3	0	1
Turkiye	16	6	5	5
UK	13	8	2	1
USA	13	12	7	2
	261	179	134	74

Figure 6 - Frequencies of support for the ordering principles.

	PEACE & SECURITY	NON - PROLIFERATION	COUNTER TERRORISM	DEVELOPMENT	ENVIRONMENT	ECONOMIC LIBERALISM	DEMOCRACY	HUMAN RIGHTS
Argentina	9	7	5	2	4	5	8	8
Australia	6	11	0	8	3	3	1	11
Brazil	10	11	0	11	4	7	12	9
Canada	6	12	0	8	4	0	8	11
China	6	12	0	12	3	5	1	1
EU	3	4	1	7	3	3	4	4
France	4	7	3	6	3	1	3	7
Germany	10	12	3	13	8	3	9	15
India	4	9	10	5	3	0	3	5
Indonesia	3	8	1	13	4	3	6	6
Italy	4	2	2	7	2	4	3	4
Japan	9	12	1	12	5	3	4	7
Korea	3	11	3	7	7	2	2	7
Mexico	4	10	1	14	6	3	9	3
Russia	2	11	3	4	1	3	8	6
Saudi Arabia	6	7	5	7	3	4	0	1
South Africa	3	6	0	6	2	0	3	9
Turkiye	3	3	10	5	3	2	4	7
UK	4	3	3	5	5	4	2	2
USA	12	15	11	8	3	7	11	6
	111	173	62	160	76	62	101	129

Figure 7 - Frequencies of support for the aspirational principles.

	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	Totals
Peace & Security	79	84	82	74	52	371
Common Challenges	57	36	40	53	60	246
Rules-Based Order	66	40	45	38	52	241
Prosperity	31	35	37	38	33	174
Accusations	53	27	23	32	38	173
Results & Deliverables	40	30	28	31	35	164
The People	46	24	34	26	31	161
JFREA	33	18	22	23	25	121

Figure 8 - Frequencies of cited justifications.

There are instances where there are no positions coded on behalf of certain countries in support of some principles, but such blanks should be taken with a pinch of salt. As a case in point, Canada, a member of the G7, does not express support for economic liberalism in this initial stage. Similarly, Russia appears to support the promotion of democracy more intensely than many G7 members, including the UK, France and Italy. It should also be mentioned that both China and Saudi Arabia are particularly

quiet when it comes to democracy and human rights – however coded data on behalf of the UK indicates only two occasions of support for each also. Whilst there are cases of such exceptions, I do not believe that this undermines the integrity of the data put forward, however it is a reminder of the limitations already discussed.

Looking at the aggregate data, some broader observations can be made which in my view further reinforce the points made so far. Firstly, in terms of the organisational dimension, the role of the United Nations is by far the most endorsed principle. One may well argue that these findings have been conditioned by the venue where these speeches were delivered, and admittedly these high numbers of support may potentially indicate such influence. Nonetheless, this is a consistent position amongst all actors and over a prolonged period of time, and it would be unhelpful to downplay such support – particularly given that in each case there is also a clear justification associated for the expression of support.

Secondly, the ordering principles of rules and of multilateralism are complemented by states frequently justifying their positions regarding the full spectrum of principles on the basis of upholding a rules-based order or responding to common challenges. The occurrence of these two themes amongst the most cited of justifications further amplifies the understanding that contemporary order is premised upon setting out a particular way of doing international politics motivated by particular objectives.

Thirdly, looking at the aspirational principles it must be highlighted that taking into account the direct references to peace and security as a principle, together with peace and security as a justification, this theme emerges as the main overarching goal of contemporary international order. In contrast, it is worth noting that whilst commentary on contemporary order shines a spotlight on the theme of political liberalism, this comes across as almost secondary to peace and security, and development. Particularly considering the emphasis in previous research on ‘aggressive’ forms of promoting political liberalism – namely the use of sanctions, and military intervention – I believe it is appropriate to also briefly discuss the data regarding these issues.

Governments typically refer to sanctions as a punishment tool aimed at a country to enforce standards of conduct. How they classify intervention is less clearcut – the general idea relates to military intervention or ‘humanitarian intervention’ as per the R2P model, however they also sometimes invoke the term broadly to incorporate UN mandated peacekeeping, which of course has different connotations. Both of these concepts gained support in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, and support for the use of sanctions in this respect was particularly significant. However as the following figure indicates, the frequency with which either of the topics is referred to is quite low. Both topics are generally avoided and fade off the agenda. Moreover, approaching the millennium there appears to be more instances of

governments cautioning against such approaches than there are instances of governments advocating in their favour.

	Sanctions (Support)	Sanctions (Contestation)	Intervention (Support)	Intervention (Contestation)
1990	15	0	4	1
1992	5	0	4	2
1994	2	1	4	3
1996	1	3	1	1
1998	1	2	1	3
Totals	24	6	14	10

Figure 9 - Support and contestation regarding sanctions and intervention.

In the case of sanctions, most contestation comes from Russia and China. The former¹³² refers to a “sanctions syndrome”, whilst the latter¹³³ notes that “experience has shown that such practices as interfering in other countries’ internal affairs and resorting to pressure, sanctions or even force at will cannot help”. Regarding intervention, contrary to popular opinion, similar resistance is also registered on behalf of Western powers. As a case in point, France¹³⁴ warns that by pursuing this principle “little by little, any country would declare itself entitled to intervene wherever its interests, security or ambitions so required, and we would have to begin all over again”. Thus, it would be a massive stretch to place these arrangements prominently alongside the principles discussed so far. Apart from the immediate post-Cold War phase coinciding with the Gulf War, these themes did not generate credible buy-in.

4.5: Conclusions

Going back to the research question asking if contemporary order is dysfunctional, a precondition to be able to answer this was to firstly identify the arrangements of order. As I outlined in the literature review, commentary on the predicament of contemporary order is generally framed according to a loose understanding of what the post-Cold War order represents, but the precise arrangements are debated. On the one hand, some pursue a maximalist approach to the concept, with emphasis on themes like democracy, human rights, and intervention as core components of this order. My findings suggest that the former two are aspirational principles which are no more prominent than others, and which are not as central to order as ordering principles, whereas the latter faded off the agenda quickly. Such a maximalist approach sets up the contemporary order to be painted as a failure. On the other hand, the minimalist approach pragmatically focuses on organisational elements though minimizes the influence of aspirational principles.

¹³² A/51/PV.6, p.16 (1996)

¹³³ A/49/PV.8, p.9 (1994)

¹³⁴ A/53/PV.11, p.16 (1998)

This chapter therefore outlined my understanding of contemporary order, setting out baseline arrangements which reflect the vision of a new global order for the post-Cold War era: a benchmark of ordering principles and aspirational principles according to which I assess whether contemporary order is dysfunctional or not, in the following chapters. In and of itself, this already represents a significant contribution to current research on the post-Cold War order. Rather than an arbitrary selection of principles and concepts, the interpretation I put forward is derived from official state discourse, backed by a systematic process – sourced directly from the speeches by the members of the G20 delivered at the UNGA debates in 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1998. They are principles promoted by major international and regional powers as part of their vision of a new order for the 21st Century. The nature of such data adds an element of objectivity, neutrality, and credibility which is not always the case in terms of such analysis particularly given the politicised debates on global order today. The principles I put forward are visualised in the following diagram and further summarised below.

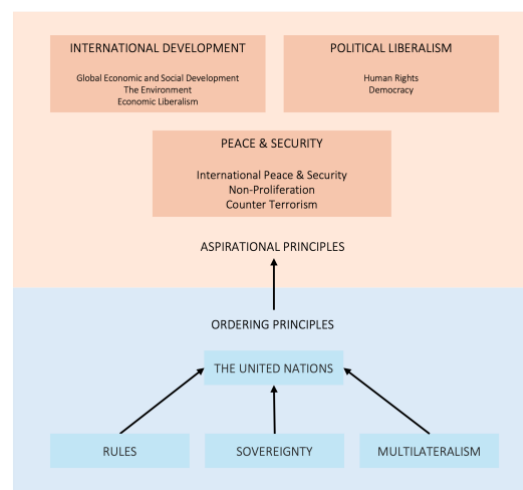


Figure 10 - The principles of contemporary order.

The ordering principles set out a standard of doing international politics, they establish ‘rules of the game’. Thus the first ordering principle of contemporary order is indeed the shared understanding that relations between states are organised according to common rules: general expectations of behaviour premised on the basis of the UN Charter in particular, accompanied by the use of international law. The second ordering principle is that relations between states are organised according to the principle of sovereignty and sovereign equality, non-interference in internal affairs, the prohibition of the acquisition of territory through the use of force, as well as self-determination. The third ordering principle is multilateralism: the shared understanding that relations between states are organised according to the imperative of developing ‘friendly relations’ and international cooperation. These three principles feed into the fourth ordering principle, the United Nations, and the special role assigned to this institution which represents the fulcrum of contemporary order.

The aspirational principles represent the direction in which states want to steer global order and could be categorized according to three themes. The first overarching aspirational principle is the promotion of international peace and security, the aim to reduce conflict between and within states, and to protect states from non-state actors and non-conventional threats to their security. This objective also includes the principles of non-proliferation and of countering terrorism. The second main aspirational principle is the promotion of global economic and social development, notably the aims of increased standards of living, alongside the reduction of global poverty and global inequality. This principle also includes environmental protection, which relates to the promotion of *sustainable* development, as well as the promotion of economic liberalism, including open markets and free trade. The third theme of aspirational principles relates to political liberalism, namely the promotion of human rights, particularly on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the promotion of democracy.

Intentional or not, the vision of global order put forward by governments following the end of the Cold War was a vision of a functional order. The ordering principles were oriented towards setting out shared guidelines organising international behaviour. They sought to relaunch the ideals of the post-1945 order in a form which was representative of the wider international community centred upon principles which responded to their particular needs and expectations. The aspirational principles that they prioritised were perceived to be common goals and shared interests, representative of the wider international community. It is the representativeness and responsiveness of these principles over the longer term which ultimately determines if global order is functional, and thus the next chapter focuses precisely on this question: is contemporary global order dysfunctional?

Chapter 5: A Partially Dysfunctional Order

Recalling the earlier conceptual discussion introducing my functionalist understanding of global order, I framed the question of the functionality of order according to the logic of supply and demand. States desire an order which is *representative* of their needs and expectations. An order that does not represent such interests would not be legitimate. This aspect of legitimacy is reflected in this research through the buy-in criterion. States also desire an order that is *responsive* to their needs and expectations, which is reflected by the responsiveness criterion. Framed accordingly, my analysis of speeches delivered at the General Assembly indicates that contemporary global order is partially dysfunctional due to a perceived lack of responsiveness.

Whereas the principles of the post-Cold War order generate consistent buy-in on behalf of the members of the G20, this is offset by consistent negative assessments in terms of the responsiveness of these same principles. Governments have expectations that the principles of order that they collectively endorse contribute towards maintaining shared standards of conduct and achieving common aspirations. This is the essence of responsiveness. However, governments consistently express the belief that their expectations are not being met – signalling that the supply of order is not meeting their collective demand. Thus, there is a responsiveness deficit. This claim is very much in line with the literature discussed earlier on the dissatisfaction of governments with the contemporary order, however it deviates from the claim arguing that contemporary order lacks legitimacy.

In this chapter I therefore present the first body of evidence for this claim that contemporary global order is partially dysfunctional. This evidence demonstrates that despite the principles of order being considered legitimate, they are considered to lack responsiveness. In practical terms, this evidence consists of positions taken by the G20 members regarding each of the principles identified in the previous chapter during the UNGA sessions sampled in this study: a compilation of positions. The positions are sorted according to buy-in and responsiveness, detailing the aggregate levels of support and contestation generated by the principles of order, and the aggregate levels of positive and negative assessments generated by them, respectively. This data is illustrated through a series of tables summarising these results in the beginning of the next section.

Though the members of the G20 give different priority to different principles and support some principles more than they support others, this does not amount to evidence of divergence between what is considered in the mainstream as the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’, or the ‘Global South’, with a specific

exception in the case of China. In this regard, my findings do not indicate that there is any concerted challenge by a critical mass of actors against the organisational dimension of contemporary order, which is the dimension being focused on in this study. Put plainly, the problem of contemporary order is not a legitimacy problem but a responsiveness problem. The group of major powers focused upon in this study consider that the principles of contemporary order are not sufficiently responsive towards their needs and interests, and that the way they are being pursued is not meeting their expectations.

When appraising literature on this subject, it was quite apparent that this specific theme – the functionality of order – is quite overlooked as a research topic, while in contrast conversations amongst states related to this theme are routine. Political leaders support, critique, and contest arrangements, they express positive and negative opinions about how they are responding to their needs, expectations, and interests, if they are content with how a principle is being implemented in the real world, if they see progress towards achieving an objective, or if they are disappointed by the lack of results. If nothing else, my findings show very clearly that the functionality (or dysfunctionality) of global order is a concern that governments are exceedingly aware of, and which they speak about openly.

Indeed, perhaps the most consequential finding of this research is that the principles being analysed in this project as constitutive of the post-Cold War order are referred to time and time again in such official discourse at the UN General Assembly, at least on a bi-annual basis, over the course of more than thirty years. This is quite remarkable and should not be understated. It cannot be a coincidence that session after session governments representing twenty significant states from different areas of the globe, with different histories, cultures, perspectives and foreign policy outlooks talk about the same principles and concepts over and over again.

Wendt's concept of "collective authorship"¹ is demonstrated very clearly through such discourse on the same recurring principles, and the way that these states coalesce around a certain group of principles quite organically. The implication here is that whether they are conscious of it or not, governments are constantly conferring recognition upon a set of shared understandings on how international relations and world politics should be organised. They recognise the value of influencing how these principles work, how these principles are perceived, and of shaping the global narrative for each principle according to their particular interests. The fact that these principles are omnipresent throughout these debates reinforces their relevance.

¹ Wendt (1992), as per discussion in literature review.

Buy-In & Responsiveness

The functionality of global order depends upon two criteria: legitimacy (or buy-in) and responsiveness. Firstly, the principles of order should generate buy-in on behalf of the members of that order, endorsing them, and thereby conferring legitimacy upon them. Secondly the principles should be responsive, meaning that the way the principles are implemented meet the expectations of the members of that order: they respond to their needs and interests, and are perceived as generating the results being sought. Based on my analysis of positions taken by the members of the G20 in their speeches delivered at the UN General Assembly General Debates over the past three decades, there is a strong case to be made that contemporary international order is at least partially dysfunctional.

The principles of contemporary order outlined in the previous chapter are considered to be legitimate, generating consistent buy-in and widespread support. However, in terms of the responsiveness criterion, the members of the G20 deliver negative assessments more often than not – most prominently in terms of the United Nations, rules-based international relations, as well as the promotion of international peace and security, and the promotion of international development. The way that these principles are being implemented and pursued are not meeting expectations, they are not perceived to be delivering the desired results – supply is not meeting demand. On this basis, the results of my analysis indicate that while political leaders consider the principles of contemporary order to be legitimate, they are dissatisfied with their responsiveness, and thus global order may be considered to be partially dysfunctional.

This section presents the first portion of evidence for this argument based on the numerical data emerging from my content analysis. These findings are accompanied by illustrations serving as a reference point summarising the positions taken by the members of the G20 regarding each principle in each of the sampled sessions from 1990 to 2022 in terms of the criteria of buy-in (support, contestation) and secondly in terms of responsiveness (positive, negative). The summaries of positions are classified according to different levels of intensity, and dispersion – as elaborated upon in the methodology section.

As a brief recap, intensity indicates the proportion of G20 members taking the same position regarding a principle during each debate. For a collection of positions to be considered as a significant one, I set a threshold of at least five governments taking that position – or 25% of the G20, otherwise the position is classified as ‘Neutral’². In order of increasing intensity, positions are classified based upon loosely quarterly intervals as ‘Dispersed’ (5-9), ‘General’ (10-14), ‘Strong’ (15-17), and ‘Full’ (18+). Positions

² Unless there are four positions from either the G7/OECD, or from the G77/BRICS – in which case the particular group is referred to in the summary as having taken that position.

are further classified in terms of the extent to which there is convergence or divergence among the members of the G20 associated with ‘the West’ and those associated with ‘the Rest’, or in other words, an overlap in their positions. These classifications are ‘Neutral’, ‘Weak Convergence’, ‘Convergence’, ‘Strong Convergence’, and ‘Extreme Convergence’, with the same descriptors for divergence. This qualification of data is incorporated in order to counter the argument that results may be skewed by disproportionate support or positive sentiments from the established Western powers.

In an ideal world, a functional global order would receive a high degree of buy-in, and a high degree of positive assessments in terms of responsiveness. A fully dysfunctional order would be characterised by a high degree of contestation together with a high degree of negative assessments, which would be a situation approaching disorder. My findings are more mixed. Governments reiterate their support for both the ordering principles and aspirational principles. Nonetheless, this feedback is then countered by negative assessments in terms of the responsiveness of these principles – indicating that contemporary order is ultimately somewhat dysfunctional. Notwithstanding that there are several UNGA debates where positive assessments are registered, these fizzle out. Negative assessments are more frequent across the full timeframe, and become more intense over the past decade, culminating in a peak of negative assessments in 2022.

5.1: Buy-In

Looking firstly at the principles of contemporary order as a whole, I dedicated a portion of my literature review to a body of research giving prominence to the view that the post-Cold War order is facing both an internal and an external challenge. Such research puts forward the assessment that emerging powers are intent upon contesting the values and principles of a Western-led order, using their new-found influence to promote an alternative vision of international politics, having never bought-into this order in the first place. It is further argued that this challenge is amplified by the established Western powers seemingly abandoning or turning against the ideals that they stood for previously, as they navigate their own internal issues and grapple with changing political identities.

Several considerations lend some credibility to such a diagnosis. Amongst these, the prominence of Sino-American rivalry, the European Union’s pursuit of strategic autonomy, and the increased international role played by middle powers promoting policies on several topics which do not necessarily align with those of the G7 and likeminded partners suggest that the apparent divergence between the West and the Rest is real. The rising popularity of ‘illiberal’ democracies, polarizing culture wars within Western societies, and segments of Western electorates which resent internationalist

foreign policies further fuel this perspective³. Policies pursued by the Trump presidencies also serve as some justification, yet it is important to avoid a recency bias or to present America as being the sole representative of Western policy.

All in all, my findings do not quite support these claims – and as I reflect upon later, these critiques may be misreading expressions of dissatisfaction with contestation against the principles of global order. It would be reasonable to expect that if actors are against the principles of contemporary order, then they would seize the opportunity provided by the UN General Assembly debate to express their dissenting views, to denounce principles they disagree with. Other personalities from Gaddafi to Netanyahu have used this podium to openly criticise certain principles, to express their lack of buy-in. Furthermore, these actors do not shy away from expressing negative views, disappointment regarding these principles, or regarding other actors, so they clearly have the capability to express such criticism and objections if they so wished.

Yet from the sample of speeches covered in this study expressions of contestation are isolated, and there is no evidence that a genuine coalition of emerging powers is seeking to overturn the principles of the post-Cold War order, nor evidence of any alternative competing set of principles being promoted. Supporting this, no sessions covered in this study meet the minimum threshold in relation to contestation – meaning there are no UNGA debates where a critical mass of more than four G20 members contest the validity or challenge the legitimacy of any principle. The main exception to this – as I’ll expand upon later in this chapter – is China’s outlook in relation to aspirational principles linked to political liberalism, where there is a distinct lack of support.

Some have also taken the assessment of declining support for the post-Cold War order a step further, proclaiming the demise of a rules-based order. Again, this is understandable to some degree. On the one hand, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine openly attacks the principle of sovereignty. China has not only watched on silently and bolstered Russia with the willingness of a no-limits partnership, but has pursued certain policies regarding territories in disputed waters that has prompted concern amongst its neighbours. On the other hand, beyond its own past transgressions, American support for Israeli policies in Gaza and the West Bank, and the indifferent ‘hands-off’ approach of many European governments towards this conflict have served to justify long-held complaints of double-standards in the realm of human rights and international law, as well criticism on the emptiness of such concepts as a rules-based order.

³ For reference regarding these points, one may wish to consult again the sections in the literature review entitled: *Dissatisfaction from Inside, Challenge from Outside*, as well as *A Fragmented World*.

The scope of this study is not to enter into the merits of these claims on substance. Exceptions to a principle should not be mistaken as the end of that principle – and it is a facile argument to say that we live in a state of disorder because a minority of actors may be challenging certain principles, when the overwhelming majority are upholding and promoting them. If one were to follow the same logic, then most countries could be described as lawless, because people break the law. Quite the opposite really, whereas modern societies have active law enforcement to deter against rule-breaking, our international society does not. There is no global police-force to ensure that everyone behaves; yet governments adhere to general rules of conduct more often than not. In this vein, focusing first on the ordering principles, based on my findings I believe it would be hasty to proclaim a world without rules.

Ordering Principles

It may certainly be justified to argue that we have departed from a specific interpretation of rules-based order, but the idea that global order is not rules-based any longer is a vast leap, and governments clearly don't consider this to be the case, nor is it something they want. Over the past thirty years leaders have outlined a narrow set of recognised and supported 'rules of the game': rules-based international relations, conducting international relations on the basis of the principle of sovereignty and non-interference, conducting relations in a spirit of multilateralism and fostering positive relations, and supporting the role of the United Nations as the fulcrum of these principles. The justifications are much the same as those highlighted in the previous chapter. There is clearly a set of general principles endorsed by these actors, and this endorsement is also evident in recent UNGA sessions.

This consistent support is illustrated in Figure 11. All the ordering principles identified in the previous chapter receive expressions of buy-in from at least five members of the G20 on almost all occasions, with the exception of the principle of sovereignty. The United Nations is the most supported principle: in all sessions except one at least fifteen speakers out of twenty (75%) express support for the role and existence of the organisation to some degree – reflecting the belief in the UN as the focal point of contemporary order. Similarly, in each session at least half the members of the G20 support international relations organised according to common rules, and a multilateral approach to international politics. Paradoxically, despite being a systemic component of international politics, the principle of sovereignty is the least supported ordering principle, typically generating only dispersed to general support – thought this may well be because the concept is taken for granted.

THE UNITED NATIONS			RULES	
Year	Support	Contestation	Support	Contestation
1990	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
1992	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
1994	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
1996	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	Strong Support, Convergence	No Contestation
1998	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	General Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
2000	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2002	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2004	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2006	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
2008	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2010	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	General Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2012	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2014	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2016	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2018	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	General Support, Weak Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2020	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2022	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation

MULTILATERALISM			SOVEREIGNTY	
Year	Support	Contestation	Support	Contestation
1990	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
1992	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
1994	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
1996	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
1998	General Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	Neutral Contestation
2000	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Strong Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2002	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	Neutral Contestation
2004	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2006	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	G7/OECD Support, Weak Divergence	No Contestation
2008	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
2010	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	No Contestation
2012	General Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	Neutral Contestation
2014	General Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
2016	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	No Contestation
2018	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2020	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2022	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation

Figure 11 - Support and contestation in relation to the ordering principles.

Among the sample of speeches analysed in this study, there are specific instances of isolated expressions of contestation against the concept of rules-based international relations, sovereignty, and the United Nations, as reflected by the recurring ‘neutral contestation’ indicator which means that less than five actors took that position in a single debate. In truth these numbers are quite low. Criticism against the concept of rules is a product of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov criticising⁴ “a single hegemon that forces everyone else to live by its infamous rules”, and oddly enough the then US President Donald Trump on behalf the same alleged hegemon⁵ criticised “an unelected, unaccountable global bureaucracy”. In the case of the former, this represents a rhetorical stick with which to beat the West, and in the case of the latter, a product of Trump’s ‘America First’ policies driven by a sentiment that global governance short-changed the US. In each case, they are lone voices which do not receive any backing from the rest of the G20 membership.

⁴ A/77/PV.12, p.44 (2022)

⁵ A/73/PV.6, p.17 (2018)

In the context of sovereignty, the majority of positions contesting this emerge in the 1990s and early 2000s, amidst the struggle to produce coherent policies regarding civil wars, and the realisation that a strictly Westphalian understanding of this principle prioritised national security at the cost of human security. I elaborate on these concerns in the second half of the chapter. Criticism regarding the UN is primarily a product of the lack of representation within the UN Security Council, which is seen as lacking legitimacy and does not attack the role and scope of the UN. Though not infrequent, this criticism does not detract from the wider support for the UN which is by far the most supported principle but it does reflect the special attention given to this particular body.

Aspirational Principles

The intensity of support on the aspirational dimension is slightly less emphatic when compared to the ordering principles. The most supported aspirational principle is the promotion of international development where again at least fifteen G20 members support this in all sessions sampled except one. The promotion of international peace and security follows closely with frequent ‘strong’ levels of support, with at least half of the G20 membership supporting the pursuit of this common objective in each debate. The tables below illustrate the consistent support for these two core aspirational principles, which, on the basis of the recurring importance assigned to them, could be said to have somewhat of a higher standing than the other aspirational principles as overarching priorities.

Year	DEVELOPMENT		PEACE & SECURITY	
	Support	Contestation	Support	Contestation
1990	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
1992	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
1994	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation
1996	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
1998	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
2000	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2002	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
2004	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
2006	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
2008	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2010	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2012	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2014	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2016	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation
2018	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2020	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
2022	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation

Figure 12 - Support and contestation in relation to the aspirational principles pertaining to the promotion of development and the promotion of international peace and security.

The rest of the aspirational principles typically garner ‘dispersed’ and ‘general’ support, as illustrated herewith. The minimum threshold is met on an almost constant basis across the board, even for

principles which may be considered part of a more liberal agenda, such as the promotion of human rights, the promotion of democracy, the promotion of economic liberalism, and the promotion of sustainable development. That being said, the less pronounced degree of support for such principles lends credence to the value of differentiating between the minimalist and maximalist interpretations of the post-Cold War order.

COUNTER-TERRORISM			NON-PROLIFERATION	
Year	Support	Contestation	Support	Contestation
1990	Neutral Support	No Contestation	General Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
1992	Neutral Support	No Contestation	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation
1994	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
1996	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation
1998	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2000	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
2002	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2004	Full Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2006	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2008	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
2010	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
2012	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2014	Strong Support, Convergence	No Contestation	G7/OECD Support, Weak Divergence	No Contestation
2016	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2018	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2020	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
2022	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation

Figure 13 - Support and contestation in relation to the aspirational principles pertaining to the promotion of counter-terrorism and non-proliferation

ENVIRONMENT			ECONOMIC LIBERALISM	
Year	Support	Contestation	Support	Contestation
1990	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
1992	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
1994	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation
1996	General Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
1998	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2000	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2002	General Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	No Contestation
2004	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	Neutral Contestation
2006	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	Neutral Contestation
2008	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2010	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2012	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	Neutral Contestation
2014	General Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	Neutral Contestation
2016	Strong Support, Extreme Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2018	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2020	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2022	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Neutral Support	Neutral Contestation

Figure 14 - Support and contestation in relation to the aspirational principles pertaining to the promotion of environmental awareness and economic liberalism.

Year	DEMOCRACY		HUMAN RIGHTS	
	Support	Contestation	Support	Contestation
1990	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	No Contestation
1992	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	Neutral Contestation
1994	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
1996	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
1998	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Strong Support, Strong Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2000	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2002	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2004	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
2006	Neutral Support	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	Neutral Contestation
2008	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2010	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2012	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2014	Dispersed Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	No Contestation
2016	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2018	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2020	Dispersed Support, Convergence	No Contestation	General Support, Convergence	No Contestation
2022	Dispersed Support, Weak Convergence	Neutral Contestation (P2)	General Support, Convergence	Neutral Contestation

Figure 15 - Support and contestation in relation to the aspirational principles pertaining to the promotion of development and the promotion of political liberalism - democracy and human rights.

On this note, I believe it is appropriate to engage with the data related to the maximalist principles and other principles which generate particular attention in research on contemporary order head-on, to pre-empt concerns that such buy-in may be a product of overwhelming support from the established Western actors, masking a lack of support by other emerging powers. In this regard, my findings also reflect nuanced positions when looking at more strategic, political groupings.

The illustration below represents an attempt to amplify the West and the Rest division. I do this by looking at more politically charged blocs, at the cost of removing certain members of the G20 from the equation for a moment. In this regard I scrutinise the positions promoted by the members of (i) the G7 and (ii) NATO as opposed to (iii) BRICS, (iv) the G77+China and (v) the Non-Aligned Movement, in order to gauge possible variation in intensity of support for different and potentially more ‘controversial’ principles. In my view, the frequency of promoted positions confirms that there is no particular divergence in terms of the principles of contemporary order even amongst such groups, but rather different priorities.

	G7+EU	NATO	BRICS	G77+CHINA	NAM	Totals
RULES	166	144	75	106	111	602
SOVEREIGNTY	46	51	57	82	67	303
DEMOCRACY	125	115	55	85	109	489
HUMAN RIGHTS	179	147	62	92	108	588
DEVELOPMENT	239	197	163	217	209	1025
THE ENVIRONMENT	106	88	62	87	95	438
ECONOMIC LIBERALISM	47	41	40	56	48	232
Totals	908	783	514	725	747	3677

	G7+EU	NATO	BRICS	G77+CHINA	NAM
TOTAL SPEECHES	131	119	83	115	115
TOTAL CODED POSITIONS	2435	2191	1499	1939	1884

Figure 16 - Positions promoted by the G7+EU, NATO, BRICS, G77+CHINA and the Non-Aligned Movement regarding more 'controversial' principles.

Whilst the principles of rules and sovereignty are not in and of themselves controversial, they have been put in the spotlight lately with accusations of double-standards on all sides – the Western powers who defend a rules-based order when it suits them, and others such as China who protect the sanctity of sovereignty and non-interference but who are conspicuously silent on Ukraine’s sovereignty. Admittedly, there is a slightly greater emphasis on the concept of rules by Western governments, while on the other hand sovereignty is typically promoted much more intensely by countries associated with the emerging non-Western powers – but this is far from a great divergence.

Despite less speeches in total on behalf of the G77+China, they promote the principle of sovereignty and non-interference almost twice as much as the G7+the EU; and the BRICS also promotes the principle more despite having almost fifty less speeches coded. This does not mean that the G7 does not support the principle of sovereignty. It means the members of the G7 collectively have given less priority to the principle over the past thirty years, instead giving more priority to other principles. After all, it is not as if there are no expressions of support or more expressions of contestation than support – it is simply a degree of support that is less intense than a different political bloc with different interests. Likewise, for the G77+China and the BRICS in relation to the concept of rules-based interstate relations.

Discussions regarding international development would appear to be quite heated during the UNGA Debates. Advanced economies are often pilloried by the Global South for holding back their development, abusing of their privileged roles, having exploited them and the world’s resources to develop, and then introducing regulations to stifle the development of the rest of the international community. However, there appears to be no north-south or west-rest divide even if we look at these more extreme blocs. The same can be said in terms of the promotion of pro-environment ‘sustainable development’ priorities. To round off this theme, the promotion of economic liberalism is indeed a more frequent feature of discourse on the side of the G77+China than it is on behalf of the G7+EU. Without reading too much into it, I believe this sustains the argument often put forward⁶ that when it comes to the benefits of the post-Cold War order, this has enabled the rise of a new group of powers, especially in terms of economic prosperity. It would not be in their interest to challenge an order which is benefiting them.

Turning to political liberalism, there is slightly more to say than initially meets the eye, and my findings are somewhat more insightful if we delve into a little more granular detail on this particular theme. Firstly, it is of note that the Non-Aligned Movement promotes democracy just as much as NATO members, whereas it is the G77+China, as well as the BRICS which lag behind. It should be underscored

⁶ Ikenberry is arguably at the forefront of this view, coining the summary that the LIO is easy to join and hard to overturn, precisely because of thi

here that even Western governments promote democracy with less intensity. This is also contrary to some of the prominent assessments put forward on the basis of a maximalist interpretation. Perhaps this could be because democracy is a principle which it is not as enshrined as human rights, which has a strong body of international law and international institutions to back this up. At the same time, in much the same way as the G77+China promotes sovereignty almost twice as much as the G7+the EU, the opposite can be said in terms of the promotion of human rights.

Divergence & Contestation: Outliers

So far, I have generally avoided stating that *N* actors took a certain position, or that ‘Country X’ promoted a certain position a certain number of times, because the data gathered represents an approximation of a country’s broader policy, and to use the frequencies in such a manner could be misleading. With that said, I believe it would be inappropriate not to bring attention to data where the frequency with which a certain position is taken (or not taken) is potentially indicative of a pattern which could be an outlier. What I mean here is that if a country (or group of countries) says something much more or much less than any of the others then this is valuable data because it is an anomaly, it is unusual compared to the positions taken by the rest of the G20, and perhaps we may make some educated inferences from this. Thus, the following tabulations reproduce all the frequencies of support on behalf of each member of the G20 based on the speeches sampled for this project, in order to make a few precise points.

	RULES	MULTILATERALISM	SOVEREIGNTY	THE UN	Totals
ARGENTINA	19	28	11	19	77
AUSTRALIA	22	24	6	41	93
BRAZIL	17	29	9	31	86
CANADA	20	25	4	44	93
CHINA	23	47	29	38	137
EU	24	30	10	57	121
FRANCE	29	28	12	41	110
GERMANY	28	38	4	43	113
INDIA	4	21	7	40	72
INDONESIA	8	29	13	42	92
ITALY	15	22	6	46	89
JAPAN	14	23	1	56	94
KOREA (REP. OF)	10	21	3	48	82
MEXICO	28	33	14	44	119
RUSSIA	24	28	9	49	110
SAUDI ARABIA	28	22	10	32	92
SOUTH AFRICA	7	19	3	33	62
TURKIYE	12	19	10	32	73
UK	17	20	2	37	76
USA	23	28	13	41	105
Totals	372	534	176	814	1896

Figure 17 - Expressions of support for each of the ordering principles, in alphabetical order. Numbers in bold indicate above average frequencies of support.

	NON- PROLIFERATION	COUNTER- TERRORISM	PEACE & SECURITY	DEMOCRACY	HUMAN RIGHTS	DEVELOPMENT	THE ENVIRONMENT	ECONOMIC LIBERALISM	Totals
ARGENTINA	11	25	20	20	26	21	16	11	150
AUSTRALIA	29	14	12	3	20	24	15	9	126
BRAZIL	16	5	19	25	23	33	15	19	155
CANADA	21	6	13	13	28	29	12	2	124
CHINA	23	7	34	2	5	50	12	13	146
EU	22	15	21	17	27	32	14	6	154
FRANCE	20	23	22	7	23	34	18	4	151
GERMANY	29	8	27	12	28	34	19	5	162
INDIA	18	43	11	11	6	28	16	0	133
INDONESIA	13	7	19	18	9	30	11	4	111
ITALY	10	10	16	9	18	32	9	4	108
JAPAN	36	12	32	9	20	37	15	7	168
KOREA (REP. OF)	29	12	12	8	25	25	18	4	133
MEXICO	25	10	15	26	21	42	20	5	164
RUSSIA	25	22	20	8	9	16	7	5	112
SAUDI ARABIA	15	25	13	0	4	19	5	6	87
SOUTH AFRICA	9	5	17	9	19	36	12	3	110
TURKIYE	11	30	18	10	8	16	7	4	104
UK	10	16	17	16	13	24	13	9	118
USA	23	35	28	48	29	28	10	13	214
Totals	395	330	386	271	361	590	264	133	2730

Figure 18 - Expressions of support for each of the aspirational principles, in alphabetical order. Numbers in bold indicate above average frequencies of support.

Firstly, regarding the aspirational principles under the heading of political liberalism. China expresses support a combined seven times (twice for democracy, five for human rights). Only Saudi Arabia is less vocal. In the interests of fairness, it should be noted that Australia only supports democracy clearly three times in the coded speeches, albeit offset by strong support for human rights. Of the twelve expressions of contestation against human rights coded in my analysis, more than half are by China (in 1992 twice, 1994 twice, 2000 twice, 2006, 2022) often framed in terms of accusations and presenting the promotion of human rights as pretext to interfere in internal affairs, or flat-out interference. This is the only instance where contestation on behalf of any of the G20 members is almost equal to the degree of support. In this scenario, if one accords China a certain weight as a superpower in and of itself, capable of challenging the liberal established powers, then this could be seen as a divergence of particular note – and perhaps a lack of buy-in.

However, looking at the actors who are most vocal in their support for the principles under the heading of political liberalism, such divergence would appear to be limited to human rights, and only to China. Other actors who are not typically considered to be part of the established Western group take quite a different stance. Unsurprisingly the US is at the forefront, outlining support for the promotion of democracy 48 times, much more than any other actor, and a further 29 expressions of support for human rights. Yet interestingly enough, the second most vocal cohort of supporters for the principles associated with political liberalism are the South American contingent within the G20 – Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina (a combined 48, 47, 46 respectively). Whilst I treat Mexico as a member of the West (as outlined in the methodology section, on the basis of OECD membership) this suggests that support for democracy and human rights cannot be confined to a West vs Rest debate.

With this in mind, to address additional concerns that the study may be glossing over potential areas of divergence I wish to highlight the two such instances which suggest that at times, due to the context of a particular event relevant to a particular principle divergent opinions may arise, with some taking a stand and others remaining silent. There are two such cases identified. In 2006 the G7 and OECD

countries emphasise the importance of respecting the principle of sovereignty in the context of the situation in Lebanon, whereas the Rest demonstrates less interest. The same situation develops in 2014, where the G7 and OECD members place particular emphasis on non-proliferation amidst missile tests by North Korea, a fact-finding mission by the OPCW which established the use of chemical weapons in Syria by the Syrian Government, as well as heightened concerns regarding Iran's nuclear project.

I believe that in the bigger picture these two cases of divergence, which are not even cases where one side supports and one side contests, do not detract from the claim of total buy-in. These episodes demonstrate that whilst states agree on the overarching principles of order, due to specific circumstances and interests they may be less inclined to openly support them at times – and it is well known that events in the Middle East are particularly contentious.

In view of the findings presented so far relevant to the buy-in criterion of functionality, I would conclude that it is a bold claim to argue that contemporary international order lacks buy-in or legitimacy, or that there is any concerted attempt to challenge it or to put forward a vision of an alternative order. I believe that such arguments rightly highlight a palpable degree of concern within international society but they mischaracterise the nature of this concern. Certainly, support for the various principles identified in this study varies, and some principles gain more support from certain actors than others, but, ultimately, they all generate a healthy degree of buy-in, often with more than half the members of the G20 representing both the established and emerging powers expressing support.

5.2: Responsiveness

Whereas my findings do not support the prevalent claim that contemporary global order is being challenged due to a perceived lack of legitimacy, ultimately my results lend more credibility to those who argue that the contemporary powers are *dissatisfied* with contemporary order. Recalling the literature review, studies refer to the sentiment within Western societies that they have been losers of globalisation, together with an apparent abandonment of Western ideals. These are seen as potential drivers of a shift in attitudes within the West towards global order. My findings support this general sense of disillusion but point more in the direction of a common global disillusionment with the lack of results being generated and perceived lack of effectiveness of order. In this vein, the positions taken by the members of the G20 over the past decades consistently indicate a negative assessment in terms of the responsiveness of the principles of contemporary order. This is a prevalent sentiment across the ordering principles, as well as the two primary aspirational principles.

It should be highlighted that governments comment on the responsiveness of order far less frequently than they comment on the legitimacy of order. In this regard, given that there are less coded positions to work with in terms of this criterion I do not delve into the same level of granular data as I do in the case of the buy-in criterion. Due to this lower degree of commentary, the sum of positions taken per session is typically less intense, simply because speakers comment less. Taking this into account, notwithstanding the ‘strong’ and ‘full’ levels of support for the principles of order, I believe that it is still significant that the results point towards a fairly consistent ‘dispersed’ intensity of negative assessments – consistent rumblings of discontent. Moreover, my findings in this section are more mixed in terms of positive and negative assessments, and less vividly one-sided than those regarding legitimacy, though they are nonetheless clearly pointing in a net negative direction.

Furthermore, it is of note that in their discourse political leaders explicitly highlight that they have certain expectations, whether it is about the effectiveness of the UN, or making progress in the promotion of international development, they make it amply clear that they are expecting some sort of results. So to set the scene in terms of my findings regarding a lack of responsiveness, the extracts below reflect specific statements related to different ordering and aspirational principles and different subjects, showing that governments vocalise their expectations clearly.

Country	Year	Statement	Topic
Türkiye	1996	The new expectations and hopes that the end of the cold-war era instilled in us all have, unfortunately, been short-lived. (p.4)	General
Canada	2010	That widespread consensus continues to convince the idealist in all of us that so much more is possible in this world of ours. At the same time, it makes the gap between aspiration and achievement so disappointing. (p.44)	General
India	1998	The decade of the 1990s has fallen far short of expectations. Nowhere is this more apparent than on the global economic scene (p.19)	Development
Japan	2006	We have high expectations for the newly created Human Rights Council and look to it to open a new page in the promotion of respect for human rights. (p.33)	Human Rights
Australia	2018	Member States have the honour of preserving and advancing international rules and order so as to deliver on the expectations of our people for a just, fair and secure world. (p.37)	Rules-Based Order
USA	2016	I understand that the gaps between rich and poor are not new, but just as the child in a slum today can see the skyscraper nearby, technology now allows any person with a smartphone to see how the most privileged among us live [...] Expectations rise then — faster than Governments can deliver. (p.14)	Development
South Africa	2018	The millions across our globe who stand expectant at the gates of hope look to this Organization to bring them peace, to bring them life, to bring them a life worth living. (p.50-51)	The UN
ROK	2008	Today, the expectations placed upon the United Nations by the international community are higher than ever. (p.34)	The UN
Russia	2010	To live up to expectations, the United Nations must continuously renew itself. (p.32)	The UN
The UK	1998	The world has high expectations of the United Nations as the guardian of global peace and security. (p.29)	The UN, Peace and Security
China	1990	In the critical and complex situation in which the world finds itself, the United Nations has before it an even greater responsibility [...] and should play a more important role, so that it will not let down the high expectations of the people of the world. (p.60)	The UN
Indonesia	1996	Yet, while these developments have revived expectations of a more peaceful and secure world, the acute reality is that our planet is still far from being a peaceful place. (p.9)	Peace and Security

Figure 19 - References to 'expectations'.

Ordering Principles

Beginning with the ordering principles, it is unsurprising to see that the United Nations and the principle of multilateralism are the most talked about. Both generate a credible degree of positive feedback. Governments clearly value the work of the United Nations and feel that to some degree the role that they have entrusted to the institution is being fulfilled, while recognising the benefits of the organisation and multilateralism at large. Certainly it would be immensely concerning if political leaders delivering their national speeches at the UNGA General Debate refrained from saying anything good about these principles, given the venue and the scope of the event which is in some ways a celebration of multilateralism.

True to this, in the case of multilateralism, there are more sessions where there are more positive assessments than negative assessments, however, these trail off. From 2014 onwards ‘dispersed’ negative assessments become more frequent than the positive ones. In contrast the members of the G20 take negative positions regarding the United Nations’ responsiveness on an almost constant basis. Furthermore, more than ten members of the G20 delivered negative assessments in almost half the sessions. Only in 2002 (post-9/11) were there more positive assessments than negative. Again, the positive assessments decline markedly from the 2000s onwards. The tables below illustrate these findings.

Year	THE UNITED NATIONS		MULTILATERALISM	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
1990	Strong Positive, Strong Convergence	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	General Positive, Convergence	Neutral Negative
1992	Dispersed Positive, Convergence	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
1994	Dispersed Positive, Convergence	General Negative, Strong Convergence	Dispersed Positive, Convergence	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
1996	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	General Negative, Strong Convergence	Dispersed Positive, Convergence	No Negatives
1998	G7/OECD Positive, Divergence	General Negative, Convergence	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2000	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	General Negative, Strong Convergence	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Neutral Negative
2002	Dispersed Positive, Convergence	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	No Negatives
2004	G7/OECD Positive, Strong Divergence	General Negative, Convergence	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Neutral Negative
2006	Neutral Positive	General Negative, Convergence	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2008	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2010	Neutral Positive	General Negative, Strong Convergence	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2012	Neutral Positive	General Negative, Strong Convergence	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2014	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2016	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2018	G7/OECD Positive, Weak Divergence	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Neutral Negative
2020	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	G7/OECD Positive, Divergence	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2022	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Strong Negative, Convergence	G7/OECD Positive, Strong Divergence	Dispersed Negative, Convergence

Figure 20 – Positive and negative assessments in terms of the perceived responsiveness of the ordering principles pertaining to the role of the United Nations and the principle of multilateralism.

The ordering principles of rules-based international relations and the principle of sovereignty both generate less engagement than the other two. The responsiveness of the principle of rules is assessed positively once in 1996 with the 50th anniversary of the ICJ and the extension of the NPT, and Western actors also share a positive outlook in 1998, celebrating the establishment of the ICC. However,

following a decade of relative quietness on the topic, from 2012 onwards four out of six sessions sampled indicate a negative outlook regarding the responsiveness of this principle. Less positions are taken in terms of the performance of sovereignty, reflecting the same relative silence in terms of buy-in.

Year	RULES		SOVEREIGNTY	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
1990	Neutral Positive	General Negative, Strong Convergence	No Positives	Neutral Negative
1992	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	No Negatives
1994	Neutral Positive	No Negatives	No Positives	Neutral Negative
1996	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
1998	G7/OECD Positive, Divergence	No Negatives	No Positives	No Negatives
2000	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2002	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	No Negatives
2004	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2006	No Positives	No Negatives	No Positives	No Negatives
2008	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	No Negatives
2010	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2012	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2014	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2016	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2018	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2020	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	No Positives	No Negatives
2022	Neutral Positive	General Negative, Weak Convergence	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence

Figure 21 - Positive and negative assessments in terms of the perceived responsiveness of the ordering principles pertaining to rules-based interstate relations and the principle of sovereignty.

I would venture to remark here that the responsiveness of sovereignty is perhaps more easily identifiable than other principles – the very existence of sovereign states is an indicator that by and large the principle is being respected consistently, even if there are glaring exceptions, and thus the principle is evidently responding to their needs. The threshold is then crossed in 2022 precisely because of such a violent exception which triggered widespread worry that for the first time since 1990 a state which was sovereign until then risked erasure from the map, with Russia’s renewed invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, all the ordering principles have a negative assessment in 2022, which is perhaps indicative of a worsening of the already generally negative trend.

Aspirational Principles

Shifting to the aspirational principles, both the promotion of peace and security, as well as the promotion of international development generate recurrently negative assessments regarding their responsiveness, with no instances where the threshold is crossed for positive assessments as per the below tables. These results indicate that progress in terms of these two primary aspirational principles remains elusive, with the consistent sentiment that the way affairs are being conducted currently is not to the satisfaction of the major powers, and the way that these aspirations are being pursued is not meeting their needs or

interests. The way theory is being translated into practice is not what they want. Actors feel like these goals are not being achieved.

Year	DEVELOPMENT		PEACE & SECURITY	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
1990	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	Neutral Positive	General Negative, Convergence
1992	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
1994	Neutral Positive	BRICS/G77 Negative, Weak Divergence	No Positives	Neutral Negative
1996	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Convergence
1998	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Convergence
2000	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Convergence
2002	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2004	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	No Positives	BRICS/G77/OECD Negative, Weak Convergence
2006	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Convergence
2008	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2010	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2012	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	No Positives	General Negative, Strong Convergence
2014	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	General Negative, Strong Convergence
2016	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	Neutral Positive	General Negative, Strong Convergence
2018	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2020	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2022	Neutral Positive	General Negative, Convergence	No Positives	General Negative, Weak Convergence

Figure 22 - Positive and negative assessments in terms of the perceived responsiveness of the aspirational principles pertaining to the promotion of international development, and the promotion of international peace and security.

Contrasting the frequency of comments regarding the rest of the aspirational principles it would appear that the more actors give priority to certain principles, the higher their expectations are, and the more likely they are to express dissatisfaction with a lack of results, or with their needs, interests, or expectations not being met in that particular field. The data indicates initially ‘dispersed’ negative assessments in relation to peace and security, however again post-2012 these assessments intensify towards ‘general’ assessments, with ten members of the G20 or more regularly sharing such a negative assessment.

Looking at the wider context, the interplay between real world events and attitudes regarding aspirational principles is noticeable. A case in point, in 2004 the members of the G20 forming part of the BRICS, G77 and OECD expressed negative assessments regarding how the promotion of international peace and security was being implemented – backlash following the invasion of Iraq. The way that the US and its allies intervened, pursuing their own agenda of international security did not respond to the needs of the other members. Meanwhile, due to the financial crisis a few years later, there is a slight dip in attention, with a negligible degree of comments regarding the responsiveness of this principle in 2008 and 2010 contrasted with a rise in negative assessments regarding Economic Liberalism in these sessions. This shows how attention shifts and follows events, a reflection of the key issues, challenges, controversies, and talking points at the time.

Other aspirational principles generate far less noise. It is notable that the promotion of counter-terrorism generates one positive assessment post-9/11 and never crosses the threshold for negative assessments. This is perhaps a reflection of the great attention to this scourge since 2001, and suggests that there is

far more common ground in terms of this principle compared to others, which is reflected in the lack of negative perceptions regarding the implementation of this principle. Even amidst the panic triggered by the rise of ISIS and the expressions of support for the principle, the threshold of five negative comments is not crossed. Non-Proliferation receives mainly dispersed negative marks on sporadic occasions.

Year	COUNTER-TERRORISM		NON-PROLIFERATION	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
1990	No Positives	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
1992	No Positives	No Negatives	No Positives	Neutral Negative
1994	No Positives	No Negatives	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Neutral Negative
1996	No Positives	No Negatives	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	General Negative, Strong Convergence
1998	No Positives	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2000	No Positives	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2002	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2004	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2006	No Positives	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2008	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2010	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2012	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2014	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	No Negatives
2016	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2018	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2020	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2022	Neutral Positive	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	G7/OECD Negative, Weak Divergence

Figure 23 - Positive and negative assessments in terms of the perceived responsiveness of the aspirational principles pertaining to counter-terrorism, and non-proliferation.

Generally, negative assessments regarding the promotion of international development are not quite reflected in terms of the environment, and economic liberalism is only slightly more active. In the latter case there is a concentration of negative assessments from 2008 to 2012. In 2012 divergence appears too, with negative assessments coming from the emerging powers, which again can likely be attributed to the hangover of the financial crisis. Democracy and human rights are almost ignored with generally neutral comments. Negative assessments regarding human rights cross the threshold once in 2018, which is quite surprising considering the dire situation globally. The same can be said for democracy, however this is somewhat more understandable given that this has far less global reach than human rights, and as already mentioned, it does not have the same structural, legal backing as human rights.

Year	ENVIRONMENT		ECONOMIC LIBERALISM	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
1990	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
1992	No Positives	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
1994	No Positives	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
1996	No Positives	Neutral Negative	Dispersed Positive, Weak Convergence	Neutral Negative
1998	No Positives	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Convergence
2000	No Positives	No Negatives	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2002	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2004	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2006	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2008	No Positives	No Negatives	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2010	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2012	No Positives	No Negatives	No Positives	BRICS/G77 Negative, Divergence
2014	No Positives	No Negatives	No Positives	No Negatives
2016	No Positives	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2018	No Positives	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2020	No Positives	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2022	No Positives	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative

Figure 24 - Positive and negative assessments in terms of the perceived responsiveness of the aspirational principles pertaining to the environment, and economic liberalism.

Year	DEMOCRACY		HUMAN RIGHTS	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
1990	No Positives	General Negative, Convergence	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
1992	No Positives	No Negatives	No Positives	Neutral Negative
1994	No Positives	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
1996	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
1998	Neutral Positive	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2000	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative
2002	Neutral Positive	No Negatives	No Positives	No Negatives
2004	Neutral Positive	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	No Negatives
2006	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Convergence	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2008	Neutral Positive	No Negatives	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2010	No Positives	No Negatives	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2012	Neutral Positive	No Negatives	Neutral Positive	No Negatives
2014	No Positives	Neutral Negative	No Positives	Neutral Negative
2016	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	No Negatives
2018	No Positives	No Negatives	No Positives	Dispersed Negative, Weak Convergence
2020	Neutral Positive	Neutral Negative	No Positives	No Negatives
2022	Neutral Positive	No Negatives	No Positives	Neutral Negative

Figure 25 - Positive and negative assessments in terms of the perceived responsiveness of the aspirational principles related to political liberalism.

Interestingly, there are also far more instances of divergence between the West and the Rest when commenting on the responsiveness of the ordering principles compared to their legitimacy, despite my analysis turning up less coded positions regarding this criterion. In the six instances of such divergence, it is the Western members who convey positive assessments, without a similar perspective from the Rest. This divergence is particularly emphatic in 1998 with two such episodes in terms of rules-based international relations and regarding the UN, whilst three more instances clump up more recently in 2018 in the case of the UN, and 2020 and 2022 in the case of multilateralism.

Episodes of divergence also crop up in terms of negative assessments – notably in terms of peace and security, where the emerging powers convey dissatisfaction in 2004 in response to the US invasion of Iraq. Conversely, divergence also appears in 2022 in relation to non-proliferation, with Western actors

underscoring concern in view of Russia's occupation of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine. Under the development umbrella, members of the emerging powers highlight negative assessments in 1994, and more specifically in terms of economic liberalism in 2012. With all this said, these cases do not overshadow the net result that there is for the most part consistent convergence on the negative side.

The key take-away in terms of my findings regarding the responsiveness of contemporary order is that the members of the G20 are dissatisfied. A sentiment of dissatisfaction is quite prevalent particularly in terms of the ordering principles, as well as the ballpark goals of international peace and security, and international development. Moreover, this dissatisfaction did not suddenly appear, it is not as if things suddenly became worse. Rather the negative positions are consistent over the past decades, and governments generally converge upon these negative appraisals. The question is what is driving these negative assessments – a topic I address in later chapters.

5.3: Conclusions

Answering the overarching research question, “is contemporary global order dysfunctional?”, the response is that yes, contemporary global order is partially dysfunctional. The threshold for a functional order is not met as the majority of assessments regarding the responsiveness of the principles of order are negative. To back up this claim, in this chapter I presented frequency-based data representing the positions taken by governments in relation to each of the principles introduced in the previous chapter, detailing the intensity of buy-in and positive or negative perceptions of responsiveness on behalf of the members of the G20 based on a sample of their speeches at the UN General Assembly between 1990 and 2022. In my view, the results are fairly clear.

The responses indicate resounding support with no instances of significant contestation, at least on paper. This is contrasted with overwhelmingly negative assessments regarding the responsiveness of these principles. Focusing on the responsiveness criterion, in terms of the ordering principles, a significant portion of G20 members rate the responsiveness of the United Nations negatively on an almost constant basis (with 2002 being the exception). Negative assessments regarding rules-based international relations and multilateralism are initially inconsistent, but these become the norm from 2014 onwards. The achievement of the two main overarching aspirational principles – the promotion of international peace and security as well as international development – remains consistently elusive thus also leading to negative assessments on behalf of these governments. The net result is that perceptions of responsiveness are resoundingly negative.

Concluding this initial presentation of evidence, I recognise that to say contemporary order is dysfunctional in some way is quite a bold claim. I also recognise that the evidence I have provided so far could be criticised as being somewhat dependent upon my interpretation of discourse. After all, the data that I have presented so far reflects hundreds of positions identified by me, based on principles which I myself have defined, and according to criteria to assess the functionality of order set by myself, even if this is all rooted in previous research. In short, the findings presented so far depend upon my interpretation of the principles of order, my interpretation of specific positions regarding these principles, and my own interpretation of the functionality of order.

Whilst the coding scheme addresses such concerns, I would also agree that the evidence presented so far does not adequately convey the real worries expressed by states regarding a dysfunctional order. A key inspiration for this project was to focus more on the perspectives of key actors themselves, and yet, by compressing their speech and rhetoric into numbers I have nonetheless stifled their voice, transforming the rich content of political and strategic discourse into frequencies which are, in the end, estimations of positions. As such, the next chapter provides the second block of data supporting my claim, outlining how governments themselves put forward commentary which supports the assessment that contemporary order is at least partially dysfunctional.

Chapter 6: Interregnum, From Transition to Crisis

Whilst the data presented in the previous chapter is fundamental to my case that contemporary order is dysfunctional on the basis of a perceived lack of responsiveness, the findings are open to the critique that they are perhaps removed from real world events. The numbers are extracted from political discourse – from a carefully crafted strategic narrative – but extracting these frequencies comes at the cost of losing the content of such political discourse – the message being communicated by political leaders when they speak, their visions and values, their thoughts and assessments; what they say they stand for. With this in mind, the body of evidence presented in this chapter sustains the data put forward previously in terms of content, with the added value of context, which is key for understanding not only what drives these negative assessments but also how the post-Cold War order has evolved. In this chapter I therefore provide further evidence sustaining the claim that contemporary order is partially dysfunctional, outlining positions where governments assess international politics to be, in general terms¹, in a situation of transition, or of crisis.

Assessing the dysfunctionality of contemporary order requires an analysis which covers an appropriate timeframe. It would not be an accurate analysis of affairs to simply pick a moment in time and scrutinise that. Likewise, we cannot understand the evolution from the New World Order in 1990 to whatever we have today, without looking at what happened in between. In this chapter I therefore recreate a generational conversation amongst the established and emerging powers who are members of the G20. I trace the evolution of general assessments regarding the state of international politics from a general perception of an order in transition, to concerns of an order in crisis citing specific discourse from the sample of speeches studied to sustain this point.

Perhaps for those who have lived through the events of the 1990s through to the present-day and who have their own first-hand experiences of these events this may be a somewhat descriptive analysis. Yet the specific positions outlined by governments throughout the years and the way these positions evolved is remarkably eye-opening. They show that the boundaries and functionality of global order are a topic of continuous political debate amongst the main actors within international politics. Considering how understudied these speeches are in relation to this subject matter, this may also be the first attempt to

¹ Whereas the codebook defines the basis upon which such positions were taken into account, I refer to assessments outlined by governments in ‘general terms’ because it would be unduly restrictive and unrealistic to expect governments to specify assessments purely in terms of ‘global order’ or ‘international order’. Whilst they do on occasion refer to this topic explicitly, it is more usual to have comments on global affairs and international politics at large – but these are just as instructive regarding the state of order.

produce a systematic analysis based on first-hand assessments by political leaders on the state of global order at this scale.

The evidence I put forward reflects a linear, chronological overview of the evolution of the post-Cold War order, based on assessments put forward by the governments of the G20 members. They initially reflect optimism that despite setbacks, the vision of a new era of international relations would somehow emerge. Even so, as crisis after crisis looms. Commentary begins to reflect a pessimistic tone. While discourse regarding an extended phase of transition persists, in parallel there is an alarming increase of concerns that global order is in a state of crisis. The continuity of such uneasy assessments suggests that the post-Cold War manifestation of the Liberal International Order was never fully consolidated. It suggests that at least since 1990, global order has been stuck in what has been termed an “interregnum”. While states have coalesced around arrangements intended to cultivate a new way of doing international politics, they have struggled to impose these arrangements upon the system.

Bridging the frequency-based evidence, with specific quote-based evidence, the following figures track the number of statements within the analysed speeches indicating references to a state of transition or a state of crisis. What we see in the window from 2008 to 2012 onwards is a sense almost as if governments did not quite know what to make of the situation. In 2014, a peak in references to a crisis is also coded. References to both descriptions spike over the next couple of debates. Some see a transition, and some see a crisis – but what is clear is that it was not business as usual. The trajectory of order moves from attempted consolidation to deterioration. Rather than getting more entrenched and more consolidated, the opposite happens, it gets weaker – from chasing a dream of a new order, to crisis control.

Putting academic jargon to the side for a moment, it is fair to argue that if several important countries are expressing concern about international politics being in a state of crisis, persistent transition, or even “disorder” then this would suggest there is certainly a basis to claim that something is seriously wrong, that global affairs are not moving in the right direction, that global order is in some way dysfunctional. Underlining this point, in 2022 – the last session of speeches incorporated in this study - a full 50% of G20 members outline assessments that international politics is in a state of crisis, in sync with the high rate of negative assessments referred to earlier. Clearly, governments are strongly concerned, and these concerns conveyed by the members of the G20 are remarkably synchronised with the claim that contemporary order is dysfunctional. I conclude this chapter with key take-aways in terms of possible drivers of this lack of responsiveness and dysfunctionality.

Year	Crisis	Transition	Totals	Crisis	Transition
1990	0	14	14		ARG, AUS, BR, CHIN, FR, DE, INDO, IT/EU, JAP, MEX, RF, KSA, UK, US
1992	0	12	12		CAN, CHIN, DE, INDO, IT, ROK, MEX, RF, KSA, TUR, UK/EU, US
1994	0	9	9		ARG, BR, CHIN, INDIA, INDO, ROK, RF, UK, US
1996	0	7	7		AUS, CHIN, INDO, IT, RF, KSA, US
1998	2	7	9	FR, IT	CHIN, EU, DE, INDIA, IT, JAP, TUR
2000	0	3	3		ARG, DE, TUR
2002	0	1	1		MEX
2004	1	3	4	RF	CHIN, DE, RF
2006	3	0	3	BR, INDIA, SAF	
2008	4	3	7	BR, FR, DE, IT	BR, DE, UK
2010	1	2	3	FR	BR, UK
2012	3	6	9	BR, INDO, TUR	ARG, CAN, CHIN, DE, INDO, RF
2014	7	1	8	EU, FR, DE, IT, JAP, TUR, US	US
2016	5	4	9	BR, EU, ROK, TUR, US	ARG, IT, RF, US
2018	5	3	8	BR, FR, DE, RF, UK	AUS, FR, RF
2020	4	2	6	CAN, FR, SAF, UK	FR, ROK
2022	10	7	17	AUS, CAN, CHIN, FR, DE, INDO, IT, JAP, RF, ROK	CHIN, EU, DE, JAP, RF, SAF, UK
Totals	45	84	129		

Figure 26 - References to transition and crisis by G20 member.

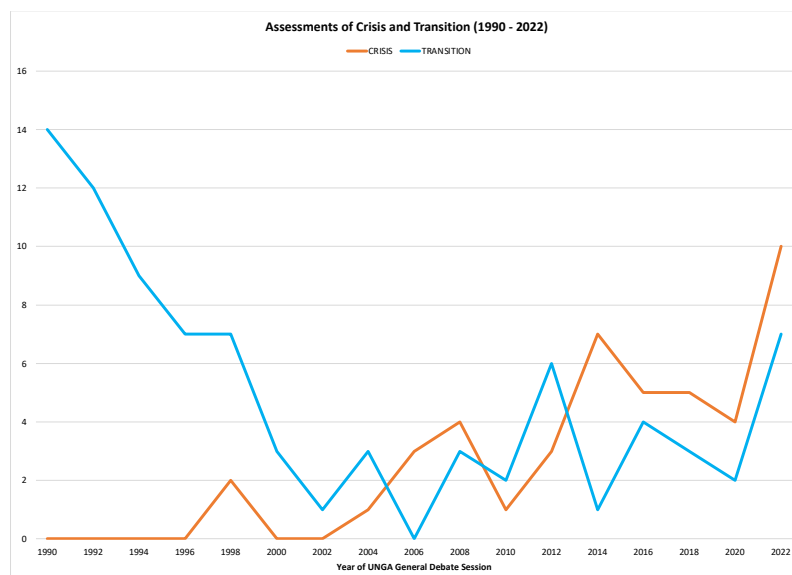


Figure 27 - References to transition and crisis, a chronological view.

On the basis of these illustrations, we can loosely outline three stages in the evolution of contemporary order framed in terms of transition and crisis. The first stage represents the attempt to consolidate order from 1990 to the beginning of the new Millennium, roughly until 9/11. The second stage covers 2002 until 2010, a period which received a relatively low degree of comments in terms of a transition or crisis compared to the earlier and latter stages. Thirdly, a descent towards crisis from 2012 onwards to the present. The rest of this chapter deconstructs these assessments, showing that whilst there has been little concern aimed at the legitimacy of the current order, at no point have governments been comfortable with the responsiveness of order. I outline how assessments initially converged upon the perception of a global order in transition, eventually shifting to an order in crisis, and how warnings regarding the lack of responsiveness have been a constant feature of this political discourse.

6.1: 1990 – 2000 (The Threshold of a New Age)

Heading towards the last decade of the 20th Century, governments sought to usher in a new way of doing international relations, buoyed by hope and optimism for a new era of global affairs. Symbolically, in January 1990, McDonalds opened in Moscow, followed later that year with a franchise in Shenzhen, China. Positive changes were seen across the political landscape that year: Germany and Yemen were reunited; Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania restored their independence from Soviet occupation; the number of democracies around the world was increasing; Nelson Mandela was freed, steps were taken to end segregation and apartheid in South Africa. And when Iraq invaded Kuwait, the response from the international community was emphatic. These were events which galvanised international politics, they were signs of changing times which reinforced the belief in a new era. Yet, the optimism often associated with international order in the post-Cold War moment masks the turbulent state of affairs at the time.

That same year civil wars began in Rwanda, continued in Sri Lanka, and in Somalia, while Syria occupied Lebanon ostensibly to quell the ongoing civil war. Just as some countries held elections, others experienced a coup d'état. Even as they roundly supported the vision of a new world order, several political leaders warned not to get carried away. In this context, France² questioned what to make of this new beginning “at once so promising and so perilous”, cautioning to “refrain from engaging in premature optimism”, commenting somewhat prophetically that “if we are not careful, the unique opportunity offered by the demise of blocs will become a bad dream”. Likewise, Brazil³ shared a warning regarding the “vulnerability of the international order”. This flavour of commentary continued over subsequent sessions, with Russia⁴ warning that “a difficult period of transition” lay ahead, and Germany⁵ commenting that in contrast to 1990 when “there was an almost tangible euphoria of peace. Since then we have come back down to earth”.

Speeches over the coming years show that the mood in the room was quite pessimistic with negative assessments outlined by established and emerging powers alike, largely driven by scepticism that any progress was being made in terms of the common aspirational principles. Despite enjoying a hegemonic level of influence, even the USA felt that the general state of affairs was worsening. In a year synonymous with the Rwandan Genocide, President Clinton’s speech⁶ in 1994 presented a litany of challenges that the international community had to deal with. These ranged from security issues such

² A/45/PV.4, p.32-25 (1990)

³ A/45/PV.4, p.6 (1990)

⁴ A/47/PV.6, p.57 (1992)

⁵ A/47/PV.8, p.52 (1992)

⁶ A/49/PV.4, pp.6-10 (1994)

as civil wars, terrorism, and non-proliferation; to development challenges, including disease, drugs and transnational crime, environmental threats, sustainable development, and the question of an expanding global population contrasted with economic woes; to authoritarianism and fragile democracies. Four years later, American allies⁷ across the Atlantic delivered much the same perspective, highlighting an international reality “characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability”. In sync with the issues previously outlined by the USA, other Western governments indicated two particular domains fuelling this negative perception: a lack of progress regarding challenges in the domain of international peace and security; and in the domain of international development.

Commenting explicitly on the responsiveness of order, Indonesia⁸ observed that “global problems appear less susceptible to easy solutions, earlier concepts and approaches less relevant and existing institutions less effective... bright new opportunities are overcast by unprecedented challenges in a world that is coalescing and fragmenting at the same time. The euphoria which permeated the international community at the end of the cold war has dissipated and is being replaced by a growing sense of uncertainty, disquiet and disillusionment”. These are remarks which are as poignant and appropriate in 2025 as they were so many years ago; they are remarks demonstrating that the concern regarding a dysfunctional order which is not responsive enough to the needs of its members is a longstanding dilemma which has been on the agenda for so many years. This is a comment by a country which would conventionally be considered as a non-established power critiquing existing institutions at a general level not for lacking legitimacy but for lacking perceived effectiveness, for the lack of common solutions to common challenges, pointing out the overall feeling shared by so many of an order which wasn’t delivering results.

By the start of the new millennium, it was evident that faced by the human suffering caused by civil wars and the world-altering influence of globalisation, over and above traditional challenges, the major powers were collectively quite uncertain of the way forward. Rather than commemorating the achievement of the intended new world order, political leaders conveyed a collective disillusion, reflecting on the failure to capitalise on the potential of their shared vision – stuck in an interregnum, between the promise of a new order, and the realities on the ground. In this vein, at the first UN General Assembly debate of the 21st Century, Argentina⁹ explained that notwithstanding the shared values professed by governments, global order remained at an impasse – assessing that “we are facing a more complex world that has yet to engender a stable international order”.

⁷ Italy, A/53/PV.11, p.19 (1998), The European Union (Austrian Presidency), A/53/PV.9, p.7 (1998)

⁸ A/49/PV.16, p.19 (1994)

⁹ A/55/PV/27, p.26 (2000)

Chief among the drivers of this complexity was the apparent lack of a global consensus on how to deal with “the explosion of intra-state conflicts”. In view of the international community’s failure to respond collectively to the genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica, the recommendations laid out within the so-called Brahimi report to reform UN peacekeeping gained particular attention. Without entering into the merits of the sovereignty-versus-intervention debate, governments appeared unable to find common ground, hoping to curb international instability and safeguard the lives of innocent people on the one hand, but dogmatically wedded to sovereignty on the other.

Amongst the most progressive of positions, Canada¹⁰ openly denounced this “contradiction between principle and power; between people’s security and Government’s interests” as a threat to the very future of the United Nations, advocating for intervention in the interests of peace and security. On the other extreme, China’s speech¹¹ included several thinly veiled jabs that such interference hides a political agenda rather than a humanitarian one. As explained by Mexico¹² at the turn of the Millennium, citing the crises in Kosovo, East Timor and Sierra Leone, it became crucial “to find a balance between the urgent need to respond adequately to humanitarian emergencies and the need to respect the sovereign integrity of all States”, stressing the need for the United Nations to be furnished with “a modern political structure” allowing it to respond to these crises adequately.

In tandem, the debate on globalisation was similarly divisive, notably when framed in terms of promoting international development. During the same session, Germany¹³ observed that this “was one issue in particular which dominated this debate”, posing a rhetorical question as to whether the emerging order will lead either to “common progress” or “a new divide”. Already, the idea of winners and losers of globalisation was taking shape. Against this background, Türkiye¹⁴ remarked that “for the fortunate amongst us, the world has never offered more – better education, better health care, greater prosperity. But these fruits are denied to the vast majority of the planet’s population. The number of people who live in dire poverty is growing”. Such misgivings were widely shared amongst governments representing developing economies. Giving voice to this perspective, Brazil¹⁵ highlighted the difference between words and actions in terms of promoting economic liberalism in this respect, with established powers putting forward “free trade rhetoric” while erecting their own protectionist policies.

Yet, it would seem that to some degree governments expected these difficulties, which are framed from a perspective of a certain ‘light at the end of the tunnel’ point of view. Challenges were expected and to some degree quasi-acceptable in the short-term, hoping that longer-term these would reduce. Crucially,

¹⁰ A/55/PV.15, p.3 (2000)

¹¹ A/55/PV.12, pp. 6-7 (2000)

¹² A/55/PV.13, p.30 (2000)

¹³ A/55/PV.14, p.14 (2000)

¹⁴ A/53/PV.13, p.24 (1998)

¹⁵ A/53/PV.7, p.8 (1998)

these concerns were offset by hope and the belief in a positive transition towards the ideals set out in the collective vision of a New World Order. The Russian delegation reasoned in 1996¹⁶ that “it is only natural that the end of the cold war provided a starting point for the transition to achieving a stable and predictable peace at the global level”, implying an acceptance of the situation. India’s speech¹⁷ in 1998 refers to “the threshold of a new age” and “an exciting new universe” and Japan’s¹⁸ asks how to “build the framework for a new international order in the twenty-first century”. Even whilst highlighting regression from a development standpoint, Türkiye¹⁹ assessed that “we feel we possess most of the elements for a promising future”. One may certainly question the sincerity of these comments, and if political leaders believed their own words – but ultimately none of them could have expected the inflection point which would change the course of international politics a year later.

6.2: 2002 – 2010 (A Century Behind)

The new millennium was not, after all, defined by the achievement of the New World Order. Instead, it was initially defined by the War on Terror, following the terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda on September 11th, 2001. With this in mind, though my analysis produced few coded positions specifically in terms of assessments of transition and crisis, the relationship between global affairs and global order in this period merits attention. In 2002 out of twenty speeches only one assessment on the state of global order was coded, whereby Mexico²⁰ recalled “the responsibility to decide together the direction the international system should take in the coming years”. At face value this appears to be an innocuous observation, after all governments were routinely supportive of a multilateral approach to international relations. But in the wider context and taking into account the criterion of responsiveness in relation to the functionality of international order, the remark about deciding the direction “together” should not be understated.

The question of a responsive international order ultimately boils down to a question of whether governments perceive and believe that the arrangements of order respond to their needs, interests, and expectations. At that moment the United States of America had profoundly different needs and interests compared to the rest of the members of the post-Cold War order. The Bush Doctrine departed massively from the ideals initially promoted in the US vision of a new world order, forcibly reorganising the ordering principles and aspirational principles according to the priorities typically associated with the

¹⁶ A/51/PV.6, p.14 (1996)

¹⁷ A/53/PV.13, p.19 (1998)

¹⁸ A/53/PV.8, p.16 (1998)

¹⁹ A/55/PV/18, p.13 (2000)

²⁰ A/57/PV.5, p.22 (2002)

maximalist conception of the Liberal International Order. The rhetoric outlined by President Bush during the 2002²¹ and 2004²² UNGA Debates reflects a doctrine that upended the post-Cold War order, revising the hierarchy of agreed upon principles as outlined in the previous chapter, directing energy towards principles which did not have collective buy-in, or which were given less global priority: intervention, as well as the promotion of democracy.

In 2002, he singled out Iraq, and the Saddam Hussein regime, stressing the lack of compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions, and the need to enforce compliance. In 2004, a belief in “human dignity” comes to the fore. The emphasis on the promotion of democracy and ‘freedom’ in this statement is unprecedented in terms of the US speeches from 1990 until this point. President Bush projects a narrative seemingly buttressed by the democratic peace thesis, that more democracies lead to more peace, whilst dictators and totalitarian regimes confront this through terrorism, violence, and oppression. The narrative is one of good against evil: “Because we believe in human dignity, peaceful nations must stand for the advance of democracy. No other system of government has done more to protect minorities, to secure the rights of labour, to raise the status of women or to channel human energy to the pursuits of peace... When it comes to the desire for liberty and justice, there is no clash of civilizations. People everywhere are capable of freedom and worthy of freedom”.

Despite the inability to even consolidate soft promotion of political liberalism in the post-Cold War era, the speech here is a triumphant, maximalist vision of global democracy. Whilst it is understandable that scholars and commentators give weight to this particular conception of global order, I believe it is a mistake to treat this as the default version of the post-Cold War order. It is true that the US vision of order holds a certain weight, and particularly post-9/11 this was truly a defining unipolar moment where America showed unparalleled power projection to force their maximalist intentions upon the international community. This cannot be understated.

Nonetheless, to be clear, American policies and priorities at that point did not align with the prevalent understanding of global order amongst sovereign peers. The previous chapter already established and demonstrated that the long-term vision of the post-Cold War order was a collective endeavour with clearly endorsed principles. Therefore, this approach is not representative of the post-Cold War order but, to the contrary, should be considered a challenge to it because it sought to revise the principles of order without securing buy-in. Regardless of context and justification, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan fundamentally disrupted the agreed rules of the game upon which the post-Cold War order depended, degrading the structural arrangements put in place to restrict such behaviour, and making them secondary to political expediency.

²¹ A/57/PV.3, pp.6-9 (2002)

²² A/59/PV.3, pp.9-11 (2004)

In this respect, discourse in the 2004 UNGA session is indicative of a polarised international community in relation to intervention, with the G7/OECD members isolated in their promotion of this principle. Even France²³, which opposed the intervention in Iraq, voices support for the concept as a viable policy approach in the context of human rights violations, whilst highlighting the UNSC's obligation in this respect. The concept of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) which emerged at the time represented a multilateral solution to bridge this divide, as well as a tangible attempt to update the principles of order to reflect the evolving international situation.

At the same time, the major powers rallied around the cause of counter terrorism. As the tables in the first half of the chapter illustrated, more than 18 of the G20 governments expressed support for this principle both in 2002 and in 2004. It should be underscored that this spike in promotion of counter terrorism did not come at the cost of the other established principles, where trends of support remain largely consistent as illustrated in the tabulations displayed earlier in this chapter, and moreover, other challenges did not suddenly disappear. To the contrary, the terrorist threat accentuated the sense of anxiety amongst governments, which continued to simmer in the background of General Assembly debates even if there was a strong emphasis on security at the time.

Capturing this mood, Russia²⁴ expressed concerns in 2004 that: “There is an enormous increase in the number of new unresolved problems and new dangerous challenges to security and the development of mankind. We still lack a collective strategy and universally applicable mechanisms for responding to those challenges... We have to constantly improvise and use makeshift means to ensure world stability. A question arises as to whether we could soon find ourselves in a situation in which events start to go out of control. It is now time for the international community to assume an active role in impacting upon global processes and taking targeted actions to establish a more secure and just world order.” This assessment paints a picture of events outpacing order, a framework of order that is unable to cope, fuelling the sentiment of a constant transition – and a clear insistence on the need for an order capable of subjugating the system.

This assessment shines a spotlight on two specific shortcomings which appear to gain increasing intensity in subsequent sessions. Firstly, the view that the common rules underwriting international relations became inadequate as guidelines of behaviour to address emerging challenges. Hence Russia's reference to improvisation and “makeshift means” to maintain a semblance of order. I have already referred to the debate on sovereignty and intervention in the context of civil wars, which exemplifies this dilemma. Secondly, in the context of “unresolved problems” a concern related to a multilateralism

²³ A/59/PV.7, pp.28-31

²⁴ A/59/PV.8 p.32 (2004)

deficit emerged. This is communicated through worries about the inability to find common ground to respond to common challenges as well as worries regarding the increased willingness of certain actors to act beyond the parameters of the ordering principles.

In this respect, by the time the financial crash struck in 2008, international politics appears to have settled into a spiral of unsolved problems and common challenges, compounded by a build-up of frustration and tension – and this is reflected in speeches openly showing concern that the situation is deteriorating and that the arrangements of order are not responsive to these realities. In the 1990s governments appear to have almost tolerated a lack of responsiveness as they saw a bigger picture, accepting that their expectations were unfulfilled as part of a longer-term transition. By the end of the first decade of the 21st Century amidst what had so far turned out to be a perpetual transition, it became apparent that hope can only go so far. Several members of the G20 express their dissatisfaction at the lack of responsiveness no longer framed according to a transition, but according to a burgeoning sense of crisis, linked particularly to an abandonment of the spirit of multilateralism.

Concern regarding governments abandoning a multilateral approach to international relations is profound for two reasons. Firstly, the consequences of not working together are far-reaching; there is a knock-on effect. As explained in the Indian²⁵ speech, “whether we look at issues such as international trade, international financial mechanisms, methods to improve economic and social well-being, or even the various threats to peace and security that challenge our collective existence, one common theme that emerges is the lack of an effective and equitable global partnership”.

Secondly, if governments pursue such a policy, it reflects a deliberate choice contrary to the ethos of coercion that the post-Cold War order depends upon. Making this point in 2006, South Africa²⁶ refers to “the unilateralism that threatens to negate the democratic advances of the last decades of the twentieth century”. Reflecting on the breakdown of the Doha round and the situation in the Middle East, Brazil’s President Lula da Silva²⁷ argued that “the only way to achieve peace, development and genuine democratic coexistence” is through a global order based on international law. The position almost comes across as a reprimand of the USA and its allies stating that: “trust has now been shaken” and continuing that “what is missing is the political will” to find solutions.

Despite such criticism, on the G7 side, commentary was nonetheless in sync with the analysis put forward by the emerging powers. Germany²⁸ observed astutely that “the world is clearly searching for a new order, and multilateralism does not always seem to be the first choice in this quest. What we have

²⁵ A/61/PV.12, p.6 (2006)

²⁶ A/61/PV.10, p.12 (2006)

²⁷ A/61/PV.10, p.8 (2006)

²⁸ A/63/PV.12 p.48 (2008)

experienced since then is the confluence of the traditional power politics of the 19th century, the legacies of the cold war and the new challenges of the 21st century”. France’s Sarkozy²⁹ also called for urgent reform to curtail unilateralist behaviour, highlighting inaction and lagging political will, denouncing that “for too long we have retreated before the need to give to the globalized world institutions that will enable it to be regulated. The world of the twenty-first century cannot be governed with the institutions of the twentieth century. We are a century behind”.

These are assessments which substantiate the argument of a dysfunctional order and which, additionally, point towards the political, anarchical dimension of order rather than the structural dimension as the key cause of dysfunction. Governments express dissatisfaction with the state of international affairs, whilst recognising that this is a result of the behaviour of other governments. Certainly, they are ultimately calling for reform of the rules of the game and of the multilateral system – but they are not criticising these principles in and of themselves, they call for more investment in them. Instead, they direct their criticism towards other actors for not acting in good faith or impeding these principles from working.

We should also be mindful of the context in which such remarks were put forward. Apart from the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, in 2004 the Orange Revolution took place in Ukraine, in 2006 the poisoning of Litvinenko in the UK, and 2008 Russia’s annexation of South Ossetia – mutterings of a Cold War which have resurfaced today. As I argued in the previous chapter, the vision of the new world order was an attempted renaissance of an old order. But the fundamentals of international politics remained the same. The distribution of power changed, but the systemic characteristics associated with anarchy still persisted.

Whilst economic liberalism may have revolutionised international trade and finance, on the political front a liberal³⁰ approach to international affairs based on dialogue and cooperation appeared to have reached a ceiling, particularly on matters of international peace and security. It was only a matter of time until the interminable inertia of realist power politics confronted the liberal undergirding of global order, which requires a deeper level of coaction to not only find shared understandings on how relations should be organised and to agree upon organisational principles but to implement them in good faith, putting common interest at par with sometimes narrow national interest. Ultimately, these are assessments put forward by political leaders which strike at the very heart of scholarly research on the concept of global order and the question of whether this is even possible; if the organisational dimension of order can truly constrain behaviour and shape the anarchic dimension of order.

²⁹ A/63/PV.5 p.13 (2008)

³⁰ Liberal in the sense of IR theory, not political theory.

Heading towards the end of the 21st Century, some already spoke of “disorder in the world”³¹, not only because aspirational principles³² were no closer to being achieved, but because ordering principles increasingly appeared to be impotent and superficial. Really by this point it is almost as if the Cold War ended, and things got worse instead of better. Crucially, however, the positions here are not indicative that these actors consider any of the principles to lack legitimacy, quite the contrary. Rather, they are speaking about impediments to the responsiveness of order. They are criticising other actors for undermining international order, they are highlighting how inadequate the rules of the game are, and how ill-equipped the international community still was to deal with new challenges arising in the 21st Century. The problem here is that governments recognise that something is wrong, but do not or cannot do anything about it.

6.3: 2012 – 2022 (A Pervasive Unease)

The speeches delivered by the G20 members between 2010 and 2014 indicate that events in this phase pushed several governments towards an analysis either that international politics was in a state of transition, or alternatively a state of crisis – with the latter becoming more pronounced. In this vein 2012 saw an initial peak in combined references to transition and crisis. The general drivers of such references appear to have been both the emergence of new power-players contrasted with the economic downturn faced by the established powers, as well as the turbulence related to the Arab Spring and the Syrian conflict in particular. Referring to a trend towards multipolarity, China³³ highlights that “emerging markets and developing countries have never had such strong influence”, and similarly Canada³⁴ remarked that “at the geopolitical level, change means a rebalancing of power”. The global narrative was once more one of transition and change, so much so that in a flashback to the early 1990s, Argentina³⁵ refers to “a new world” which “requires more creative leadership”, summing up the mood amongst governments highlighting that the new distribution of power should be accounted for in global decision making.

In parallel, a narrative of crisis is also apparent, particularly due to widespread concern regarding the overall situation of international peace and security. Over a decade after Rwanda, Srebrenica, and a phase marked by civil wars, governments again express dismay at the total inaction in the case of Syria, betraying the same shortcomings which were present earlier. Criticism of the UN Security Council’s inability to deal with issues of international peace and security returns to the fore as the main motivation

³¹ France, A/65/PV.19, p.36 (2010)

³² See also Italy’s speech in 2008 (A/63/PV.12, p.49) which repeats the rhetoric from a decade earlier.

³³ A/67/PV.14 p.24 (2012)

³⁴ A/67/PV.19 p.1 (2012)

³⁵ A/67/PV.7, p.7 (2012)

for negative assessments in terms of the overall state of order. Türkiye³⁶ asks how nothing is done to stop regimes from resorting to “indiscriminate attacks and collective punishment” against their civilian population, as in the case of Syria, and how members of the Security Council can simply negotiate away the fundamental rights of Syrians, Palestinians, Somalis, and Afghans. Brazil³⁷ referred to “stalemates within the Security Council” as “one of the gravest problems that we face”, while Indonesia³⁸ remarked flatly that “whatever the explanation, the present international system cannot for now resolve the Syrian conflict”, before pointing squarely towards division within the Security Council as an explanation.

This sense of crisis and division reached an inflection point in 2014. While emerging powers sought to take their place at the leadership table, a schism emerged amongst the traditional great powers, the established Western powers and Russia, following the latter’s invasion of Ukraine. To be sure, this was a major challenge to global order as once more, the principle of sovereignty was openly violated. However, 2014 was decidedly pessimistic across all fronts. The UN General Assembly was preceded that year by the rise of ISIS seeking to carve out a caliphate in the Middle East, conflicts in the region including between Israel and Hamas, civil war in Yemen and Libya, the rise of Boko Haram infamously kidnapping over 200 schoolgirls sitting for exams, a migrant crisis in the Mediterranean with thousands drowning at sea, the downing of MH17, and an Ebola epidemic, amongst other tragic events.

The positions expressed by Western powers convey an almost desperate stocktaking. Germany³⁹ remarks that “our world seems to be unravelling. Crises are coming at us thick and fast”, Italy⁴⁰ states that “the future appears threatening. The future is frightening”, Japan⁴¹ refers to “serious, unprecedented crises”, France⁴² classifies the situation as one of “disorder”, while the European Union⁴³ assessed that “it is as if the political foundation of our very existence together is being challenged”.

Somewhat of an outlier here is the approach outlined by President Obama in 2014⁴⁴ and 2016⁴⁵, providing some measure of insight into the perspective of the US at the time, with slightly more nuanced global analysis. He refers to a “paradox” where beyond all the negatives, there are important positives. Looking at the bigger picture beyond international peace and security, he refers to “signposts of progress”, the minimised risk of great power conflict, the very existence of the UN, and the rebound of the global economy following the financial crisis. Particularly on the development front, he refers to

³⁶ A/67/PV.15, p.47 (2012)

³⁷ A/67/PV.6, p.9 (2012)

³⁸ A/67/PV.16 p.13 (2012)

³⁹ A/69/PV.15 p.33 (2014)

⁴⁰ A/69/PV.9, p.35 (2014)

⁴¹ A/69/PV.9, p.29 (2014)

⁴² A/65/PV.19, p.36 (2010)

⁴³ A/69/PV.9, p.38 (2014)

⁴⁴ A/69/PV.6, pp.10-15

⁴⁵ A/71/PV.8, pp.13-19

the decline in people suffering from extreme poverty globally on both occasions, remarking that all things considered this is “the best time in human history to be born, for you are more likely than ever before to be literate, to be healthy and to be free to pursue your dreams”, and that “the world is by many measures less violent and more prosperous than ever before”.

Even so, Obama’s 2014 speech also refers to “a pervasive unease in our world”. Over the course of these two speeches, the recurring cause cited as the driving force of this unease is, again, the lack of results in addressing prevalent inequalities and common challenges, and the resentment that this produces, which exacerbates division. Going by the American analysis at that point, both established and emerging powers were no longer content. President Obama highlights the inability to solve common challenges across domains, warning that “as these real problems have been neglected, alternative visions of the world have pressed forward both in the wealthiest countries and in the poorest”. Crucially, Obama’s analysis attributes this endorsement of alternative visions not to a lack of legitimacy, but due to “dissatisfaction” amongst the citizens of different countries and their governments.

Just like Germany’s warning at the turn of the Millennium, this analysis supports scholarly argumentation in terms of the “losers” of globalisation generating resentment amongst Western governments, within Western electorates, and the emerging powers who feel excluded from the decision-making table. He highlights that “all too often, those trumpeting the benefits of globalization have ignored inequality within and among nations” and how “the same forces of global integration that have made us interdependent also expose deep fault lines in the existing international order”. Linked to this sense of injustice and inequality – which is after all frequently referred to in such speeches – President Obama also acknowledges the widespread resentment against the established powers, accepting how “powerful nations contest the constraints placed on them by international law”.

Finally, taking stock of all this, Obama returns to the same explanation alluded to by others, that these shortcomings are ultimately, “symptoms of a broader problem: the failure of our international system to keep pace with an interconnected world”. Speaking in practical terms he warns how international institutions have been left “ill-equipped, underfunded and under-resourced for handling transnational challenges”. The sentiment conveyed by Obama in these two speeches is thus consistent with the argument of a global order frozen in a state of interregnum. It is as if whilst the world moved on – whilst the political dimension of order moved on, the structural dimension did not. The shared understandings and aspirations that guided relations lost their influence. The principles, processes and institutions organising international relations remained resolutely fixed, with no solutions on the horizon, leaving common challenges unresolved. In turn, this led to all stakeholders feeling resentful and disenfranchised by this lack of results, established and emerging powers alike. The proposed way forward from the side of the USA is that “the existing path to global integration requires a course correction”.

In the 2016 and 2018 sessions, several other members of the G20 echo this belief that that the contemporary global order had fallen out of step with global political and economic realities of a globalised and interconnected world. They link this to a crisis or use similar vocabulary to express their concerns. Showing the degree of convergence amongst the West and the Rest, Brazil's assessment⁴⁶ in this period is perhaps the most similar to that of the US. Like "signposts of progress", Brazil firstly acknowledges that "however imperfect it may be, the current order has nevertheless served the greater interests of humankind". Similarly to the description of "pervasive unease", and the portrayal of these issues as symptoms of an outdated order the Brazilian analysis ultimately concludes in 2016 that "the international system is currently experiencing what could be described as an order deficit. Reality has moved ahead faster than our collective ability to address it".

And just as Obama refers to the need for a course correction, Brazil's assessment in 2018⁴⁷ underscores that so many other leaders have also come to the General Assembly "to call for the improvement of the international order that we have been building for decades". Similarly, France's Macron⁴⁸ referred to "a crisis of effectiveness", the Republic of Korea⁴⁹ comments that "unfortunately, the oversupply of problems and the deficit of solutions remains unchanged", and likewise, Argentina⁵⁰ highlights "a continuous challenge, namely that of adapting to the new realities of global interdependency", adding that "building a modern international order is an ongoing task in which we are all protagonists".

The underlying theme of an "order deficit" aligns with the view that this situation was not so much a state of disorder but rather a sense that the standard of order was not meeting expectations which is a different matter altogether. This resonates with the general sentiment of an outdated order unable to respond to contemporary realities – but the question to be asked here is whether it is global order that is outdated, or the underlying mentalities driving behaviour that is contrary to the scope of order. Indeed, leaders did not shy away from alluding to other causes of this order deficit either, notably that this was not simply a question of an outdated order, but an outdated approach to international relations on the part of governments themselves, and their tendency to deviate from the way of doing international politics that they sought to cultivate.

Again, referring to the French statement⁵¹ the analysis is put forward that "this moment in time is not a parenthesis; it is a manifestation of our own failures of the past". The meaning of this position is that this situation was not a blip, it was not an exception but the norm, not the result of a sudden change, but

⁴⁶ A/71/PV.8, p.7 (2016)

⁴⁷ A/73/PV.6, p.8 (2018)

⁴⁸ A/73/PV.6, p.27 (2018)

⁴⁹ A/71/PV.16, p.22 (2016)

⁵⁰ A/71/PV.8, p.28 (2016)

⁵¹ A/73/PV.6, p.27 (2018)

an accumulation of neglected challenges, the culmination of a build-up of failures. Governments again attribute this build-up of failures to an abandonment of multilateralism and a turn towards unilateralism, repeating the same warnings which were outlined a decade earlier.

Germany bluntly puts forward the explanation⁵² that “we are indeed facing a crisis — a crisis of multilateralism. And that crisis makes conflicts around the world appear insoluble”. Quoting the Secretary General’s opening speech at the 2018 UNGA, Australia⁵³ highlights that trust in global governance has fallen “as twenty-first-century challenges outpace twentieth-century institutions and mindsets”, referring clearly to an outdated approach to international politics. This view is supported by Brazil’s worries about “numerous challenges to the integrity of the current international order”⁵⁴, and France’s call⁵⁵ “to build a new, modern humanism that refuses to yield to attempts to withdraw or to simple-mindedness”, alongside concerns about “fractures” within global order. In a similar vein the European Union therefore underscored⁵⁶ its commitment to the values upon which it is itself built – rule of law and international trade – emphasising how with the abandonment of such common values “the world will descend into greater disorder”. Even Russia⁵⁷, amidst a slew of accusations against America and its allies remarks that there is “shrinking space for constructive international cooperation, escalating confrontations, a growing overall lack of predictability”.

The speeches sampled between 2014 and 2018 are so explicit and say so much about how these actors felt about the state of global order that there is little to add beyond spelling out the prevalent points being made and underscoring key themes. By this point, established and emerging powers shared the general “pervasive unease” outlined by President Obama. Some go so far as to proclaim a situation of disorder – which may come across as an extreme characterisation – though the key take-away is really that discourse is now dominated by the shared assessment that something is acutely wrong. In so many words they conclude that global order is dysfunctional. It is worth taking note of the language being employed in this respect. The criticism of an order deficit and a crisis of effectiveness is again not a criticism about the legitimacy of order but the responsiveness of order, the frustration that expectations are not being met.

They attribute this situation to two main factors which are somewhat inter-related, and which have already been highlighted. Firstly, they blame this situation upon an outdated order out of touch with contemporary needs and realities. Particular emphasis is placed upon the UN Security Council in this

⁵² A/73/PV.12, p.50 (2018)

⁵³ A/73/PV.13, p.40 (2018)

⁵⁴ A/73/PV.6, p.8 (2018)

⁵⁵ A/73/PV.6, p.32 (2018)

⁵⁶ A/71/PV.11, p.23 (2016)

⁵⁷ A/73/PV.12, p.47 (2018)

respect given the importance given to upholding international peace and security. Reference is also made to divisions within the Security Council. Secondly, several leaders point towards a crisis of multilateralism, linked quite explicitly to an abandonment of a mentality conducive to coercion, to actors undermining the “integrity” of order.

The urgency and abruptness of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a shift in terms of attitudes to political order. Though negative assessments on individual principles persisted, interestingly enough assessments of a crisis dropped. There is in fact a return to almost post-Cold War rhetoric, that out of the disaster of the pandemic a new order could be born. In this vein, and also touching upon the crisis of multilateralism referred to in the previous paragraphs, South Africa⁵⁸ calls once more for investment in a new order, outlining that, “as the founders of the UN stood at a crossroads in 1945, so do we 75 years later...the order we seek to build must be rooted in solidarity, equality and unity of purpose. The coronavirus pandemic has presented us with a choice. It is a choice between the global cooperation envisaged in the UN Charter or the pursuit of narrow self-interest and unilateralism”. This latter point is illustrative of the pendulum swinging decidedly in the direction of criticism not directed primarily at the principles and institutions of order, but at the retreat towards unilateralism.

In practical terms, the UK⁵⁹ highlighted how despite all facing the same threat, “members of the UN have still waged 193 separate campaigns, as if every country somehow contains a different species of human being”. Speaking in practical terms about how “nation has vied with nation for a supply of PPE” the UK further assessed “how the crisis has also been an extraordinary force for division” and that in the context of such policies being pursued by countries contrary to the spirit of multilateralism “the notion of the international community looks, frankly, pretty tattered”. At a more political level, France⁶⁰ openly admonished America’s “withdrawal” and China’s “projection beyond its borders”, as well as the “hegemonic assertion of other powers” – a frank acceptance even at this high-level that the problem in dealing with this pandemic collectively was really a consequence of the attitudes, posturing and political decisions by key players. Similarly, Canada⁶¹ remarked that “The world is in crisis. And not just because of the last few months. Not just because of COVID-19. But because of the last few decades. And because of us. This is our wake-up call, and we cannot ignore it”.

Far from a wake-up call, even as the global population was recovering from the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, global order was plunged into disarray with Russia’s renewed invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Mexico remarked⁶² that as a result of this conflict the world was “facing one of the

⁵⁸ A/75/PV.4, p.39 (2020)

⁵⁹ A/75/PV.12, p.21 (2020)

⁶⁰ A/75/PV.4, p.74-76 (2020)

⁶¹ A/75/PV.11, p.35(2020)

⁶² A/77/PV.9, p.38 (2022)

most serious crises in recent times, which has had an impact on the global order, international peace and security, the economy, the supply of basic commodities and essential services”. Furthermore, the conflict created an international environment “marked by an increase in geopolitical tensions among the major Powers”. Even without entering into political debates, it is evident that amongst the G20 members, there was again widespread acceptance that global order is in a state of crisis.

Even those who have been somewhat diplomatically aligned with Russia since the war reignited took a stance, at the very least acknowledging the implications of the war. South Africa⁶³ referred to the combination of the pandemic and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as “a key turning point in history”, even whilst emphasising that “the real inflection point” would be a global turn towards international development. China also takes a muted position. You may have noticed that so far, China has not been cited much. This is because whilst speeches on behalf of the Chinese government frequently refer to the emergence of multipolarity they refrain from contributing any analytical positions on the efficiency of order, preferring grander platitudes. This changes in 2022, where despite some optimistic and perhaps hollow language on how “peace and development remain the underlying trend of our times”, there is the concise assessment on behalf of Foreign Minister Wang Yi⁶⁴ that “the world has entered a new phase of turbulence and transformation”.

To be clear, this turbulence was not simply due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. There was a sense of despair across domains, both in terms of the ordering principles, as well as in terms of the aspirational principles of international security and international development. Looking at the numbers, President Macron put forward the following rather bleak tour d’horizon⁶⁵: “Around the world, 345 million people, including 153 million children, are experiencing acute hunger. There are currently 55 civil wars being waged on our planet. There are 100 million displaced persons. While between 1990 and 2015, 137,000 people escaped extreme poverty every day, by 2030 some 345 million in conflict-affected countries could slip back into it. The most vulnerable people are always the hardest hit by crises, climate disruption, pandemics and rising food prices”. Others remark that “major crises are piling up before us and are combining and reinforcing one another”⁶⁶, how “crisis after crisis is unfolding around the world”⁶⁷, “hardships that now affect billions of people”⁶⁸. The sense of dysfunction even in a colloquial sense is not an exaggeration by this point. In some ways, the signposts of progress were now eclipsed by signs of regression, showing exactly how international order was in terms of responsiveness, and clearly failing to meet expectations.

⁶³ A/77/PV.7, p.36 (2022)

⁶⁴ A/77/PV.12, p.31 (2022)

⁶⁵ A/77/PV.4, p.47 (2022)

⁶⁶ Germany, A/77/PV.5, p.48 (2022)

⁶⁷ Indonesia, A/77/PV.14, p.12 (2022)

⁶⁸ Mexico, A/77/PV.9, p.38 (2022)

The root of this turbulence leads us again to the theme of actors undermining the political language of order – though this time rather than focusing on multilateralism the emphasis was on the premise that international relations must be rules-based, accompanied again by the element of division. Japan⁶⁹ presented Russia’s attack as “an act that tramples on the vision and principles of the Charter”, which challenges international law, Germany⁷⁰ referred to descent towards “a world without rules” and taking this a step further the Republic of Korea⁷¹ commented that this calls into question “the viability of the United Nations system and the universal global norms architecture”. Indonesia⁷², likewise bemoaned that “violation of international law has become a norm in pursuit of narrow self-interest”, expressing concerns about the threat of wider escalation and a “huge war” akin to WW2, citing the economic downturn due to COVID, the rise of ultranationalism, and “rivalry between major powers”. Turning to division more specifically, France⁷³ commented that “these emergencies are each either the result of deep-rooted flaws in our international system, which was able to reap the benefits of globalization but failed to contain its divisions, threats and imbalances, or the result of divisions among us”.

And thus, we arrive at the present day. Whilst the speeches delivered at the UN General Assembly in September 2024 were not included in this study due to practical limitations, I defer at this point to the words of the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, who may be better placed than any other political figure to comment on the functionality of global order in 2025. In his opening remarks⁷⁴ he described the current era as one of “epic transformation – facing challenges unlike any we have ever seen – challenges that demand global solutions. Yet geo-political divisions keep deepening”. In this respect, he underlined that “the state of our world is unsustainable” and that though the challenges being faced are solvable, “that requires us to make sure the mechanisms of international problem-solving actually solve problems”. This assessment dovetails very closely with the recurring observation made throughout this chapter of common challenges left without solutions, and that a core issue lies not with the principles of order themselves, but the behaviour of states who are undermining these same principles and precluding them from working as intended. This theme of division is particularly concerning as the antithesis of the coercion required by contemporary order to function.

Expanding upon this, Guterres referred to “three major drivers of unsustainability”. The first driver was “impunity”, in the context of which he highlighted the increased violations of international law and the UN Charter and how “a growing number of governments and others feel entitled to a “get out of jail free” card”. He links this to “appalling levels of violence and human suffering in the face of a chronic failure to find solutions”. He outlined how this approach to international affairs has become prominent,

⁶⁹ A/77/PV.5, p.45 (2022)

⁷⁰ A/77/PV.5, p.48 (2022)

⁷¹ A/77/PV.4, p.35 (2022)

⁷² A/77/PV.14, p.12 (2022)

⁷³ A/77/PV.4, p.47 (2022)

⁷⁴ United Nations (2024)

producing “impunity everywhere -- in the Middle East, in the heart of Europe, in the Horn of Africa, and beyond”. This driver of unsustainability is a reflection of how the rules-based component of order and the principle of international peace and security are undermined.

The second driver he referred to was “inequality”. He outlined how inequality manifests at different levels, from the UN Security Council where Africa is unrepresented, to the outdated Bretton Woods institutions. He explained that “without reform, fragmentation is inevitable, and global institutions will become less legitimate, less credible, and less effective”. These points correspond with a variety of themes touched upon previously related to a crisis of multilateralism and the absence of solutions to common challenges. Inequality begets misgivings and feelings of injustice, which leads to division and fragmentation. This in turn leads to the inability to find solutions, and thus a lack of responsiveness.

The third driver Guterres referred to harks back to the discussion on the scope of order as predictability – “uncertainty” – expressing concerns about what comes next in terms of climate change and artificial intelligence, identified both as existential issues. He reflected upon the point that ultimately it is in the interests of all UN members to “manage the epic transformations underway; to choose the future we want and to guide our world towards it”. He defends the view of a normative order that goes beyond predictability, in favour of an order oriented in a specific direction. All in all, these are observations that resonate strongly with the commentary that I have referenced in the previous sections, wrapping up this presentation of evidence.

6.4: Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented a linear, chronological account of official discourse outlined by the members of the G20 detailing assessments relevant to understanding their perspectives on the overall state of global order, specifically whether they perceived order to be in a state of transition or crisis, supplemented by the justification for their views where possible. The lack of responsiveness and the dysfunctionality of contemporary order is highly visible, and the discourse outlined in this chapter strongly corroborates the findings presented in the preceding chapter. Taken in conjunction with the evidence in the previous chapter, my findings do not support arguments that contemporary order is perceived to be illegitimate or that there is an attempt to overturn the structure of order, but they do sustain previous literature on the dissatisfaction of governments with contemporary order. This concluding segment briefly recaps the key takeaways from the evidence presented so far, with an eye towards potential explanations discussed in the next chapter.

Responding to the wider literature on this subject, I believe that commentary which presents the rise of emerging non-Western or non-democratic major powers as a threat or challenge to contemporary order misrepresent their overall stance regarding the structural dimension of this order. Whereas it is problematic to lump countries with different interests and contexts together in the first place, apart from singular exceptions such as China's general opposition to the promotion of human rights, my evidence does not back up this argument. My findings do not support the idea of a struggle between the West and the Rest at least in terms of the ordering and aspirational principles that I identified. Support for this post-Cold War manifestation of the Liberal International Order is unequivocal on both sides, and both are equally eager to see reform in the interests of a more responsive order, to bring the post-WW2 order into the 21st Century.

Certainly, there is dissatisfaction related to a lack of responsiveness – persistent calls for reform, expressions of frustration with the principles of order which are not producing the desired results. However, perhaps such analysis could be misreading this dissatisfaction as a challenge, mistaking very justifiable criticism regarding expectations not being met with criticism regarding the legitimacy of contemporary order, and radical calls to overturn it. Based on the speeches sampled in this study and the positions outlined by the governments of the G20 members over the past thirty years, it becomes quite apparent that notwithstanding the initial optimism in the 1990s, the post-Cold War Order was never consolidated. Even if governments repeatedly support the arrangements of order and recall the longstanding importance of the ordering principles, they never seem to be meeting their expectations.

At no point does there seem to be a moment when anyone thinks that things are under control. That said, this does not seem to be the result of a breakdown of order in the sense of principles being disregarded. To the contrary, in cases where the ordering or aspirational principles of order are violated or undermined, there are clear expressions of support for them. This shows that such cases are seen very clearly as exceptions to the rule which are to be rectified: whether it is an eruption of conflict, or a common development goal not being met, there is an expectation that things fall into place, that commonly held standards are maintained, and that the agreed upon order of things prevails.

What is particularly interesting in this respect is that the response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait does appear to stand in isolation: a challenge to global order was identified, governments agreed that this represented a common challenge, a response to this challenge was agreed upon by the international community, and the response was executed, with a solution found relatively swiftly. The responsiveness of order in this instance is actually a glaring anomaly. It is quite an arduous task to find a recent similar event and over the course of the speeches assessed this level of swift responsiveness to a common challenge was never replicated.

The opposite is a more frequent occurrence; challenges, left without solutions. So much so, that from then on, there is rather a sense that events simply evolved too fast. Even the 1990s reflect a somewhat dysfunctional order despite the optimism of a new path for international politics. The positions taken by governments in subsequent years illustrate how the international community appears to have been consistently caught on the back foot, lurching from one crisis to another. Session after session governments seem to be exerting less and less control over affairs and as we reach the present era even the rules of the game upon which contemporary order depends are undermined, particularly the spirit of multilateralism.

The persistent references to a transition until the end of the 20th Century, and the uptick in references to a crisis within a decade of the 21st Century illustrate that the post-Cold War order has been uneasy and unsettled. Moreover, the alarm bells have been ringing for a long time. Several political leaders have sought to bring attention to such concerns over the past decades. The present sense of uncertainty, and this dysfunctionality did not suddenly appear. It would seem that governments have almost sleepwalked towards the current crisis of order, fully conscious that the way it is being articulated is dysfunctional, but never taking steps to remedy the situation.

I believe we may perhaps understand the trend towards an increasingly dysfunctional order as an evolution from latent dysfunctionality to active dysfunctionality. As I mentioned earlier, wishful thinking is no substitute for serious policymaking. Initially, despite the lack of progress in terms of international peace and security and the promotion of international development, together with the UN Security Council appearing to be unfit for purpose, governments appear to have tolerated these shortcomings as they saw them as part of a transition. However, as the situation deteriorated this mutated into active dysfunctionality, with governments now seeing a world which was no longer in transition but in crisis.

Commentary put forward by members of the G20 today points towards a crisis of multilateralism, behaviour undermining the concept of rules-based international relations, and concerns regarding division. The convergence between such remarks and a sense of crisis suggests that there is a relationship between the change in outlook from one of “transition” to “crisis” and the increased awareness of a divided international community and a crisis of multilateralism. Additionally, the sense of resignation amongst governments and the timing of the increase in negative remarks related to crisis and division align with literature on the implications of a diffusion of power following the financial crisis lending further credence to this underlying systemic shift as a key ingredient for this dysfunctionality.

Beyond a vindication of the methods employed in this project, another key takeaway from these findings is that the sense of incoherence and uncertainty I referred to in the introduction is not abstract. The dysfunctionality of order at the heart of this research is a very real concern. This is a concern being communicated explicitly. If leaders of some of the most influential countries are dedicating a portion of their speeches to express their worries about the state of international affairs, if they are highlighting an ‘order deficit’ or referring to a state of disorder, or a crisis of order – they are doing so because the situation is concerning to them.

By and large, governments are not challenging the principles of order. They are sounding a warning. They clearly feel that how contemporary order is being translated from theory to practice is not meeting their needs. When they speak of a crisis of multilateralism, they are not challenging multilateralism but bringing attention to their belief that the behaviour of other actors is undermining multilateralism, and plunged multilateralism into a crisis. Over and above the criteria I put forward in terms of buy-in and responsiveness, these findings tell us that governments are concerned and are telling each other and telling the world clearly that in their view contemporary order is dysfunctional in some way: it isn’t working as they want it to.

The follow up question to all this is why contemporary global order is so dysfunctional, what drives this responsiveness deficit. If one continues the above thoughts, the inference one makes is that governments express dissatisfaction because they expect more, they want a functional order which is not only legitimate, but which is responsive. The constant theme throughout this chapter is that governments have set certain standards of international relations, they have arrived at a set of shared understandings which they return to as guidelines of conduct and guidelines of common goals; they consistently outline certain expectations, but they are not being met. To understand why contemporary global order is dysfunctional, we therefore need to investigate why expectations are not being met, what is driving this lack of responsiveness.

There are three themes which emerge in my view meriting consideration as potential explanations as to what is driving this responsiveness deficit. Firstly, criticism that the overall framework of organisational arrangements was not innovated to keep up with the challenges being faced in the 1990s and the 21st Century, the ordering and aspirational principles of contemporary order go back to 1945, and the necessary innovations have not been incorporated. Secondly, a crisis of multilateralism characterised by a lack of action, cooperation, and solutions to common challenges. Thirdly, the criticism regarding the UNSC is indicative of a vital organ of contemporary order which is unable to perform its role adequately. The next chapter unpacks these elements.

Chapter 7: The Responsiveness Deficit

The central conclusion from the previous chapters is that members of the G20 assess that their expectations, needs, and interests are not being met. Why is contemporary global order at least partially dysfunctional? What is driving the current responsiveness deficit? This chapter discusses potential drivers of this lack of responsiveness, based on the findings of my analysis. In particular, I focus upon the most frequent justification prompting governments to express negative assessments: accusations against other governments. Additionally, I also explore predominant themes which emerged from the evidence presented in the previous chapter, namely: a feeling that the ordering principles may be outdated, unilateralism and a sense of division amongst governments, and criticism regarding the UN Security Council.

Given the nature of the data gathered in this study, which could be likened to a survey of opinions amongst governments, it would be an exaggeration to propose conclusive explanations as to the causes of dysfunctional order and to claim that this is verifiably the result of a specific event or chain of events. Certainly, the justifications for the negative assessments outlined in the previous chapters point in the direction of what is pushing these governments to have negative outlooks. Furthermore, the prevalent themes in their discourse point in the direction of the particular domains where a lack of responsiveness is frustrating governments. This data does not necessarily explain real world events. Instead, the data provides insight into the perspectives of key players, and on the basis of this data there is scope to identify underlying factors, to make educated inferences and draw evidence-based conclusions as to what is driving this responsiveness deficit.

At the outset, I entertain the criticism on behalf of governments that the principles of order which were formulated in the mid-20th Century are no longer adequate for 21st Century realities. In this sense, whilst demand has evolved, supply has remained the same. However, I argue that this is an insufficient explanation as it drastically overstates the influence of the formal arrangements of order and underplays the role of states in international politics. Agreeing with orthodoxy from the traditionalist school of thought I discard this viewpoint, classifying this as a crisis of expectations rather than a crisis of order. In this respect I highlight that perhaps the level of expectation on behalf of states requires a reality check. While politicians may criticise global order for being outdated or not delivering results, how

principles and institutions are adapted to meet contemporary needs depends upon governments themselves.

Instead, I propose that a primary driver for the responsiveness deficit relates to the theme of multilateralism: a crisis of coercion. In this context, a factor that I elaborate upon is a lack of political will amongst governments to cooperate with each other in good faith to get things done, to work together in the interests of common solutions to common challenges. Though I acknowledge that a certain lack of political will is a commonplace shortcoming with regards to multilateral endeavours, I highlight that there is a more sinister underlying motivation for this unwillingness to coact. I attribute this lack of political will to an underlying factor – increased division within contemporary international society, which is the antithesis of the coercion required for the post-Cold War order to be responsive.

My findings resonate with recent literature highlighting a trend of fragmentation, competition, claims of double standards and the paradox that in as much as governments recognise the need to work together more than ever, they appear to be increasingly antagonistic. This division is illustrated by the high rate of accusations made by governments against other governments throughout the statements sampled in this study. This sentiment of division corresponds not simply with the notion of division between the West and the Rest, but with increased concerns regarding a renewed Cold War of sorts between the US, Europe, Russia, China and their respective allies. On this basis, and considering the specific cleavages identified, I turn towards a compelling body of research further explaining this animosity in terms of competition for status and influence within the international system.

Next, I propose that a secondary driver of this responsiveness deficit relates to the UN Security Council. My findings indicate widespread frustration amongst governments who assess that the Security Council lacks responsiveness and is seen as failing to perform its duties. In this sense, I refer to perceptions of paralysis and a lack of representation. I further highlight that from the standpoint of responsiveness, the configuration of the Security Council has a clear blind-spot in terms of the ability to be responsive, because this configuration prioritises the needs and expectations of the P5 ahead of the generalised needs of international society. I briefly refer to comments regarding the behaviour of the major powers, or the P5 powers, closing on the note that given the shortcomings characterising the Security Council today, there is an evident paradox undermining both the integrity and the responsiveness of contemporary order.

Finally, I conclude by recalling the trade-off between having a thick and a thin order, and the central scope of a global order to mitigate the anarchy of the international system. I emphasise that contemporary order has a dependency upon coercion, and thus a dependency upon actors finding unity of purpose. Agreeing on principles is one level of coercion, but agreeing on the way to implement them

represents a deeper level of coercion that states call upon themselves to reach, which currently is not the case. I therefore concur with Ikenberry's argument that we may be experiencing a crisis of purpose, and that the current dysfunctionality is to some degree enabled by the make-up of order itself, which privileges inclusivity to generate a baseline level of buy-in and coercion, but which comes at the cost of responsiveness.

On the other hand, I qualify this with a nod towards the bigger picture. Despite an increasingly divided and politically fragmented international system, antagonism has generally remained confined within the parameters of order. I therefore also concur with arguments that this is not a crisis of global order, but a crisis that has been managed and controlled by global order, as per the research cited earlier on behalf of Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann. The consistent support for these principles is testament to the inclusive nature of contemporary order, the organic desire of actors to collectively author such principles, and the durability of an order that enables competing interests and perspectives to co-exist, whilst maintaining a certain agreed upon standard of international relations. In this sense, to some degree the lack of responsiveness appears to be the price to be paid for a more durable level of buy-in, suggesting that ultimately perhaps global order is dysfunctional by design.

7.1: Supply & Demand – A Crisis of Expectations

Earlier in the literature review I framed the concept of the functionality of order according to the logic of supply and demand. As illustrated in the chapter outlining the post-Cold War vision of a “New World Order” discourse on behalf of members of the G20 outlining a clear set of expectations on a constant basis sustains the understanding that governments express a ‘demand’ for order. However, in the previous chapters I illustrated the disappointment amongst states that in their view such demands, aspirations and expectations were not being met. Put plainly, from the perspective of states supply is not meeting demand. However, under further scrutiny, it would appear that in fact not only is demand unrealistically high, but supply is being restricted by states themselves, a point I elaborate upon in more detail in the subsequent section.

A frequent criticism emerging from discourse at the UNGA in relation to the lack of responsiveness places the blame squarely on the supply side of order, on principles of order which are perceived to be outdated. If you ask governments why supply is not meeting demand, the answer would be that 20th Century principles are inadequate for a 21st Century world. Maintaining the interpretation that the post-

Cold War vision of order was an attempted rebirth of the post-1945 order, the reason why contemporary order lacks responsiveness becomes apparent: the world moved on, but the arrangements of order did not. The supply of order today does not align with the demand for order. The responsiveness deficit that we are experiencing is the result of a situation where expectations have changed, consumer preferences have evolved, but the product being offered is the same one which was available 75 years ago. The principles of order are therefore seen as being out of touch with current needs.

Governments already flagged the issue that outdated principles and institutions were contributing to a lack of responsiveness in the 1990s (and probably even earlier than that). However, this disconnect has become increasingly apparent in recent years. My findings point to a widely shared sentiment that reform of contemporary order is necessary, with calls for reform at a general level, regarding the United Nations specifically, as well as in relation to the institutions and arrangements which promote international development¹. From established and emerging powers alike, from the West and the Rest, economically advanced or the ‘Global South’ the calls for reform are consistent. The table below illustrates these concerns.

Country	Year	Statement	Topic
Germany	2004	What we need is a far-reaching reform of the international system and its institutions that takes due account of these changes. That is a reform we need urgently, because we have to create an effective multilateral system which enables us to work together to prevent crises... ²	General / Multilateralism
Mexico	2004	The only viable, rational and necessary approach is to update the multilateral system of cooperation and understanding that we have built together. ³	
Brazil	2008	The financial, food, energy, environmental and migration crises, to say nothing of threats to peace in several regions of the world, reveal that the multilateral system must be overhauled to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. ⁴	
South Africa	2008	We join the many leaders of the world who have expressed their support for fundamental reform of the system of global governance, including the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. ⁵	
Canada	1994	At a time when we are preparing to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, there is no more urgent task than the intensification of our efforts for reform in order to give our Organization the second wind it needs. ⁶	The UN
China	1996	It is imperative for the United Nations to carry out appropriate rational reforms so that it can better perform the noble mission of the times and usher a better world into the twenty-first century. ⁷	
Russia	2022	...the UN should not grow stiff, but evolve in accordance with the dynamics of the 21st century and consistently adapt to the realia of the modern world that is indeed becoming more complicated, multipolar and multidimensional. (p.47)	
Argentina	2006	That is why we support, together with most countries, the reform of the international financial architecture to make it more effectual in assisting the progress of nations with fewer resources. ⁸	Development
Australia	2022	So we're leading efforts to reform the World Trade Organization. We're advocating for trade rules that are predictable, transparent and non-discriminatory. We're helping to design the first-ever set of global digital trade rules so we keep pace with modern realities. ⁹	
France	2022	Along with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, we must recommit our mechanisms, which are no longer adapted to the current context. ¹⁰	

Figure 28 - Statements indicating calls for reform.

¹ This takes us to the territory of reforming the international *economic* order, where I must yield to Kentikelenis & Voeten (2020), as already referred to in the literature review.

² A/59/PV.7, p.16

³ A/59/PV.10, p.35

⁴ A/63/PV.5, p.7

⁵ A/63/PV.16, p.12

⁶ A/49/PV.10, p.9

⁷ A/51/PV.8, p.16

⁸ A/61/PV.13, p.6

⁹ A/77/PV.11, p.46

¹⁰ A/77/PV.4, p.48-49

The recurring theme throughout such positions is the general feeling amongst the members of the G20 that times have simply changed too much, the world has changed too much. This might seem obvious. The ordering principles of the global order we have in place, including central components like the UN Charter, were devised in a world which would be unrecognisable today, a world which predated decolonisation, before space exploration, before the proliferation of nuclear weapons and before climate change was recognised as a serious problem, a world untouched by the internet, container shipping, and globalisation¹¹. Thus, the arrangements of global order, collectively, become a convenient scapegoat.

As a result, when there is a crisis – regardless of the topic; whether it is food security, the environment and climate change, migration, development, civil wars – it is unsurprising that governments shift the blame towards these institutions which were created so many years ago, and they call for reform. Exemplifying this approach, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked in 2014¹² that, “institutions that reflect the imperatives of the twentieth century will not be effective in the twenty-first century. They face the risk of irrelevance...the policies and rules we made in the twentieth century may no longer be applicable”. Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar doubled down on this criticism in 2022¹³ underscoring that “the world of 1945 was significantly different from today’s world. The global situation, sources-resources, problems-solutions; all were quite different”.

Additionally, governments understandably refer to changes in the global distribution of power, the emergence of new stakeholders, and the need to increase the representativeness of multilateral institutions taking such changes into account. For example, in 1992 Japan¹⁴ stressed the need for the UN to take into account “rapid transformations in the international situation, the dramatic increase in United Nations membership and shifts in global power relations”. The criticism regarding influential players being marginalised has only become more apparent, particularly following the 2008 financial crisis. Reflecting the mood amongst BRICS members and the emerging economies from the so-called Global South in this context, South Africa¹⁵ underscored the importance of recognising that challenges at the forefront of the international agenda today “cannot be addressed effectively when so many countries and regions of the world are left out of the key decision-making processes of important institutions of global governance”.

The nature of this criticism lends credibility to the explanation that perhaps contemporary international order lacks responsiveness because the principles of order are outdated, because they were not only formulated in a different era, but they were formulated in the interests of a certain segment of

¹¹ Council on Foreign Relations (2022)

¹² A/69/PV.15, p.17 (India, 2014)

¹³ A/77/PV.12, p.6 (India, 2022)

¹⁴ A/47/PV.7, p.67 (Japan, 1992)

¹⁵ A/63/PV.16, p.12 (South Africa, 2008)

stakeholders, to meet the expectations of the established powers. From this perspective, it could be argued that the arrangements of the post-Cold War order therefore need to be reformed, they need to be updated – otherwise supply simply cannot meet demand because it was not intended to meet such demand in the first place. As I acknowledge further on, such criticism is particularly warranted in the context of the Security Council.

Expectation Management

The counterpoint to all this is that perhaps rather than the principles of order being out of touch with contemporary expectations, perhaps the opposite is more accurate. Maybe, states have expectations that are out touch with the political world that they themselves cultivate. Governments call for a global order which delivers results, a rules-based multilateral system that responds to common challenges, which delivers common public goods in different fields: structured international relations, peace and security, development. But firstly, it is not as if there is a total lack of results, or that the results have only benefitted the major powers who dominated international affairs following the Second World War. And secondly, these principles and aspirations do not exist in a vacuum, they co-exist with the anarchical dimension of order, an international society characterised by different priorities, contrasting perspectives, short-termism, and self-interest.

As I argue below, ultimately even political leaders acknowledge that some introspection is required. Under scrutiny it becomes clear that the criticism of outdated principles can only be taken so far, and in this respect I believe that there are limitations to this explanation. The crisis is not of principles which can no longer cater to demand, but firstly a case of demand which is simply beyond what can reasonably be expected, and secondly a case where governments themselves are restricting supply. To support this counter argument, I recall some conventional understandings on global order from the literature review, telegraphically discuss some achievements of the post-Cold War order, as well as recent trends in the realms of international peace and security, and international development. The scope of this exercise is not to say that things are going well, but rather to highlight that the arrangements of contemporary order can deliver results across dimensions – in the right circumstances.

Firstly, in the context of a normative order, it is generally accepted that the greater the level of ambition – the thicker and more idealistic the desired order is – the less attainable order becomes. This is because the threshold of responsiveness is set too high. International politics requires pragmatism and compromise, especially on major, crosscutting challenges, simply because it is impossible to meet the expectations of every stakeholder. Furthermore, on major challenges the burden of supply is overwhelmingly carried by the United Nations as the fulcrum of contemporary order. Yet the level of criticism aimed at the organisation as a symbol of global order seems quite misguided. For good reason,

former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld’s observation that, “the United Nations was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell” is amongst the most well-known quotes about the UN¹⁶. This is not an attempt to downplay or minimise concerns, but to emphasise that criticism should be rooted in pragmatic expectations.

On the security front, whilst there may be debate on why exactly this is the case, inter-state conflict has declined markedly. The reputable Uppsala Conflict Data Programme has perhaps the most in-depth mapping of conflicts available. Zooming in on their data for the post-Cold War era, one would be perhaps slightly surprised to see that there was in fact a *decline* in intra-state conflict from 1990 until roughly 2014. Interestingly, whilst *internationalised* intra-state conflicts have been typically low in number, they also pick up significantly from 2015 onwards¹⁷. Overall, from around 1994 to 2014 there was a general decline in state-based conflicts generally. Fatalities due to state-based conflict¹⁸ were persistently low following the end of the Cold War, with a minor spike again in 2014, and a major spike in 2022. At face value the evidence suggests that by and large in terms of state-based conflict¹⁹ the situation has improved compared to previously – though in sync with the alarmist remarks presented earlier, this appears to have halted, with an increase in conflict from around 2014 onwards.

Turning to development, the rise of emerging economies suggests that wealth is no longer concentrated amongst the established Western powers, which undermines the idea that it is only the latter who benefit. This is after all the central justification for the narrative of the decline of the West, the rising Rest, as well as the idea of the Asian Century. Reflecting this, research published by the World Bank indicates that the world experienced an “unprecedented drop in global inequality” following the end of the Cold War driven by rising incomes in emerging, populous countries such as China and India, reversing a trend that had been in place since the 19th Century²⁰. Furthermore, data indicates that global poverty rates have declined by one percentage point annually from 1990 to 2019²¹.

However, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have undone progress at both levels²². According to statistics²³ issued by the UN in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals, as of 2022, over 700 million people lived in extreme poverty, and over 2 billion people experienced moderate to severe food insecurity. It would appear, furthermore that according to current trends, the SDGs will not be met by 2030 either. As in the case of peace and security, so too in development, the trends indicate

¹⁶ United Nations (1954) p.7

¹⁷ Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2024) See the chart: “State-based conflicts by type of conflict (1946-2023)”

¹⁸ Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2024) See the chart: “Fatalities by type of violence (1989-2023)”

¹⁹ I refer to this type of conflict specifically given that global order is oriented towards organising relations amongst states, so state-based conflict is primarily relevant as a metric to assess international peace and security in this context, as opposed to other conflict types, for example between a government and gangs/cartels (such as in Mexico) which is not quite what international order delves into.

²⁰ World Bank (2016) pp.9-11

²¹ Yonzan, et al. (2022)

²² Mahler, Yonzan, and Lakner (2022), Filippini and Yeyati (2022)

²³ United Nations (2024, i)

positive results, followed by a negative trajectory. Interestingly this publicly available macro data dovetails with my findings in the previous chapters hinting at a marked deterioration and escalating concern more or less post-2014 and post-COVID.

There are other relevant successes across domains. International pressure to overcome Apartheid is a prominent success of the early 1990s. The establishment of the WTO in 1995 reflected successful multilateralism to find agreement on a matter of deep significance in the realm of trade and development. The Kyoto Protocol to limit greenhouse gas emissions was agreed upon in 1997. More recently, despite some controversy and a lack of buy-in from key stakeholders, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force in 2021. Finally at a general level, there is certainly a lot of practical work that goes under the radar through the UN ecosystem, notably within specialised agencies like the IAEA, UNODC, WHO and many others.

This overview of some of the positive achievements over the past decades is intended to show that it is not all doom and gloom. Some progress has been registered. Again, it is unclear to what extent the principles of order contribute directly to these achievements, but the provision of certain global public goods has been forthcoming. Whilst criticisms of the ordering principles are legitimate, and disappointment regarding the achievement of aspirational principles is well founded, this tells us only part of the story. To a certain degree, expectations are being met, supply is meeting demand – but if expectations are too high, and demand is beyond what can reasonably be expected amongst states in intense geopolitical competition then perhaps some expectation management is needed.

Crucially, criticism from political leaders does not cover the role that states themselves play in the context of the arrangements of order meeting their expectations – and whether they are themselves facilitating or obstructing the ability of global order to meet expectations. To simply call for an updated system without acknowledging the role that they themselves play would suggest that states are bystanders, powerless to act, as if they have outsourced the maintenance of international affairs to some separate entity. As if these arrangements were imposed by a world government, and that they must passively accept them. This brings me to the second conventional understanding of order relevant to understanding this situation.

Whereas scholars often pursue different definitions of the concept of order, it is generally accepted by the research community dedicated to this topic that global order in its contemporary form is state-centred. It is also evident that the arrangements of the post-1945 order have been shaped by states – they are at their core the product of shared understandings amongst states. So, when for example, the German representative cited earlier in this segment said that “we have to create an effective multilateral system which enables us to work together to prevent crises...” this is profoundly problematic as it

suggests that cooperation amongst states is the result of multilateral institutions, rather than effective multilateral institutions being the result of states cooperating together to create such institutions. It puts the cart before the horse.

To simply blame outdated principles ignores an underlying factor which is the agency of states – how they behave. The principles of order are not autonomous. They depend upon the agency of states to come to life and to be implemented, including the UN which often seems to be treated as if it is a fully independent entity. Order is what states make of it, not only how they perceive it, but how they shape it. Such criticism also ignores the lack of enforcement mechanisms, and the opposition from states towards such mechanisms. The overwhelming sense when processing such speeches and the criticism regarding ineffective principles is a sense of cognitive dissonance. Taken as a block, the expectations that states hold are not necessarily backed up by their own behaviour. This is a point that governments also tend to tentatively acknowledge now and again in their speeches. As argued by the UK²⁴ in 1994, “the failure of the United Nations is our failure”, and by Italy²⁵ a decade later, “effective multilateralism depends much more on political will and shared goals than on structures and procedures”.

It may be true that the principles of order were born in a previous era, but this is hardly a sufficient explanation. To conclude this point, the explanation that global order lacks responsiveness due to outdated principles is a surface-level explanation. Fundamentally, for a functional global order it takes two to tango. Certainly, important elements need reform but if countries do not put in the work together to pursue common goals, then they are in essence restricting the supply of order themselves, regardless of any structural reform. This is because the political impetus comes not from the arrangements of order, but the actors who form part of global order. Ultimately, as I elaborate upon in the rest of this chapter, more compelling explanations for this lack of responsiveness are primarily political rather than organisational.

7.2: Multilateralism – A Crisis of Coaction

Contemporary global order is founded upon the principle of coaction rather than coercion, that is the value of the organisational dimension of order which was developed after the Second World War. The post-1945 order represented an unprecedented level of coaction, and the increased interdependence amongst states and governments over time has intensified a mentality of coaction. States became more

²⁴ A/49/PV/4, p.6 (UK, 1994)

²⁵ A/59/PV/7, p.27 (Italy, 2004)

and more enmeshed together, politically, economically, and infrastructurally. The principles of order shaping international relations today are founded upon the recognition amongst states that it is in their national interest to work together, to pursue sustained, open-ended cooperation, to find mutually beneficial solutions to common problems, including their collective security. This is why states resoundingly support the organisational arrangements of order so persistently, why they reaffirm their buy-in to the ordering principles and aspirational principles time and time again – it is a reaffirmation of their commitment to a common narrative, to common action, to shared goals: to a world of coaction.

But talk is cheap, and we appear to be experiencing a regression in the level of coaction today. A responsive global order – which is what states desire – requires that beyond expressing support and buy-in, deeds follow words. For the organisational arrangements of order to be effective, there must be the necessary investment in these same arrangements. The behaviour and policies of states themselves – the political dimension of order needs to complement the organisational dimension, otherwise it would be inevitable that a ceiling is reached. This is a question of political will: whether governments are willing to agree upon common solutions to common challenges, and to implement whatever policy they agree upon. This is a question of sincerity: whether governments support genuine multilateralism in the interest of stimulating coaction, or if they engage in a cosmetic, performative multilateralism whilst pursuing unilateral approaches or fomenting division.

It would appear today that this ceiling has been reached, leading to a lack of responsiveness and dysfunctional order. This is fundamentally about whether the critical ingredient for a functional normative order is present – the ability of states to coact at a level high enough to meet their own expectations. Based on my analysis, I believe that this dysfunctionality is precisely the result of a crisis of coaction. Some of this lack of coaction is fairly benign, corresponding to previous research on somewhat expected obstacles to collective action, as well as due to the gap in appetite on behalf of governments in relation to setting an agenda, as opposed to the more intricate implementation of such an agenda.

However I also identify a more sinister driving force behind this lack of political will to coact: an increasingly divided, resentful international society. This is demonstrated through the high number of accusations that are endemic throughout the speeches studied, as well as rhetoric which appears to substantiate previous research that the current problems and challenges in international politics are not simply the product of political division, but rather competition amongst actors for influence and status in the international system. The result is a spiral of common challenges without solutions, amplifying the sense of a dysfunctional order.

(A Lack of) Political Will

Throughout the speeches analysed in this study, the term “political will” is used frequently. Political will is the bridge between short-term collective action, longer-term coaction and responsiveness. As a general definition, political will may be understood as “the extent of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem”²⁶. In the context of international politics, I would adapt this definition of political will as the ability of relevant actors to recognise the existence of a problem, to agree upon a desired solution to this problem, to identify a policy towards achieving that solution, and to then execute this policy. Based on the commentary put forward by governments throughout the years, an important conclusion emerging from my analysis is that a primary factor driving the lack of responsiveness is precisely a lack of collective political will.

My findings suggest that there is a lot of talk in favour of multilateralism – to agree upon solutions and policies towards achieving desired outcomes, but little action to translate these multilateral discussions into results. The consistent disappointment in recent years regarding COP negotiations is a case in point²⁷. Despite governments having certain shared expectations, often there appears to be little substantive action to achieve them. There appears to be an inability to find compromise amongst states, to find common ground. And in cases where agreement is found, this is not necessarily translated into behavioural changes. This is indicative of a crisis of coaction: where despite common interests (at least at the surface), common aspirations, common commitments, and what appears to be a mutually acceptable outcome, there is an inability to cooperate over a prolonged period – an inability to agree upon common actions and to implement this in real terms.

Scholars writing about the difficulties faced by multilateral processes differentiate between coordination problems – setting an agenda – and collective action problems - implementation. Ruggie²⁸ writes that “in situations exhibiting coordination problems, the incentives are high for states to order their relations on the basis of generalized principles of conduct.” At the same time, he stresses that multilateral agreements require “sanctioned procedures” for implementation. My findings reflect exactly this dynamic: whereas governments express support for overarching principles, converging on a common coordinated agenda to organise relations amongst themselves, there appears to be less overlap when it comes to implementation.

In the chapter introducing the vision of a New World Order, the consistent buy-in generated by the ordering principles was justified primarily on the basis that they serve the function of contributing

²⁶ Post et al. (p.659)

²⁷ Deutsche Welle (2021); Reuters (2022); The Guardian (2023); Al-Jazeera (2024)

²⁸ Ruggie (1992) pp.573-578

solutions to common challenges. Support for the role of the United Nations and multilateralism were particularly framed in such terms. Similarly, the ballpark aspirational principles such as upholding international peace and security as well as prosperity and the promotion of international development are primarily seen through the lens of common challenges requiring common solutions. This is also reflected by the data at a micro level showing that throughout all the positions of support coded in my content analysis, the most frequent justification is that of common challenges requiring common solutions.

	The UN	Development	Multilateralism	Rules	Non-Proliferation	Peace & Security	Human Rights	Counter-Terrorism	Democracy	The Environment	Sovereignty	The LEO	
Common Challenges	139	173	149	34	55	104	34	119	17	131	3	11	969
Peace & Security	155	110	117	109	142	11	53	48	35	12	32	0	824
Rules-Based Order	100	12	51	39	113	22	79	42	11	13	56	13	551

Figure 29 - Data indicating "common challenges" (requiring common solutions) as the most frequent justification for supporting the principles of contemporary order.

In contrast, as I outlined in the previous chapter much of the sense of crisis felt by governments in the post-Cold War era, of panic even, is the sentiment that common challenges are constantly outpacing the international response to them. Consistent with this, when talking about solutions and what must be done to solve them, the language is almost always framed in terms of something “we” must do, something the “international community” must do – hence the notion that when something doesn’t go right, it is a “collective failure”. To a certain degree it could be said that this reflects a victory for multilateralism as the policy of first resort for the world’s most prominent problems, habitual multilateralism. At the same time, the lack of results, tells us that there must be some shortcoming in the way multilateralism is being pursued. Something isn’t quite right.

The problem seems to be that there is a lack of political will. Clearly, governments place a lot of weight on the role played by ‘political will’ in multilateral affairs, almost as if it is the catalyst to transform negotiations into agreement, and from agreement into action. The positions outlined below illustrate that this sentiment is highlighted frequently by political leaders throughout their speeches, in reference to various subjects. These comments contradict the blame assigned to outdated principles, and very clearly reflect acknowledgement amongst governments that this is their own shortcoming. Speakers repeatedly refer to a common challenge, in tandem with the lack of a solution, lack of agreement, lack of discussion, or the lack of a willingness to convert agreement into action. What seems to be the case in this respect is that governments are enthusiastic to shape the agenda and find compromise at a broad level, but when it comes to translating this agenda into tangible deliverables through concrete action they are less invested, and this enthusiasm fizzles out.

Country	Year	Statement	Topic
Türkiye	1992	We regret that the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations has not yet been concluded. This raises fears of protectionism. Since trade is a major vehicle for developing countries to break free of the burden of foreign debt and pursue their development efforts, the necessary political will must be displayed for these negotiations to be concluded successfully. ²⁹	Development (LEO)
ROK	1994	Given the importance of the political will of nations in this endeavour, the United Nations system as a whole should play a leading role by serving as a forum for nations to work out remedies for economic and social problems which undermine peace and security in many parts of the world. ³⁰	General/ Multilateralism
KSA	1994	We are convinced that the international community's success in serving the cause of international peace and security will depend on the commitment by its members to the United Nations Charter and on the strength of their political will to apply the resolutions of international legality. ³¹	Peace & Security
Brazil	1996	...we need perseverance, courage and, above all, the political will to advance the discussion on issues which reflect a true commitment to the United Nations. ³²	General/ Multilateralism
South Africa	1996	We would also urge Member States to demonstrate flexibility and accommodation in their future deliberations and to display the necessary political will in order to reach a common understanding. ³³	UNSC Reform
ROK	2000	We, as Member States, have to rally a stronger political will to prevent a repetition of these tragedies that have happened or are happening in Rwanda, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. ³⁴	Peace & Security
EU	2002	Translating policies on poverty eradication into sustainable development requires strong political will and true partnership in development. ³⁵	Development
India	2002	The twenty-first century has all the means to end this sad legacy of the past centuries. What is lacking is the political will among the developed countries to sincerely and speedily address the legitimate developmental needs of the developing countries. ³⁶	Development
Russia	2002	But the most important here is the presence of a strong political will to implement the provisions of the United Nations Charter pertaining to the peaceful settlement of disputes. ³⁷	Peace & Security
Italy	2004	Effective multilateralism depends much more on political will and shared goals than on structures and procedures. ³⁸	General/ Multilateralism
Canada	2006	The challenge has always been the same: to bring nations together to build a better world by forging consensus on common purposes and by finding the political will to translate these into action. ³⁹	General / Multilateralism
Indonesia	2006	All we need to do is bind ourselves to this contract and carry it out according to its letter and spirit. This means political will, which is often lacking , and a streak of sincerity, which is very rare in our time. ⁴⁰	Development
Brazil	2006	That is the only way to achieve peace, development and genuine democratic coexistence within the community of nations. There is no lack of resources. What is missing is the political will to use them. ⁴¹	General/ Multilateralism
Australia	2008	The failures that we have seen in recent times do not lie in the institutions alone. The failure lies more in the poverty of our political will to animate those institutions to discharge the purposes for which they were created. And that is our collective responsibility. ⁴²	Development
Australia	2010	...if the structures are to work we must harness the political will necessary to make them work. In other words, we must enable the institutions we have created to do the job for which they were created. Put even more starkly, we must do that which we say. ⁴³	General/ Multilateralism
India	2010	We urge Member States to display the necessary political will to finalize and adopt the comprehensive convention on international terrorism. ⁴⁴	Counter-Terrorism
Mexico	2022	Nuclear weapons continue to represent the worst threat to the very survival of humankind. Mexico regrets the lack of political will , particularly on the part of the nuclear-weapon States, to reach agreements to achieve that goal. ⁴⁵	Non-Proliferation

Figure 30 - Statements referencing the concept of political will.

²⁹ A/47/PV.13, p.54-55

³⁰ A/49/PV.14, p.21

³¹ A/49/PV.17, p.13

³² A/51/PV.4, p.4

³³ A/51/PV.9, p.19

³⁴ A/55/PV.22, p.5

³⁵ A/57/PV.2, p.29

³⁶ A/57/PV.4, p.15

³⁷ A/57/PV.5, p.20

³⁸ A/59/PV.7, p.27

³⁹ A/61/PV.14, p.23

⁴⁰ A/61/PV.18, p.18

⁴¹ A/61/PV.10, p.8

⁴² A/63/PV.10, p.36

⁴³ A/65/PV.16, p.40

⁴⁴ A/65/PV.23, p.4

⁴⁵ A/77/PV.9, p.40

Benign Obstacles

The follow-up question to all this is what explains this apparent lack of political will. It is likely a combination of factors, several of which may be classified as benign obstacles to coercion, and which may be understood as difficulties associated with the process of multilateralism itself. In other words, in as much as such obstacles may be the product of state behaviour, they are to some degree intrinsic within multilateralism. Such obstacles include a lack of trust; free riding and half-hearted commitments; myopia and the belief that the problem is not particularly urgent; as well as illusions that things will be done because multilateral negotiations are taking place on the matter – which is perhaps a reflection of a combined element of free-riding and myopia – and which I refer to below as an obstacle driven by complacency⁴⁶. These points are acknowledged by states themselves.

In this regard, no doubt much of the inability to find consensus on a way forward when faced with major international challenges is genuine; a product of diverging interests and domestic policies which require further negotiation, diplomacy, and compromise. Here again, I go back to my earlier point that this is a crisis of expectations. Though it may be assumed that in an ‘ideal type’ liberal order, zero-sum politics is avoided, interests overlap to some degree, and policies converge⁴⁷, international politics does not follow ‘the ideal’. In this respect, in his analysis on the challenges faced by contemporary order, Ikenberry devotes significant attention to what he refers to as a “crisis of purpose”⁴⁸.

This is a deceptively simple but compelling argument. He explains that global order is so inclusive, encapsulating so many actors and diverse interests that inevitably this comes at the cost of finding unity of purpose. Referencing the body of work highlighted in the literature review focusing on the implications of the post-financial crisis diffusion of power and of meaningful and influential voices, I would agree that this trend has likely accentuated the struggle to find unity of purpose – which is why a sense of crisis may seem more acute now compared to previously.

Ian Bremmer⁴⁹ makes a similar point using the analogy of a bus where there is no driver to illustrate what a world without leaders means (a G-Zero world). I would adapt this slightly. I believe that the bus already has a driver. States have an accepted *modus operandi*, they have the ordering principles and aspirational principles, and a plethora of international institutions. But they do differ on where the bus should stop, the route to be followed, the music that should be played during the drive – even if they agree on the final destination. And as a result, the bus remains fixed in one spot, whilst the driver waits for the passengers to agree amongst themselves.

⁴⁶ Maull (2020), Otker-Robe (2014) pp.12-14

⁴⁷ Goddard, Krebs, et al. (2025) p. 3

⁴⁸ Ikenberry (2018)

⁴⁹ Bremmer (2012)

Such division is benign given that it is not driven by an *unwillingness* to coact. States may engage in good faith, they may even have the same interests, but they have different ideas of how to achieve them and still struggle to find common ground. After all, this is what multilateralism is about: reconciling national interests with global interests, bringing different sides together, enabling agreement to be found. It would be unrealistic to expect governments to consistently agree on major issues of immense national importance with potential impact upon their security, their economy and society. Perhaps the best illustration of this quandary, even within the European Union as the most integrated bloc on earth the perpetual difficulty of finding common foreign policy positions is well known.

The value of the UN's role and multilateral processes lies precisely in the platform provided towards such ends, to galvanise coercion at a global scale. Several positions coded in my analysis reflect support on behalf of governments for multilateralism and for the UN precisely due to this essential service. Thus, actors refer to the UN as the “model political forum”⁵⁰ to overcome these differences, and that “whatever its imperfections, the United Nations represents a necessary democracy of States”⁵¹ where the interests of the many are taken into account alongside the interests of the powerful few. The global convening power that I mentioned earlier refers precisely to this added value⁵².

All in all, in fact, governments acknowledge the positive track record of the UN in this respect. For example, in his capacity of Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea Ban Ki-Moon assessed in 2004⁵³ that “for almost six decades, the United Nations has played a crucial role in merging the diverse interests of our Member States for the global good”. Likewise, South Africa's speech in 2010⁵⁴ also observed that “amid all the challenges the United Nations has been relevant and responsive to our diverse interests”. In this sense, when faced with such “diverse interests”, it should be expected that there is an initial threshold of political will that must be overcome even in situations where states are acting in good faith.

Alternatively, the lack of political will could also be due to convenience, choosing the easy way out and postponing or avoiding difficult decisions; for example because of the short-term cost, public perception, or upsetting allies. Obama made this point in 2014⁵⁵, remarking on international norms not being upheld because it was inconvenient to enforce them, his red line regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria is a prime example of this. Perhaps the cause may also be due to an element of free

⁵⁰ A/55/PV.10, p.7 (Brazil, 2000)

⁵¹ A/63/PV.10, p.36 (Australia, 2008)

⁵² As a recent example of this see Natorski's analysis (2024) of “the surprising UNESCO agreement on AI”.

⁵³ A/59/PV.9, p.29 (Republic of Korea, 2004)

⁵⁴ A/65/PV.17, p.26 (South Africa, 2010)

⁵⁵ A/69/PV.6, p.10-11 (USA, 2014)

riding. The UN budget is a case in point⁵⁶, notoriously underfunded, with governments safe in the assurance that if they do not pay their dues, whether a voluntary contribution or otherwise, it is not as if the UN will simply collapse. The issue here, as exemplified by a comment made in relation to climate change is that “if we all try to freeride, we will all end up in free fall”⁵⁷.

All this, in my view, betrays an element of complacency. As already discussed, expectations on behalf of governments are quite high, and yet it often seems to be the case that they are content to do the bare minimum. It seems that at times there is an almost global convergence on a laissez-faire attitude amongst governments, that as long as they go through the motions, as long as political leaders turn up for summits, their representatives attend meetings and so on, compromises and plans of action will manifest out of nothing, solutions will be found without any effort, and results will be delivered. The complexity of applying principles to real world politics is perhaps under-appreciated. There is a world of difference between agreeing upon a general principle – arriving at a shared understanding or identifying a common goal – and applying that principle to a particular event. All in all, however, such issues represent benign obstacles to coaction. They are not a conscious policy to undermine coaction, but rather a lack of investment and political will, born out of complacency.

Antagonistic Obstacles

What really emerges vividly from my analysis is somewhat more provocative than this though: the tendency of states to accuse others of impeding collective action, of undermining global order. As illustrated below, the results of my analysis indicate that without a shadow of a doubt accusations are the primary justification for negative assessments. So, while the negative assessments attributed to the lack of responsiveness of order make it look as if the principles of order are not functioning, in fact, governments are immediately pointing their finger at other actors. When accusing others of blocking the achievement of an aspirational principle such as peace and security or development, or when they are accusing others of violating another state’s sovereignty or undercutting multilateral initiatives, governments are implying that the blame for the lack of responsiveness lies with another actor.

⁵⁶ A/51/PV.7, p.16 (Canada, 1996); A/51/PV.22, p.13 (India, 1996)

⁵⁷ A/61/PV.16, p.20 (UK, 2006)

	The United Nations	Peace & Security	Development	Rules	Economic Liberalism	Non-Proliferation	Multilateralism	Human Rights	Sovereignty	Counter-Terrorism	Environment	Democracy	Total
Accusations	29	102	44	57	18	49	21	26	20	19	11	3	399
Results & Deliverables	14	47	67	2	11	6	14	14	1	3	7	0	186
JFREIA	98	2	6	0	13	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	122
Effectiveness & Reform	74	0	4	4	6	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	94
The People	8	10	3	2	0	0	0	1	6	1	0	0	31
Division	4	6	1	1	0	0	13	1	0	1	0	0	27
Peace & Security	14	1	1	1	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	23
Rules-Based Order	1	1	0	1	14	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	20
Interference	0	6	1	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	15
Legitimacy	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	13
Prosperity	1	2	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Common Challenges	1	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Principled Position	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Unity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	256	178	132	71	71	58	56	48	27	27	19	5	948

Figure 31 - Data indicating “accusations” as the most frequent justification for negative assessments.

Year	Accusations	G7	Accusations	BRICS	Accusations
1990	53	USA	47	Russia	61
1992	27	Canada	40	India	32
1994	23	France	37	Brazil	30
1996	32	Germany	34	China	25
1998	38	EU	33	South Africa	14
2000	18	UK	30		
2002	41	Japan	23		
2004	18	Italy	20		
2006	32				
2008	30				
2010	37				
2012	55				
2014	41				
2016	32				
2018	42				
2020	23				
2022	74				
Totals	616				

OECD	Accusations	G77	Accusations
Turkey	35	KSA	42
Australia	24	Argentina	31
ROK	23	Indonesia	27
Mexico	17		

Figure 32 - Data illustrating the frequency of positions justified on the basis of an accusation, per sampled session, together with data illustrating the distribution of accusations according to different groups.

The tabulations above illustrate the frequency⁵⁸ with which members of the G20 make such accusations during their statements, within the boundaries of the coding scheme followed in this study. Quite likely, if one were to track all the accusations made by the members of the G20 in these speeches, the numbers could well be higher. Notably, Russia and the USA are at the forefront. Furthermore, the quotations also show that accusations are made across domains, against specific actors (such as Syria, Russia, and the US), general segments of actors (such as developed economies), and aimed at the international community as a whole.

⁵⁸ Note: The total frequencies when adding up the individual numbers per actor adds up to 626 rather than 616, this is due to double counting of speeches delivered on behalf of the EU by G7 members. These figures are greater than the accusations associated with negative assessments because accusations could also be made in other circumstances, for example by accusing an actor of a certain action and expressing support for a related principle in response.

Country	Year	Statement	Topic
China	1996	Developed countries have failed to live up to their pledges under Agenda 21 in terms of funding and technology transfer, yet they demand that developing countries accept obligations exceeding their capability at their present level of development. ⁵⁹	Developed countries hypocrisy
Japan	1998	The recent nuclear tests of India and Pakistan constitute enormous challenges to the non-proliferation regime. ⁶⁰	Nuclear tests by India and Pakistan
Brazil	1998	In the current context of global economic turbulence, we must demand that the developed countries establish greater coherence between free-trade rhetoric and their unfair trade practices. ⁶¹	Trade policies of developed countries
India	2000	The international community must signal that it will no longer tolerate the actions of the sponsors and abettors of terrorism. ⁶²	Sponsors of terrorism
Saudi Arabia	2002	Thirty-five years have passed since the Palestinian people came under the suffocating Israeli occupation. The cycle of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories will never end unless the legitimate rights of the Palestinians are respected. ⁶³	Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
USA	2008	The United Nations Charter sets forth the equal rights of nations large and small; Russia's invasion of Georgia was a violation of those rights. ⁶⁴	Russia's invasion of Georgia
Mexico	2008	Some have called into question the fundamental principles of democracy and human rights, citing security requirements or the pre-eminence of economic and social rights. ⁶⁵	Human rights relativists
Germany	2008	At present, the headlines are dominated by the international financial crisis. Recklessness, greed and a lack of common sense among those involved has set us back years. ⁶⁶	Architects of the financial crisis
Russia	2010	Even more obvious, the economic and financial trade blockade of Cuba, whose lifting the General Assembly has demanded for a number of years, is clearly an anachronism. ⁶⁷	US sanctions against Cuba
UK	2012	The fact is that, for decades, too many were prepared to tolerate dictators like Al-Qadhafi and Al-Assad on the basis that they would keep their people safe at home and promote stability in the region and the wider world. In fact, neither was true. ⁶⁸	Authoritarian regimes
ROK	2012	As long as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to pursue its nuclear and missile programmes, achieving the goal of sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula and in the region will remain far off. ⁶⁹	DPRK nuclear and missile programmes
EU	2014	When looking back upon the past year, the most bewildering act in our region, for us in Europe, was the abrupt and illegal annexation of Crimea in March. ⁷⁰	Russia's invasion of Ukraine
South Africa	2014	We reiterate that developed countries should be reliable partners and meet their commitments to development goals, such as contributing 0.7 per cent of their gross national income towards official development assistance. ⁷¹	Unreliable developed countries
Russia	2016	Unfortunately, despite having acknowledged that fact, many Western countries continue to favour their entrenched ideas of mentoring, dominance, exclusiveness and the realization of self-interests by any means, rather than promote just and equitable cooperation. ⁷²	Western hegemony
Canada	2018	The plight of the Rohingya people demands a response. Canada is appalled by the crimes that the Al-Assad regime in Syria has committed against its own people, including, most horrifically, the use of banned chemical weapons. ⁷³	Myanmar and Syria

Figure 33 - Examples of accusations.

In and of themselves accusations are not necessarily cause for alarm. If we consider how frequently they are incorporated within UNGA speeches by G20 members they are arguably a standard component of such discourse at least amongst this stratum of major powers. They also reflect a certain awareness amongst political leaders that the problem is not the structures of order, but the policies pursued by their peers. They state very plainly that the behaviour of other actors is problematic in some way and does not meet their expectations of state conduct. But in my view, accusations may be a sign of something

⁵⁹ A/51/PV.8, p.15

⁶⁰ A/53/PV.8, p.16

⁶¹ A/53/PV.7, p.8

⁶² A/55/PV.23, p.8

⁶³ A/57/PV.17, p.24

⁶⁴ A/63/PV.5, p.10

⁶⁵ A/63/PV.7, p.24

⁶⁶ A/63/PV.12, p.48

⁶⁷ A/65/PV.23, p.32

⁶⁸ A/67/PV.9, p.41

⁶⁹ A/67/PV.16, p.27

⁷⁰ A/69/PV.9, p.38

⁷¹ A/69/PV.8, p.2

⁷² A/71/PV.17, p.39-40

⁷³ A/73/PV.16, p.31

deeper, a more sinister underlying factor driving this lack of political will, which stems from the political dimension of order: a divided, antagonistic international society.

Division (Political Fragmentation)

As already outlined in the literature review, in recent years the school of thought that the breakdown in contemporary global order is due to increased political fragmentation and division has gained momentum. It is easy to see why. The COVID-19 pandemic reflected a total absence of multilateral cooperation, with major powers engaging in vaccine diplomacy, focusing more on trying to make it look as if they were dealing with the crisis better than anyone else, rather than actually working together to bring it to an end as soon as possible. Reactions to Russia's war against Ukraine, Israeli aggression in the Middle East in response to attacks by Hamas and indiscriminate targeting of civilians in Gaza demonstrated double standards from all sides. With the re-emergence of bloc politics and trade wars between the largest economies, major powers seeking to recalibrate their relations with their peers, and talk of a new Cold War, it is hard to shake-off the view that international politics is increasingly defined by fragmentation.

The findings of this study support this school of thought and vindicate the arguments put forward in the literature review related to the characteristics and implications of such a fragmented world: lacking collective action, lacking the decisions that need to be taken by political leaders, and indeed, lacking global leadership⁷⁴. The common denominator in terms of the inability to find common ground, to find common solutions to common challenges, the high rate of accusations, claims of double-standards, the willingness to close an eye when allies undermine the principles of order, the paralysis within the UN Security Council – these all point towards an element of division amongst governments: be it a difference of interpretation, priorities, or interests, or frankly a deterioration in bilateral relations amongst some of the key players, which simply makes them less willing to work together. This is a global order described by Schweller as suffering from “entropy”⁷⁵.

Former Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau summed up this impression well in his speech⁷⁶ during the 2020 General Assembly amidst the COVID pandemic, lamenting the “collective inability, over the past decades to make the tough decisions”, referring to “shared failures” and calling for “a new way of thinking...because the way we’re doing things just isn’t working well enough”, recalling how “too often, concerted action is blocked”. He ultimately reverted to the point on division concluding that “the international approach we’ve relied on since the second half of the 20th century was built on an

⁷⁴ Again I defer to Bremmer (2012), Kupchan (2012), Haass (2017), Onis and Kutlay (2020), and the Munich Security Conference (2025).

⁷⁵ Schweller (2014)

⁷⁶ A/75/PV.11 p.36 (Canada, 2020)

understanding that countries would work together. But now those same countries are looking inward and are divided. We need to recognize where we are. The system is broken.” These sentiments reflect exactly the point being made in this section: a responsive order depends on coaction, without coaction order ceases to be responsive – at least, not to the degree that states seem to desire.

In my view, the data suggests that the crisis of coaction we are facing is not the product of a purely benign lack of political will. To the contrary, it suggests that perhaps the underlying factor is that the need and willingness to coact has fallen victim to division. This is a political problem, but the organisational dimension of order is paying the price, hamstrung by political friction. The principles of order are not responsive not because they are inadequate, but because they are not being allowed to work, because the actors that matter do not want to work with each other. Instead of pursuing common interests, they prefer to work against each other for narrow national interests and to score political points.

The data both at the macro and micro level indicates that global order lacks responsiveness and is in a state of partial dysfunction as a consequence of such division. As noted in the discussion on the functionality of order, a responsive order requires that to some extent the anarchical, political characteristics of the international system are subjugated by the organisational arrangements. What we are seeing is that political considerations are triumphing over organisational ones to some degree, undermining coaction and blocking the arrangements of order from being responsive.

I thus focus this section on specific indicators of division. I firstly present findings highlighting how the increase in references to division within UNGA speeches overlaps with the increase in assessments of an order in crisis. Secondly, drawing upon my data in terms of accusations made by different actors I present my findings in terms of the divide between the West and the collective ‘Rest’ which is amongst the most prominent in contemporary analysis, as well as a sub-type of accusations regarding double-standards. Finally, I focus on a disconcerting set of positions taken by key players – notably Russia, China, and the USA. I conclude this section with general remarks on where this leaves contemporary order.

Division & Crisis

On the basis of the persistent negative assessments regarding the general state of international affairs from the 2014 mark onwards, together with the spike in assessments of a divided international community from the 2012 mark onwards, it would be fair to infer that there is likely to be a causal link between increased division and a decrease in the standard of order that governments collectively aspire towards either in terms of following shared rules of the game (the ordering principles) or achieving

shared goals (the aspirational principles) – in other words, in terms of the responsiveness of order. My coded data indicates that amidst the emergence of assessments of a crisis of international politics, we see a similar increase in references and concerns regarding division from 2012 onwards, a sharp spike in 2012, rising again in 2020, and a peak in 2022. 26 out of 30 references to division are registered from 2012 onwards with only four references before that point. I do not believe this to be a coincidence.

	Crisis	Division
1990	0	0
1992	0	0
1994	0	1
1996	0	0
1998	2	0
2000	0	2
2002	0	0
2004	1	0
2006	5	1
2008	4	0
2010	1	0
2012	3	7
2014	8	3
2016	5	2
2018	6	1
2020	7	5
2022	12	8
Totals	54	30

Figure 34 - Table illustrating the parallel increase in references to crisis and to division.

The sudden increase in concerns regarding division, mirroring concerns regarding a crisis of order suggests a recognition amongst governments not only that they are increasingly divided, but that this is having a negative impact upon the health of international politics. The theme of division is an underlying one throughout my findings. Firstly, in the context of common challenges without common solutions, division at the global level contributes to a lack of coercion. Secondly, in the context of peace and security, division at the P5 level (amongst other factors) contributes to a paralysed UN Security Council. Thirdly, the recourse to accusations which is indicative of actors who are not seeking to find convergence, but actors who have settled upon divergent paths. In practical terms, if decisions aren't being taken due to division amongst governments, then collective action isn't being taken. Given that actors cannot agree upon common action as a result of their division then there is a direct link between division and a lack of responsiveness.

Commentary on division reflects the same themes identified when discussing the sense of crisis in the earlier chapter on dysfunctional order: unsolved common challenges, the lack of common action, the spiral of conflict exacerbating division. Indonesia's commentary⁷⁷ in 2014 is particularly insightful – highlighting the implications of Russia's war against Ukraine and referring to concerns about “the danger of the old Cold War returning”, a “deterioration in the relations between the major powers” notably Russia and the West and the need to find “mutual accommodation” because ultimately everyone else is impacted by great power relations. Similarly at the height of COVID in 2020, France

⁷⁷ A/69/PV.6, p.45 (Indonesia, 2014)

highlighted⁷⁸ how “we struggled so much to agree on so little” as a product of rivalry between major powers, assessing that “all of the fractures that existed before the pandemic — the hegemonic clash of Powers, the undermining and the manipulation of multilateralism and the trampling of international law — have only increased and deepened”. As demonstrated by the discourse outlined below, this sense of division is not an abstract one.

Country	Year	Statement
Mexico	2012	When Mexico became President of the Group of 20 (G-20) in 2012, our mission was clear: to reconcile the apparently competing interests of developing and developed nations. ⁷⁹
South Africa	2012	We have seen a divided Security Council unable to muster the collective courage to say “no more” to warring parties in the interest of peace. ⁸⁰
USA	2014	Yet around the globe we are seeing the same forces of global integration that have made us interdependent also expose deep fault lines in the existing international order... We can choose to press forward with a better model of cooperation and integration, or we can retreat into a world sharply divided, and ultimately in conflict. ⁸¹
Canada	2020	The international approach we’ve relied on since the second half of the 20th century was built on an understanding that countries would work together. But now those same countries are looking inward, and are divided. ⁸²
Indonesia	2020	At a time when we ought to unite... and work together to tackle the pandemic.... what we see, instead, is one of deep division....and growing rivalries...If division and rivalries continue to persist... then I am concerned that the pillars of stability and sustainable peace will crumble... ⁸³
UK	2020	And yet the crisis has also been an extraordinary force for division... And after nine months of fighting COVID-19, the very notion of the international community looks, frankly, pretty tattered. ⁸⁴
Brazil	2022	At the United Nations and elsewhere, we have tried to avoid the hampering of dialogue channels caused by the polarization around the conflict. ⁸⁵
France	2022	We are talking about the responsibility of all those who are committed to respect for the Charter and to our most precious good — peace — because beyond war, there is a risk of global division due to the direct and indirect consequences of the conflict. ⁸⁶
Germany	2022	After the technological revolution of the Internet and the digital transformation, which have made us more interconnected than ever before, we are now facing a new fragmentation of the world. ⁸⁷
Indonesia	2022	Clearly, we have been handling these challenges the wrong way. We have been divided instead of united. We have been working individually instead of collectively. ⁸⁸
Italy	2022	A world divided into blocs and characterized by rigid ideological demarcations and military confrontations cannot generate development or solve problems. ⁸⁹

Figure 35 - References to a sense of division and fragmentation.

The responsiveness of contemporary global order is dependent upon the ability of states to coact, and thus on the quality of relations amongst states. It depends on a unity of purpose that is lacking. To achieve this, compromise is necessary, which is dependent upon the willingness of states to merge their national interests with collective interests. In a situation where relations between states are taking a turn for the worse, this becomes problematic. Particularly in the case of the great powers who have outsized influence over the course of affairs the quality of their relations is even more relevant. These narratives

⁷⁸ A/75/PV.4, p.73-74 (France, 2020)

⁷⁹ A/67/PV.9, p.33

⁸⁰ A/67/PV.7, p.13

⁸¹ A/69/PV.6, p.13

⁸² A/75/PV.11, p.36

⁸³ A/75/PV.5, p.71

⁸⁴ A/75/PV.12, p.21

⁸⁵ A/77/PV.4, p.10

⁸⁶ A/77/PV.4, p.45

⁸⁷ A/77/PV.5, p.48

⁸⁸ A/77/PV.14, p.12

⁸⁹ A/77/PV.5, p.56

show that clearly, relations between states today are increasingly deteriorating. Significant actors are increasingly divided, and pursuing antagonistic paths, fuelling this responsiveness deficit.

Antagonistic Division & Flashpoints of Antagonism

Division is felt by actors – established and emerging, and it is an issue which generates concern. Members of the G20 recognise the implications of division and that it is not in their common interest. As I remarked earlier, we cannot always expect states to agree with each other, but there is a difference between healthy disagreement as opposed to antagonism and division. Furthermore, considering that the recourse towards accusations has been a constant one throughout the past three decades one may argue that indeed, this is the norm in multilateral affairs. However, somewhere along the way there appears to have been an inflection point, leading to a negative trend of intensified division – as if the benign division was overtaken by an antagonistic division.

This type of antagonistic division came to the forefront of international affairs in the context of the COVID pandemic in 2020, followed by a visible rupture amongst significant players in light of Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine, where the references to a crisis and division converge. It must be said that a not negligible component of this division seems to be driven by resentment, a sense of injustice, of inequality – a sense that notwithstanding clear arrangements and a set of institutions where in theory every country is equal, in practice, there is a perception that the established Western powers continue to dominate international affairs, and that contemporary order remains a Western-led project. However, this resentment is aimed not at the principles of order, but at those actors who appear to be taking advantage of systemic advantages.

In this context positions regarding double standards are a particularly interesting genre of accusations, providing insight into this feeling of resentment. This is particularly the case in terms of claims that Western actors promote policies inconsistently, notably in terms of upholding international standards of conduct. This was a point stressed by South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation in 2022⁹⁰ who assessed that “we face these crises today because we have not always upheld those foundational principles consistently and fairly. We believe that international law matters when this one is affected, but does not matter when this other one is affected”.

Of course, if governments feel that they are being treated unjustly on a particular issue, or that certain rules are applied inconsistently, they may be less inclined to engage in good faith on a separate issue of priority for Western powers even if on paper there is common ground, such as in the case of Ukraine,

⁹⁰ A/77/PV.7, p.36 (South Africa, 2022)

thus leading to a lack of coercion in a certain domain. My findings would suggest that indeed accusations of double standards are disproportionately made by non-Western actors⁹¹ which would suggest that this is quite a one-sided sentiment. For example, Saudi Arabia regularly makes this point⁹² through commentary regarding Israel, the occupied Palestinian territories, and international law. Perhaps the most vocal critic of Western powers in this respect is Russia, which often highlights the inconsistencies of the “so-called rules-based order”⁹³ – even as it routinely interferes in internal affairs and/or invades countries within its neighbourhood.

It is not the scope of this study to assess the veracity of claims about double standards, which are arguably a reality on all sides. It is unsustainable, not to say hypocritical, for a state to call out the double standards of others, simply to obfuscate or justify its own double standards. China’s accusation⁹⁴ against the West of instigating “a proxy war” in the context of Ukraine relative to China’s positions on the principle of sovereignty in the Syrian context is another example of this. Making claims against others of following double standards is a rhetorical tool regardless of whether they are fair or accurate. But they do point towards antagonism in international society, unhealthy international relations, and a deliberate unwillingness to coerce.

Contemporary analysis presenting a crisis of order framed according to increased division is rooted in this dynamic of antagonistic relations between constellations of established and emerging powers. My findings support such argumentation, reflecting antagonistic rhetoric in the context of specific themes: international development, international security, and in terms of established powers violating standards of behaviour. That being said, my findings are not indicative of an attempt to overthrow contemporary global political order or to remake it according to some particular vision. Rather, what we are experiencing appears to be a blend of status-based, ideology-based, and interest-based cleavages. Considering the different accusations put forward, and the overarching themes that the accusations relate to, this seems to be about a question of those who believe they are less favoured in the international system as opposed to those who are more privileged in different domains.

Referring to the previous table where I highlighted the prevalence of accusations, it is notable that the second most cited justification is a lack of results and deliverables, which is associated in particular with the two overarching principles of development, and the promotion of peace and security. This is in sync with the premise that countries are looking for principles which react to their needs and interests by providing tangible solutions – they want to see results and deliverables. Of particular note in my

⁹¹ Apart from Canada (1992, p.68-69) and Turkey (2014, p.52), all the other accusations referring explicitly to double-standards are made by non-Western actors: Argentina (2006, p.6; 2010, p.7; 2012, p.8); Brazil (2014, p.9); China (2004, p.9; 2006, p.23); KSA (1998, p.23; 2004, p.17; 2006, p.50-51, 2010); Russia (1998, p.23; 2004, p.30-31; 2008, p.3; 2018, p.47); and South Africa (2022, p.36).

⁹² A/59/PV.11, p.17 (KSA, 2004); A/61/PV.17, p.50-51(KSA, 2006)

⁹³ A/73/PV.12, p.47 (Russia, 2018)

⁹⁴ A/77/PV.12, p.31(China, 2022)

view is the overlap between these negative assessments due to a lack of deliverables and the concentration of accusations which cover these two aspirational principles, alongside the confrontational discourse levelled by Russia and China, as well as G7 members against each other.

In the domain of the promotion of international development, emerging powers and developing economies accuse developed economies of pursuing what are perceived to be unfair practices, such as protectionist policies, subsidies, and tariffs. There is a consistent bloc of countries making generally uniform accusations in this respect – India, Brazil, South Africa, China, Argentina, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia. The overlap with the BRICS group (with the exception of Russia) is notable. In terms of understanding the lack of deliverables on the development dossier this is quite enlightening, showing a longstanding alignment amongst certain actors and divergence from other actors which supports an important perspective on this topic. These accusations also take us back to the earlier point on a crisis of expectations in that for this group of actors the problem is clearly not with the organisational arrangements, but the lack of political will from the developed economies to engage in good faith.

Accusations Regarding the Promotion of International Development		
Year	Accusations against Developed Economies / the West	Accusations against Developing Economies/ the Rest
1990	Brazil, India, Indonesia	Italy/EU
1992	India, Indonesia, KSA, <i>Italy, Turkey</i>	Germany
1994	China	
1996	China, India, <i>Mexico, UK</i>	
1998	Brazil, South Africa	
2000	Brazil, China, India	
2002	India	
2004	Argentina, South Africa	
2006	Indonesia, South Africa	Australia
2008	Brazil, India	
2010	Argentina, KSA	
2012		
2014	South Africa, <i>Turkey</i>	
2016		USA
2018	<i>Canada, France</i>	
2020		USA
2022	Argentina, Russia	Canada, EU, France, Italy, UK, USA

Figure 36 - Accusations regarding the promotion of international development. Developed economies marked in red.

My findings also lend support to the sense of division in relation to issues related to international peace and security in the MENA and Gulf region which have been at the forefront of the international agenda over the past decade or so. In this respect a second set of accusations reflects a discrepancy between Western and non-Western actors in the approach to this region. The difference here is that while accusations from Western actors are directed towards specific actors in the region, there is a persistent theme of accusations of behalf of Russia which accuses the West and the USA in particular of sowing discord in the region⁹⁵. Taking these findings into account – particularly the interplay between Russia and the West – together with the discourse already referred to regarding the concerns related to great power competition, as well as recent literature focusing on this topic, it would be a glaring omission if

⁹⁵ Instances of this are marked in bold italics.

this project failed to address how these accusations manifest amongst the great powers – a topic I shall also address from a different angle under the heading of the Security Council in the next section of this chapter.

Accusations re. MENA/Gulf Affairs (Subject being accused indicated in brackets)		
Year	Accusations by the West	Accusations by the Rest
1992	UK (Iraq)	
1994		KSA (Iraq)
1996	USA (Iran) USA (Iraq) USA (Libya)	KSA (Israel)
1998	Australia (Iraq)	Indonesia, KSA (Israel)
2000		KSA (Israel)
2002	Germany, USA (Iran) Australia, Canada, DK/EU, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, UK, USA (Iraq)	KSA (Israel)
2004	EU, UK (Iran)	KSA (Israel)
2006		Indonesia, KSA (Israel)
2008	Australia, France, Germany, Italy (Iran) France (Israel)	Argentina (Iran) Russia (<i>USA</i> in Iraq)
2010	Australia, EU, Germany, Japan, UK, USA (Iran)	Argentina, Russia (Iran) Indonesia, KSA (Israel)
2012	Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, USA (Iran) Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Korea, Turkey (Syria)	Argentina, KSA (Iran) KSA (Israel)
2014	Canada, Turkey (ISIS) France (Syria) Turkey (Israel)	Indonesia (ISIS) Russia (<i>Western</i> support ISIS) South Africa (Israel)
2016	France, Turkey (Syria) Turkey (UNSC protection for Syria)	Russia (<i>US</i> supporting extremism in Syria) South Africa (UNSC dysfunction re. Syria)
2018	USA (Iran) Australia, Canada (Syria) USA (Syria)	KSA (Yemen/Houthis) KSA (Iran) Russia (<i>US</i> intervention in Iraq, Libya, Syria)
2020	France (Syria)	KSA (Iran)
2022	US (Iran)	Russia (<i>USA</i> in Iraq, Libya) South Africa (Israel)

Figure 37 - Accusations regarding events in the MENA and Gulf. (Specific actor being accused is in brackets.)

At a broader global level, my findings show that antagonism between Russia and the G7 has been a recurring theme even predating the initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014, however it should be noted that from 2014 onwards it does seem to be the case that antagonism on all sides intensifies. Driven by a combination of post-Cold War misgivings about US unipolarity, Russia's invasion of Georgia, followed by NATO-backed regime change in Libya, Russia's intervention in Syria, and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 followed by the renewed invasion of Ukraine in 2022 the frequency of accusations at this level suggests that there is a longstanding undercurrent of antagonism between these actors. Additionally, now and then, criticism on behalf of China also appears, sustaining Russian talking points indirectly. The following compilation reflects the extensive commentary by the G7, Russia, and China in this respect.

Country	Year	Statement
China	1992	The attempt of some big Powers to control developing countries politically and economically has become more and more obvious. Long-hidden ethnic conflicts have surfaced with a vengeance and the North-South contradictions have further intensified. ⁹⁶ (p.41)
Russia	1994	The cold war is over, but its material infrastructure - the mountains of arms and the military-industrial complexes of the developed countries - still remain. ⁹⁷ (p.3)
China	1996	The collapse and disappearance of the bipolar structure has rekindled hope that the world will become a community of countries with equal rights for all, rather than one dominated by a single big Power. ⁹⁸ (p.14)
Russia	1996	First, we should see to it that the old fronts of bloc confrontation are not replaced with new lines of division. That is precisely why we accept neither the idea of the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military infrastructure to the area of the now defunct Warsaw Treaty nor the efforts to make that alliance the axis of a new European system. ⁹⁹ (p.14)
China	2000	To interfere in other countries' internal affairs in the name of protecting human rights in order to advance one's own political agenda is simply to blaspheme and betray the human rights cause. ¹⁰⁰ (p.7)
China	2002	By mutual trust, we mean that countries should rise above their differing ideologies and social systems, abandon the cold-war mentality and the power politics mindset, and refrain from harbouring suspicion and hostility towards each other. ¹⁰¹ (p.15)
Russia	2002	As for Russia, we have made our choice. This is the choice in favour of a democratic, multi- polar world order, which would guarantee sustainable development and equal security for all States. ¹⁰² (p.22)
Russia	2006	The situation surrounding the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe continues to cause grave concern. The old Treaty, based on the realities of confrontation between military blocs, has lost its relevance, while NATO is blocking the entry into force of the Agreement on its adaptation. At the same time, reconfiguration of the military architecture on the European continent is under way. At its heart is an expanding military alliance. ¹⁰³ (p.30)
Canada	2008	The current crisis in Georgia also calls for a unified international response. Canada supports the democratic and legitimate Government of Georgia and Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Canada calls on Russia to fulfil its international obligations, reconsider its actions and cooperate fully with the international community to resolve the crisis in Georgia in a peaceful manner. ¹⁰⁴ (p.17)
Japan	2008	First, regarding the situation in Georgia, I strongly expect to see a peaceful resolution of the issues, based on the principle of territorial integrity; with the parties involved, including Russia, acting in a responsible manner. ¹⁰⁵ (p.28)
Russia	2008	The crisis in the Caucasus has proved again that it is impossible to resolve the problems we face when blinded by the mirage of a unipolar world. ¹⁰⁶ (p.2)
USA	2008	The United Nations Charter sets forth the equal rights of nations large and small; Russia's invasion of Georgia was a violation of those rights. ¹⁰⁷ (p.10)
Canada	2012	The crisis in Syria is a test of this Organization's ability to achieve results. While the brutal and repressive regime of Bashar Al-Assad continues the slaughter of its own people, the United Nations continues to fail to impose binding sanctions that would stem the crimson tide of that bloody assault. Until the last moment of recorded time, the world will remember and history will judge Member States that are allowing the atrocities to continue. ¹⁰⁸ (p.3)
Italy	2012	Italy...strongly urges the Security Council to overcome the stalemate that is preventing effective international action. History will not be lenient in judging those who bear responsibilities. ¹⁰⁹ (p.54)
Russia	2012	We should not allow irresponsible actions dictated by expedient interests to shatter the system of international law. The world order is threatened by arbitrary interpretation of such essential principles as the non-use or threat of force, the peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their domestic affairs. ¹¹⁰ (p.21)
EU	2014	That violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity triggered the gravest threat to the European security order in decades. It matters beyond the European continent. It is about rejecting the use of force and about defending the rule of law that upholds our society of nations. ¹¹¹ (p.38)
Germany	2014	Not just any State, but a permanent member of the Security Council — Russia — has, with its annexation of Crimea, unilaterally altered existing borders in Europe and has thus violated international law. ¹¹² (p.33)
Italy	2014	But the crisis in Ukraine has forced us to confront unexpected challenges...I hope that we can overcome the tensions with the Russian Federation, which will, I hope, return to playing its role as a global stakeholder so needed by the international community. ¹¹³ (p.36-37)

⁹⁶ A/47/PV.8, p.41

⁹⁷ A/49/PV.5, p.3

⁹⁸ A/51/PV.8, p.14

⁹⁹ A/51/PV.6, p.14

¹⁰⁰ A/55/PV.12, p.7

¹⁰¹ A/57/PV.5, p.15

¹⁰² A/57/PV.5, p.22

¹⁰³ A/61/PV.15, p.30

¹⁰⁴ A/63/PV.16, p.17

¹⁰⁵ A/63/PV.10, p.28

¹⁰⁶ A/63/PV.12, p.2

¹⁰⁷ A/63/PV.5, p.10

¹⁰⁸ A/67/PV.19, p.3

¹⁰⁹ A/67/PV.9, p.54

¹¹⁰ A/67/PV.16, p.21

¹¹¹ A/69/PV.9, p.38

¹¹² A/69/PV.15, p.33

¹¹³ A/69/PV.9, p.36-37

UK	2014	This year we face extraordinary tests of our values and our resolve. In responding to the aggression against one of our Member States, Ukraine. ¹¹⁴ (p.9)
USA	2014	Recently, Russia's actions in Ukraine have challenged that post-war order. Here are the facts. After the people of Ukraine mobilized popular protests and calls for reform, their corrupt President fled. Against the will of the Government in Kyiv, Crimea was annexed by Russia. ¹¹⁵ (p.11)
Russia	2014	The United States-led Western alliance, which portrays itself as a champion of democracy, the rule of law and human rights within individual countries, acts from a directly opposite position in the international arena, rejecting the democratic principles of the sovereign equality of States enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and trying to decide for everyone what is good or evil...After the West declared victory in the Cold War and the so-called end of history, the United States and the European Union opted to expand the geopolitical area under their control without taking into account the balance of legitimate interests of all the peoples of Europe. ¹¹⁶ (p.34-35)
France	2016	I would say to its foreign supporters — and we all know who they are — that they need to compel the regime's hand to peace. If they do not then they, alongside the regime, shall bear responsibility for the division and chaos in Syria. ¹¹⁷ (p.32)
Germany	2016	Today the situation could not be more serious. We are again faced with the choice. Will we succeed in taking the first step towards a ceasefire, which would finally make humanitarian access possible so that people can receive what they need to survive? To that end, I have proposed an agreement on banning military flights during a period of several days. Al-Assad's Air Force must cease its attacks. I believe that Moscow also has a responsibility to help bring that about. ¹¹⁸ (p.46)
Russia	2016	In today's world, we cannot be guided by the philosophy of the anti-heroes of George Orwell's dystopic novel <i>Animal Farm</i> , where all animals are equal but some are more equal than others. ¹¹⁹ (p.40)
Canada	2018	The ongoing illegal annexation and occupation of Crimea is a clear breach of international law... We must not allow Russia to continue its destabilizing actions. ¹²⁰ (p.32)
China	2018	What we see today is that international rules and multilateral mechanisms are under attack, and the international landscape is filled with uncertainties and destabilizing factors. Should we stay committed to multilateralism or let unilateralism have its way? ¹²¹ (p.17)
Russia	2018	On the other hand, we see the desire of a number of Western States to retain their self-proclaimed status as world leaders... ¹²² (p.47)
UK	2018	We see what happens when States like Russia flagrantly breach international norms — from the seizing of sovereign territory to the reckless use of chemical weapons on the streets of Britain by agents of the Russian GRU. ¹²³ (p.45)
France	2020	Likewise, we will not tolerate the use of chemical weapons in Europe, in Russia or in Syria. ¹²⁴ (p.75)
Germany	2020	This applies to those who block the Security Council with one veto after another and who prevent its urgently needed reform with constantly new delay tactics. And this especially applies to those who contravene international law, although, as permanent members of the Security Council, they bear particular responsibility for upholding it. ¹²⁵ (p.20)
Russia	2020	I would like to add that as early as last year, Russia declared a moratorium on deploying ground-launched medium and short-range missiles in Europe and other regions as long as the United States of America refrains from such actions. ¹²⁶ (p.49)
Canada	2022	Many described and condemned Russia's further invasion of Ukraine as brutal, illegal and unjustified — as a violation of the Charter of the United Nations. We agree with them. ¹²⁷ (p.24)
China	2022	Turbulence and war can only open a Pandora's box, and he who instigates a proxy war can easily get himself burned. Pursuing one's own absolute security can only undermine global strategic stability... To achieve a fundamental solution, it is important to address the legitimate security concerns of all parties concerned and build a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture. ¹²⁸ (p.31-34)
EU	2022	Russia claims that its security has been threatened for years by "the West". That is false. The Kremlin is attempting — in vain, I hope — to mobilize the rest of the world against an imaginary enemy. Absolutely nobody has threatened, attacked or invaded Russia. And no one in Europe wanted a conflict with Russia. ¹²⁹ (p.9)
France	2022	On 24 February, Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, fractured our collective security with an act of aggression, invasion and annexation. ¹³⁰ (p.45)
Germany	2022	There is no justification whatsoever for Russia's war of occupation against Ukraine. ¹³¹ (p.49)
Italy	2022	Imperial ambitions, militarism and systematic violations of civil and human rights seemed to belong to the past century. ¹³² (p.55)
Japan	2022	Russia's aggression against Ukraine is an act that tramples on the vision and principles of the Charter. ¹³³ (p.45)

¹¹⁴ A/69/PV.8, p.9

¹¹⁵ A/69/PV.6, p.11

¹¹⁶ A/69/PV.15, p.34-35

¹¹⁷ A/71/PV.8, p.32

¹¹⁸ A/71/PV.17, p.46

¹¹⁹ A/71/PV.17, p.40

¹²⁰ A/73/PV.16, p.32

¹²¹ A/73/PV.12, p.17

¹²² A/73/PV.12, p.47

¹²³ A/73/PV.8, p.45

¹²⁴ A/75/PV.4, p.75

¹²⁵ A/75/PV.14, p.20

¹²⁶ A/75/PV.4, p.49

¹²⁷ A/77/PV.14, p.24

¹²⁸ A/77/PV.12, p.31-34

¹²⁹ A/77/PV.10, p.9

¹³⁰ A/77/PV.4, p.45

¹³¹ A/77/PV.5, p.49

¹³² A/77/PV.5, p.55

¹³³ A/77/PV.5, p.45

UK	2022	For the first time in the history of the General Assembly, we are meeting during a large-scale war of aggression in Europe. ¹³⁴ (p.46)
USA	2022	Putin claims that he had to act because Russia was threatened. But no one threatened Russia, and no one other than Russia sought conflict. ¹³⁵ (p.19-20)
Russia	2022	In its attempts to revive a unipolar model under the banner of a rules-based order, the West has established dividing lines everywhere based on the notion of confrontation between blocs and the spirit of “either you are with us or against us” ...Official Russophobia in the West has taken on unprecedented and grotesque dimensions. ¹³⁶ (p.44-45)

Figure 37 - Accusations by members of the G7, Russia, and China against each other (explicit and implicit).

Drivers of Antagonism

The question at this stage is what is motivating this antagonistic division driving the unwillingness to coact, and in turn, the responsiveness deficit. My findings are not indicative of division between liberal and non-liberal actors per se, certainly not at the level of democracies and non-democracies. This is plainly demonstrated when considering the schism in positions between G7 members vis-à-vis India, Brazil, Argentina, and Indonesia, which are democracies. Rather than presenting this division through a lens of ‘the West and the Rest’ a more contemporary ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ framing is perhaps more appropriate moving forward in this respect – given that a defining feature of ‘the West’ is typically the association with liberalism.

My findings may however lend support to a specific facet of research related to competition over status. In recent years a body of literature related to the emerging powers potentially challenging the established powers, has given particular importance to the question of status within the wider international system¹³⁷. Alongside the orthodox understanding that status is a product of material capabilities, scholars today increasingly subscribe to a perspective centred around status as a product of perceptions. Status is not simply a product of hard power, of resources and material capabilities, but rather it is a product of how actors see each other. Whether an actor has a certain status depends upon whether other actors recognise them as having such status.

The politics of status centres around perceptions. As summed up by Gotz, “status is a perceptual and social phenomenon; it comes into being only intersubjectively”¹³⁸. In this vein, Larson, Paul and Wohlforth¹³⁹ denote several factors that may contribute to how the status of a state is shaped, outlining a broad definition of status as: “collective beliefs about a given state’s ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout).” Operationalising this, one could consider the number of foreign embassies that have been established on the ground in a country, and the number of state visits to a country may be an

¹³⁴ A/77/PV.7, p.46

¹³⁵ A/77/PV.6, p.19-20

¹³⁶ A/77/PV.12, p.44-45

¹³⁷ See notably, Mukherjee (2022), and Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth (2014)

¹³⁸ Gotz (2021) pp.228-230, see also Renshon (2017)

¹³⁹ Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth (2014) pp.3-30

indicator of the status accorded to a certain country¹⁴⁰, or perhaps a country's diplomatic footprint – how many diplomatic missions a country has opened abroad¹⁴¹.

States actively compete over their status in the international system. Mukherjee¹⁴² writes that “existing rules, norms, and institutions accord higher status to some groups, who seek to maintain their social position, while others seek to narrow the gap”. This understanding of relations between states is very much in sync with the concept not only of a system but an international society, with states not only seeking to defend or promote their national interests but placing a premium on how they are perceived by others within the system – or the society, rather. He further assesses that “the symbolic politics of status is one of the most persistent causes of contestation in international orders”. Based on my findings I believe that this antagonism is indeed motivated to a compelling degree by status-based competition and a desire to address perceived inequalities of status.

As already discussed, it is perfectly normal for states to have competing interests, and governments to have diverging views. However, there is a case to be made that perhaps rather than trying to find commonalities, governments are to some degree exploiting divergent interests and ideologies today. Cleavages and prominent known areas of divergence associated with embedded inequalities within global order are being targeted strategically by actors. They do so in order to drive home their resentment regarding such perceived inequalities, and with the scope of raising their profile. This tells us that the difference of perspectives is not driven by differences of existential conflict, nor differences on the construction and character of global order, nor the product of purely material interests.

The antagonism is somewhat more nuanced, because it is antagonism driven by a more ‘symbolic’ interest related to the perceived inequality of status. This is evident in the three domains of division that I focused upon earlier: in terms of developed economies as opposed to developing and how the former hold back the latter; in terms of Western interference in the Middle East; and in terms of a schism between the G7 vis-à-vis Russia and China. The constellations of different actors promoting competing narratives and accusing each other of certain behaviour together with the topics generating such division, combined with the somewhat contradictory overlapping support for the ordering and aspirational principles lends credence to this view. Namely, an important driver of such antagonism leading to a lack of coercion is the perception of inequality in relation to particular domains of the international system, and the desire of certain actors to address such inequalities which ultimately denote a difference in status within the system.

¹⁴⁰ Volgy et al. (2014) p.66

¹⁴¹ The Lowy Institute Global Diplomacy Index is a case in point where diplomatic footprint is the basis of ranking diplomatic influence.

¹⁴² Mukherjee (2024) p.2

Caramani refers to such cleavages as “politicized inequalities”, which are produced when actors vocalize their discontent about some inequality and express their desire for this to be addressed¹⁴³. In this vein, I would argue that though the contestation and apparent diversity of interests and perspectives is certainly genuine, it is also amplified at a political level as a deliberate policy choice, with the deeper scope of enhancing status. Parmar eloquently assesses that “emerging powers are demanding a renegotiation of power within the international system”¹⁴⁴. This attempt to renegotiate power manifests through such accusatory rhetoric, utilising narratives which draw upon sentiments of resentment and misgivings about how other actors conduct themselves or take advantage of the system. The idea here is to amplify differences in order to stand out – with the intention not only of addressing a polemic related to inequality, but to raise a country’s profile on the matter which in turn enhances status – a champion of a cause.

To understand why states may pursue such behaviour, I believe we may go back to the point on perceptions influencing status; status as a product of how a state is perceived by peers. Actors may engage in a variety of strategies and deliberately pursue certain policies with the scope of influencing how their status is perceived by others – or with the scope of what has been termed “status signalling”¹⁴⁵. China modelling itself as a champion of the Global South, asserting that the country remains a developing power even while it is widely recognised as the only serious competitor of the USA demonstrates this approach clearly¹⁴⁶.

In the interests of status signalling, states may pursue various strategies: increasing the amount of funds disbursed as foreign aid¹⁴⁷, by acquiring nuclear weapons¹⁴⁸, or by successfully becoming members of a certain international organisation¹⁴⁹. In this context, Pu explains that another tactic pursued by governments involves “strategic spinning”, a sub-type of framing¹⁵⁰. As defined by Entman: “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”¹⁵¹. Strategic spinning falls under the heading of framing as a method pursued by states to frame discussions in a certain way in the interests of projecting “a particular image” about themselves¹⁵².

¹⁴³ Caramani (2024)

¹⁴⁴ Parmar (2018)

¹⁴⁵ Pu (2019), Pu (2024)

¹⁴⁶ Klingebiel and Li (2025), International Department, Central Committee of CPC (2023), Xinhua (2023)

¹⁴⁷ Ferry and O’Brien-Udry (2024)

¹⁴⁸ Larson and Shevchenko (2010)

¹⁴⁹ Renshon (2017)

¹⁵⁰ Pu (2024)

¹⁵¹ Entman (1993) p. 52

¹⁵² Pu (2024)

Recalling the earlier discussion on the role of strategic narratives, I would argue that using political discourse to promote particular narratives and outlooks on international affairs conforms to this tactic of strategic spinning, in the interests of influencing perceptions, and enhancing status. The overlap with the notion of soft power in international politics is evident in this respect¹⁵³. Carefully framing discourse and employing strategic narratives with the aim of augmenting status in some way is straightforward to execute and a low-cost endeavour which makes this course of action appealing. The entry point is much lower than investing in foreign aid, nuclear weapons, or opening new diplomatic missions. It is about selling a narrative and an image, talking the talk – launching accusations of double standards or flaunting the rules – and seeing how far that takes you without necessarily walking the walk. If managed well, this is a low-risk strategy for actors who wish to leave a mark on the global stage.

Promoting a certain narrative, positions and perspectives, regarding a particular cause is a convenient method through which states can enhance their standing, by establishing themselves as a focal point on that subject, and by demonstrating the willingness and ability to take on other actors – including the established powers – thus placing themselves at the same level as the established powers. In this regard, emerging powers wishing to enhance their status through the promotion of certain strategic narratives may identify a cleavage that they seek to exploit, that they can amplify – something targeting their competitors, but which generates positive feedback from the rest of international society. Based on the accusations and cleavages identified in my research I would argue that this is a pragmatic potential underlying driver motivating such antagonistic behaviour contrary to a spirit of coercion¹⁵⁴.

This dynamic is particularly visible when considering the case of Russia, where the consistent message to Western actors is essentially that if they are permitted to behave in a certain way – above the rules of the game – then so can they. Rhetoric is characterised by accusations where, in a nutshell, Russia accuses the Western powers, notably the USA of seeing themselves above other states. Just as China presents itself as a champion of the Global South, Russia presents itself as the global champion against what is described as Western imperialism and double standards. Thus it identifies itself both as a protector of the Global South, or the non-Western World, while elevating itself to the same status as Western powers like the G7. Simultaneously, Russia engages in behaviour demonstrating that it expects equal treatment.

Literature cited in the literature review on behalf of Kaczmariski¹⁵⁵ in relation to Russia, and Stuenkel¹⁵⁶ in relation to the BRICS came to similar conclusions. They assess that Russia considers that it merits

¹⁵³ Beyond the discussion in the literature review, one may wish to refer to Tafuro Ambrosetti (2018) who discusses the link between soft power and status in her review of Paul, Larson and Wohlforth's *Status in World Politics* (2014). See also Gallarotti (2022).

¹⁵⁴ Again, see Gortz (2021) p.230 for further reference.

¹⁵⁵ Kaczmariski (2019)

¹⁵⁶ Stuenkel (2015, 2016)

the same exceptionalism as a great power at par with the USA. This sequence of developments further aligns with the orthodox understanding of how rising powers at the highest echelon of international politics seek to challenge hegemonic power and establish a new hierarchy within the international system¹⁵⁷. This is mirrored with its recent interference in Syria, Libya, Sudan, and invasions of Ukraine, reflecting how this resentment-driven narrative has evolved into a fully-fledged worldview.

Whilst not all actors pursue such a strategy as openly or in an extreme manner, emerging powers are seeking to improve their status – enhancing their standing in international affairs by taking stronger stands on subjects of particular interest to them. They are promoting particular narratives with this motive in mind – to further their particular interests and/or to promote their ideological viewpoints in the context of that particular subject, knowing that these are in competition with the narratives promoted by others. In turn, by promoting their interests and ideologies, and taking strong positions on such subjects, actors enhance their global standing, positioning themselves as a reference point – a systemically significant actor – championing a cause in relation to that subject, even alongside likeminded actors, and thus elevating their status in the international system.

A Crisis Within Order

All this suggests that there is somewhat of a contradiction in my findings: contrasting the broad consensus supporting these principles, and the lack of a consensus in terms of how they are pursued – in fact, I point towards a conscious strategy to amplify differences. As I have highlighted on several occasions so far, governments express support for the principles of contemporary global order, conveying their buy-in openly and consistently. At the same time, it would appear that they have different priorities – giving some principles precedence ahead of others; potentially different interpretations and expectations of how they should be implemented; and they routinely accuse each other of obstructing the realisation, achievement, or the respect for such principles.

The crucial point here is that all this is taking place within the parameters of global order. As noted by Nexon and Cooley¹⁵⁸, such an approach is firmly rooted within the concept of multilateralism. Indeed, referring to Russia and China, they argue that not only is their general behaviour not a challenge to multilateralism, “on the contrary: they are racing to expand their influence in long-existing multinational institutions and to create their own counterparts”. They are not seeking to overthrow the United Nations. Nor are these significant actors calling for a world without rules – quite the opposite, they are invested in both – perhaps with the potential exception of Russia. Otherwise, emerging powers

¹⁵⁷ Kupchan (2014)

¹⁵⁸ Nexon and Cooley (2025) p.37

from South America are at the forefront of promoting political liberalism, China and European actors promoting economic liberalism. All support security, but their conceptualisations differ, and how they believe this should be pursued also differs.

I therefore arrive to the same conclusion as Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann that this is not a crisis of order but a crisis *within* order, if a crisis at all. Governments are utilising the principles of order as hooks to latch onto with the intent of expressing discontent with the conduct of other governments, to promote particular interests, perspectives or ideologies in relation to ongoing events, and to enhance their standing in the international system. But it should be underscored, this is precisely the scope of an open, multilateral order. It represents a platform to disagree and for states to challenge each other, an environment for a divergence of interests, ideologies and perspectives without this escalating towards aggression. So much so, even amidst a divergence of views and diversity of interests, governments rally around the principles of order, and their status-driven competition is ringfenced, confined within the widely agreed upon parameters of these same principles.

In my view, therefore, we do not appear to be experiencing a crisis of order, but a crisis driven by anarchic tendencies that has been *contained* by the principles and rules of the game, and this speaks to the resilience of this order. Along these lines Mukherjee¹⁵⁹ refers to this being “institutionalised disagreement” which is exactly what makes contemporary order functional from the standpoint of the organisational dimension constraining the anarchic dimension. States agree on the rules of the game and should respect them, but they are entitled to disagree on broader things¹⁶⁰. Again, I go back to Ikenberry’s explanation that we are experiencing a “crisis of purpose” and, as he takes it a step further, a “crisis of success” of sorts¹⁶¹.

Where I deviate slightly compared to Ikenberry is that this success is not quite a success of liberal internationalism – certainly not in terms of the spread of democracy. This would be a crisis of success due to the global reach of contemporary order, its inclusivity, the mainstreaming of multilateralism and the general acceptance of a way of doing things that has exerted a degree of constraint over the antagonism that characterises relations amongst states today. Despite deteriorating relations and increased competition, governments continue to broadly adhere to a commonly agreed *modus operandi*. However, it would appear that the law of diminishing returns has kicked into place.

Whilst it may be ambitious to make such a claim considering the course of affairs around the world, this competition for status and this difference of perspectives being confined within the parameters of

¹⁵⁹ Mukherjee (2024) p.1

¹⁶⁰ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann make the same point regarding ordering principles stating that “they stipulate generale rules of conduct, but leave considerable scope for contestation” (2020, p.1078).

¹⁶¹ Ikenberry (2018)

contemporary order is not a failure of global order, but a key deliverable of the post-Cold War manifestation of the post-1945 liberal order. The alternative to such institutionalised disagreement, as scholars of the subject well know, is war. The current predicament shows the value of principles that are a product of inclusive shared understandings, of collective authorship, even if this comes at the cost of a lack of responsiveness. The partial dysfunctionality that we are experiencing shows that in fact global order is fulfilling its role of mitigating anarchic influences by confining them within a set of rules of the game, institutionalising competition over status and influence.

7.3: The United Nations Security Council – A Crisis of Integrity

The United Nations serves as the focal point of contemporary order, and within it, the Security Council plays a vital role in terms of achieving the collective aspiration regarding the promotion of international peace and security. There are a few reasons why this particular component of order merits attention in the context of understanding what may be contributing to a dysfunctional order. In particular, competition over status is particularly evident in the context of the Security Council. The Council is itself a noteworthy driver of the responsiveness deficit. Division and antagonism amongst the great powers, specifically those who are permanent members of the UN Security Council, inevitably has implications on the responsiveness of the Security Council. Additionally, a lack of representativeness also serves as fertile ground for status-based competition and criticism.

Going back to the chapter where I initially made the claim that contemporary order is partially dysfunctional, I underlined the frequent negative positions outlined by the members of the G20 regarding the UN's responsiveness, the pursuit of international peace and security, as well as the justifications for negative assessments under the heading of justice, fairness, and representation. Indeed, the majority of these positions are directed primarily at the UN Security Council. Reflecting this, almost two-thirds of the negative assessments coded in my content analysis regarding the UN relate specifically to the UN Security Council. Furthermore, the focus of the members of the G20 on the role of the Security Council was also a recurring theme in the previous chapter, regularly cropping up alongside references to a crisis of order or a particular international crisis.

The reason for this focus on the Security Council is that what pushes governments to ring the alarm bells about a state of crisis tends to be their concern regarding a deterioration in international peace and security, the proliferation of wars and their consequences. This is particularly vivid from around 2014

onwards, coinciding with Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as conflict in the MENA region, as the passive acceptance of a dysfunctional order evolved into more active awareness of a crisis of order. In such situations all eyes turn to the UN Security Council as the body with the capacity to implement and pass measures to enforce the ordering principles, in the interests of the aspirational principles. As the primary mechanism of the UN in relation to upholding international peace and security and enforcing the rules-based order, the Security Council has particular value. It is the guardian of global political order.

Thus, exploring the role of the UNSC merits a special focus in order to explain the increasingly palpable lack of responsiveness over the past decade or so. As outlined by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal,¹⁶² “the Security Council, the body most directly concerned with the maintenance of international peace and security, has the primary responsibility for dealing with international problems”, and by his French counterpart¹⁶³, “when conflicts become exacerbated, when a crisis calls for a mandatory solution, the Charter requires us to turn to the Security Council”. In an effort to understand the shift from the latent lack of responsiveness discussed in the previous chapter to a palpably dysfunctional international order, I therefore explain how the role and lack of responsiveness of the UN Security Council may be another driver contributing to the broader responsiveness deficit, leading to a more acute sense of crisis and dysfunctionality than the crisis of coercion alone.

Looking at the recent record of the Security Council, it is understandable that governments question its role. Former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff¹⁶⁴ underscored the inability, “either to solve old disputes or to prevent new threats... That has been made clear by the persistence of the Palestine question, the systematic massacre of the Syrian people, the tragic national fragmentation of Iraq, the serious insecurity in Libya, the conflicts in the Sahel and the clashes in Ukraine”. Likewise focusing on the response to the Syrian conflict President Zuma stressed on behalf of South Africa¹⁶⁵ that this “exposes the inherent structural dysfunction of the 1945 post-Second World War consensus”, calling for a reconfiguration of the Security Council “to act in our collective interests, without being bogged down by the narrow domestic interests of a few States”.

Reflecting the above, firstly, I refer to negative assessments regarding the lack of effectiveness of the Security Council, often referred to as a paralysed body, with the use of the veto singled out in particular. Alongside this, I highlight criticism regarding a lack of representation, and the divide between the P5 and the rest of the UN membership in this respect. These findings coincide very strongly with previous

¹⁶² A/49/PV.17, p.14 (Saudi Arabia, 1994)

¹⁶³ A/49/PV.8, p.14 (France, 1994)

¹⁶⁴ A/69/PV.6, p.8 (Brazil, 2014)

¹⁶⁵ A/71/PV.9, p.8 (South Africa, 2016)

academic research on Security Council reform, which has also focused upon questions revolving around the concepts of legitimacy and equity, effectiveness and efficiency¹⁶⁶.

I then turn to observations on the behaviour of certain permanent members of the Security Council which is contrary to their privileged role within this body as a guardian of international peace and security. Here, I again draw links to the question of status in the international system, highlighting the criticism aimed at this institutionalised elitism by members of the G20 in their speeches. I conclude that due to such factors, it is quite appropriate to see the lack of responsiveness of the Security Council as a significant potential driver of the contemporary responsive deficit. Ultimately, this crucial component within the United Nations is not responsive to the needs and expectations of wider international society, but rather to the needs and expectations of an established group of powers, who take advantage of their privileged position, leading to a crisis of integrity.

Paralysis

Several criticisms of the Security Council outlined by the members of the G20 in the sampled speeches specifically refer to its failure to be responsive when faced with crises of international peace and security of global interest, often characterising this situation as a state of paralysis. In particular, many see the use of the veto as the main cause of this paralysis¹⁶⁷. Data shows that since 1990 whilst France and the UK have implemented somewhat of a self-imposed moratorium on vetoes, from 2011 onwards China's and Russia's use of the veto increased drastically, primarily in the context of the Syrian conflict, mirroring American use of the veto in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict¹⁶⁸. Such a trend supports the view that division particularly amongst the US, China, and Russia is likely to be impacting the responsiveness of the Security Council negatively, by leading to more vetoes – supporting the notion of a tipping point post-Arab Spring and following the rupture of the G8.

Analysing this current predicament, Kolosovskiy remarks that the Security Council's responsiveness "depends on the quality of relations and the degree of trust among the P5". Putting forward a point of view seeking to capture Moscow's perspective, he refers to "a series of perceived US and Western provocations". He argues that the 1999 Nato intervention in Kosovo, the invasion of Iraq, and the no-fly zone implemented in Libya – enabled by Russia begrudgingly abstaining, leading to regime change – upended Russian trust in the system. As a result, whereas the 1990s were characterised by frequently unanimous support for Security Council resolutions showing a willingness to compromise, by 2015

¹⁶⁶ Winther (2020), Gould and Rablen (2017)

¹⁶⁷ Italy (1990, A/45/PV.6, p.40), India (2006, A/61/PV.22, p.7), Türkiye (2006, A/61/PV.17, p.7), Australia (2006, A/61/PV.15, p.34), Indonesia (2008, A/63/PV.14, p.16), Indonesia (2012, A/67/PV.6, p.33), South Africa (2012, A/67/PV.7, p.13), Canada (2022, A/77/PV.14, p.6), EU (2022, A/77/PV.10, p.20), Mexico (2022, A/77/PV.9, p.39)

¹⁶⁸ Security Council Report (2024)

(with Russia intervening in Syria) the relationship between Western members of the Security Council and Russia had broken down on matters relevant to international peace and security¹⁶⁹.

The use of the veto lends itself to criticism particularly considering the troubling tendency of the P5 members to wield it essentially to extend their protection to actors who are visibly, at least in the eyes of rest of the UN membership, brazenly violating the agreed standards of order. From US vetoes to protect Israel amidst its occupation of Palestine, to Russia and China protecting Assad as he besieged and bombed the Syrian population, even unable to properly insulate humanitarian assistance reaching civilians on the ground (in both cases). The contradiction posed by what are seen as capricious policies is not lost on the rest of the members of the G20. It is for this reason that states increasingly criticise the Security Council and question its suitability to respond to crises today. The following table in relation to vetoes regarding Syria illustrates some of this frustration.

Country	Year	Statement
Canada	2012	...the United Nations continues to fail to impose binding sanctions that would stem the crimson tide of that bloody assault. Until the last moment of recorded time, the world will remember and history will judge Member States that are allowing the atrocities to continue. Many people of the planet, including many of the citizens whom we represent, cannot understand why this Organization — despite the sound and fury of debate in this great Assembly — has been unable to take concrete steps. ¹⁷⁰
Germany	2012	To this very day, the Security Council has failed to live up to its responsibility for the people in Syria. ¹⁷¹
Indonesia	2012	That is clearly evident in the Syrian crisis. The world community is witnessing, with great pain, the worsening violence and unfolding humanitarian catastrophe on the ground; at the same time, the United Nations is in a state of paralysis in responding to the situation. ¹⁷²
South Africa	2012	We have seen a divided Security Council unable to muster the collective courage to say “no more” to warring parties in the interest of peace. ¹⁷³
Mexico	2014	The world needs a United Nations where the permanent members of the Council refrain from using the veto in cases of grave violations of international humanitarian law. ¹⁷⁴
Turkey	2014	Let me also say that the world is larger than the five permanent members of the Security Council. The fact that they have rendered the United Nations ineffective, despite the situation in the world, must not be accepted by the global conscience. Otherwise, decisions taken at the United Nations will depend on a single country. That is, if one country disagrees, then a decision will not be taken or implemented ¹⁷⁵ .
France	2016	The Security Council must meet as soon as possible. It should not be a theatre of fools — in other words, a place where responsibility can be evaded and where some can impede its work in order to protect a regime while they should be seeking a solution with us. ¹⁷⁶

Figure 38 – Criticism of the UN Security Council in the context of the Syrian conflict.

Such criticism goes beyond the members of the G20 of course. As an example, we may stay on the subject of the Syrian conflict. In 2012, following vetoes by Russia and China contrary to the appeals of the League of Arab States and the other 13 members of the Security Council – the General Assembly took it upon itself to pass a resolution with text based on the same blocked resolution with 137 countries voting in favour. However, the General Assembly also condemned the Security Council for its inability to take action, showing that the sentiment of frustration regarding how the veto is being used or in some way abused is arguably very widely shared. Similarly in 2025, following an American veto in the

¹⁶⁹ Kolosovskiy (2023) pp.44-45

¹⁷⁰ A/67/PV.19, p.3

¹⁷¹ A/67/PV.15, p.15

¹⁷² A/67/PV.6, p.33

¹⁷³ A/67/PV.7, p.13

¹⁷⁴ A/69/PV.6, p.41

¹⁷⁵ A/69/PV.6, p.52

¹⁷⁶ A/69/PV.6, p.32

context of Israel's blockade of Gaza the General Assembly passed a resolution with almost identical wording during an emergency session, with 149 countries voting in favour, including all the G7 members except for the USA¹⁷⁷.

Looking at this from a technical, legal perspective Carswell¹⁷⁸ writes that it would be “nonsensical” to describe this conduct as ‘abuse’ of the veto – because there are no restrictions placed on its use, not even the need for a justification. However, the concept of the veto is premised on this being utilised in good faith (*bona fide*) whereas the way it is being employed in recent years is clearly indicative of bad faith (*mala fide*). This is exactly why the *willingness* to coact is so crucial to the responsiveness of order. Today, instead it appears that the Security Council has fallen victim to the deteriorating relations between America (or the West), Russia, and China – “a stage for them to try to humiliate one another”¹⁷⁹. Dependent upon the level of relations amongst the great powers, dysfunctional relations inevitably lead to a dysfunctional Security Council.

Lack of Representativeness

There is a lot more to the UN Security Council than resolutions and vetoes,¹⁸⁰ and there is more to a veto than simply blocking a resolution. Even the threat of a veto may be sufficient to stop a draft resolution being put in blue for a vote. This is not a claim that the Security Council is entirely gridlocked and unable to agree on anything¹⁸¹, nor is this an attack upon the veto as some senseless mechanism¹⁸². However, the trends appear to justify the criticism levelled at the Security Council by the rest of the G20 members, as the increased use of vetoes overlaps with specific conflicts generating a sense of crisis and negative perceptions of responsiveness.

The veto is often conceptualised as a member of the P5 (or members) obstructing a certain policy, perhaps a condemnation of certain behaviour, or paving the way for the international community to pursue a particular course of action. The image is simply of something being blocked. However, situating a veto in the broader context of how the Security Council contributes to the overall responsiveness of the United Nations, and its capability to be responsive to the collective expectations of international society the implications are deeper. Considering the overarching symptom of expectations not being met, what should be kept in mind here is that the policy decision in favour of a

¹⁷⁷ United Nations (2025)

¹⁷⁸ Carswell (2013) pp.470-471

¹⁷⁹ Gowan (2024), Trenin (2024), see also Security Council Report (2024)

¹⁸⁰ Dayal and Dunton (2023), Raustiala and Jeronimo (2023)

¹⁸¹ As noted by Gowan (2024) even amidst Russia's invasion of Ukraine, agreement was found on several peacekeeping and sanctions related issues.

¹⁸² For a review of the debate on UNSC reform in relation to the veto see Winther (2020). For a more political defence of the veto, see Polyanskiy (2025), outlining Russia's position during a General Assembly Intergovernmental Negotiation on UNSC reform.

lack of action imposed by one actor against the will of the rest of international society is in effect the imposition of a policy decision on behalf of everyone else.

This is being said without prejudice to the motivations for such vetoes, whether it is Russia, China or the USA – the point is that a single actor or a faction of actors within the Security Council can potentially take a decision which nobody else agrees with but which, theoretically, the rest of the world would need to adhere to. It is unclear how the use of the veto in such a way can be reconciled with a Security Council that is responsive to the expectations of wider international society, as it represents a barrier to responsiveness. However, members of the G20 extend this criticism beyond the use of the veto itself, to the idea of an elite, privileged P5 more generally, who possess this trump card, and who hold an inordinate amount of influence on global security policy.

Russia appears to be the only P5 member openly pushing back against criticism of the veto in the speeches sampled¹⁸³. As argued by Foreign Minister Lavrov, “such a right pertaining to the five nuclear powers, the victors of the Second World War, remains indicative of the actual military and political balance to this day”. Such a justification further underlines this sense of elitism. To go back to the logic of supply and demand, as a body oriented towards the supply of international peace and security the Security Council should respond to collective generalised demand rather than specific interests. Yet in practice, the Security Council responds primarily to the demands of a privileged minority, unless there is a level of altruism beyond what has typically been the case in relation to such crises commanding global attention. Thus, its responsiveness is inherently considered to be limited by a lack of representativeness.

Turkish President Erdogan made precisely this point in 2016¹⁸⁴ remarking that “one cannot condemn the fate of the rest of the world to depend on what the five permanent members in the Security Council say”. Similarly, speaking in the context of its own dispute with the UK, Argentina¹⁸⁵ stated that “resolutions of the Council are applicable only to those countries that do not have sufficient power or the right to a permanent seat on the Council. The Council should be reformed because it has never been able to maintain international peace and security.” The perception is essentially that of a body which should be protecting global interests but is instead protecting the foreign policy interests of a group of established actors in a cartel-like fashion.

Summing up these individual points, if we consider the criticisms outlined so far in terms of paralysis, the veto, and a lack of representation there is a clear contradiction when contrasted with the scope of

¹⁸³ A/75/PV.4, p.47 (Russia, 2020)

¹⁸⁴ A/71/PV.8, p. 47 (Türkiye, 2016)

¹⁸⁵ A/65/PV.14, p.6 (Argentina, 2010)

cultivating a functional, responsive global order. Firstly, the continued use of the veto contrasts strongly with this goal and is a clear barrier towards the Security Council being responsive. Secondly, the Security Council is widely seen as representing an exclusive group of actors which is not representative of wider interests. If these actors are unable to put aside their national interests in order to preserve common, global interests, and if there is insufficient overlap between the expectations of the P5 and the rest of the international community, then there is another barrier to responsiveness. These two underlying factors therefore limit the ability of the Security Council to meet expectations, limiting the responsiveness of the Security Council – at least for non-members of the P5 – and contributing to a responsiveness deficit¹⁸⁶.

Non-permanent members of the Security Council find it difficult to tolerate the elite status of a few actors who hold a monopoly over the fate of international peace and security, despite being unable to engage in good faith on this vital matter. Regardless of the criteria for this setup – whether they emerged victorious after the Second World War or because they are nuclear powers, and regardless of the political argumentation that some may use to defend this arrangement, the flaws are so glaring that at least the rest of the members of the G20 all agree on this point, generating more convergence amongst them than any other topic really. The table below demonstrates this widely held perception, outlining criticism that the configuration of the Security Council is out of date today.

Country	Year	Statement
Australia	1990	At the same time, we have to acknowledge that the world has changed since 1945 and that there will be increasing and legitimate pressure to ensure that the membership of the Council better accords with today's realities. ¹⁸⁷
Indonesia	1992	We believe therefore that the Security Council should be expanded to accommodate new members who, if they are not to be given veto powers, should at least serve as permanent members. They should join the Council on the basis of a combination of relevant criteria that more faithfully reflect the world situation today. That means that the criteria should also take into account the changing concept of security, which has now to emphasize the economic and social aspects as much as the military. ¹⁸⁸
India	1994	The present-day composition of the Security Council reflects the power balance of the immediate post-war period. Since then, the membership of the world body has increased many times over. ¹⁸⁹
India	1998	An international body that does not reflect, and change with, changing international realities will inevitably face a credibility deficit. [...] The Security Council does not represent contemporary reality; it does not represent democracy in international relations. ¹⁹⁰
Germany	2000	The Security Council no longer reflects the political reality of our world at the dawn of the new millennium. ¹⁹¹
Japan	2006	Perhaps a limited few may find it in their interest to leave the Security Council configured in the way it was in 1945. It is clear, however, that no one stands to gain from the waning credibility that failure to reform could entail. ¹⁹²
Brazil	2008	The United Nations has spent 15 years discussing the reform of its Security Council. Today's structure has been frozen for six decades and does not match the challenges of today's world. Its distorted form of representation stands between us and the multilateral world to which we aspire. ¹⁹³
Indonesia	2010	The Security Council must better reflect the contemporary world, not that of 1945. A more representative Council would be a more effective Council. ¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁶ See also Eriksen's valuable discussion on "organized hypocrisy" and the legitimacy of the Security Council (2023).

¹⁸⁷ A/45/PV.17, p.64

¹⁸⁸ A/47/PV.10, p.23

¹⁸⁹ A/49/PV.14, p.15

¹⁹⁰ A/53/PV.13, p.17

¹⁹¹ A/55/PV.14, p.17

¹⁹² A/61/PV.21, p.33

¹⁹³ A/63/PV.5, p.7

¹⁹⁴ A/65/PV.22, p.10

Germany	2012	It cannot be that Latin America and Africa have no permanent seats on the Security Council or that dynamic Asia has only one. That does not reflect the realities of today's world, and it definitely does not reflect the realities of tomorrow. ¹⁹⁵
South Africa	2014	We would like to see a more meaningful representation of Africa in the Security Council. About 70 per cent of the Council's agenda is taken up by issues from the African continent. ¹⁹⁶
Turkey	2016	A Council that does not represent the entire world can never serve to re-establish peace and justice around the world. That is something that we need to revisit over and over again. Can everyone think about that — three European countries, one country in Asia and one country, the United States of America, of course — five countries as the permanent seat-holders? What about the rest of the world? What about the other countries around the world? ¹⁹⁷

Figure 39 – Statements illustrating criticism of the UN Security Council for being outdated.

Commentary on behalf of the G20 members shows that beyond complaints about the lack of responsiveness in terms of results, complaints about a lack of representativeness are also prevalent. Perhaps, this particular case would indeed justify the criticism of outdated 20th Century arrangements in a 21st Century world as the Security Council is proving ill-suited to contemporary needs. This is more than a question of responsiveness but also a question of buy-in, and how this amplifies the responsiveness deficit. It is not only about results. The combination of a lack of results and a lack of representativeness, leads to a lack of trust and a lack of legitimacy in the eyes of contemporary international society¹⁹⁸. Again, this point is made frequently by governments throughout the years, who appear to accord a high degree of importance to this.

Country	Year	Statement
Australia	1994	If the United Nations decision-making bodies are to have legitimacy and guaranteed international support...they must be representative of the broad range of interests and perspectives of United Nations Member States. This is a key reason why enlargement of the Security Council's membership is a pressing concern for this General Assembly. It should be said, at the same time, that the Security Council's legitimacy will ultimately depend, not just on its representativeness, but upon the quality of its performance... ¹⁹⁹
India	1996	The Security Council must be made more representative in order to enhance its legitimacy and effectiveness. ²⁰⁰
Canada	1998	The Security Council remains at the centre of what the United Nations is all about: protecting against conflict and human risk. However, the Council's legitimacy is increasingly being questioned. To remain credible, the Council must re-examine traditional interpretations of its mandate. ²⁰¹
Indonesia	1998	The legitimacy , credibility and effectiveness of the Council's work depend on its representative character. ²⁰²
Mexico	1998	The Security Council needs to be reformed in order to strengthen its legitimacy , representativeness, effectiveness, democracy and transparency. ²⁰³
Brazil	2002	The Security Council needs reform in order to enhance its legitimacy and lay the foundations for more solid international cooperation in building a just and stable international order. ²⁰⁴
Türkiye	2004	The Security Council should have a more representative and balanced character; indeed, representation in the Council must be inclusive and fair. ²⁰⁵
Japan	2010	The role of the Security Council is particularly important for the United Nations to perform effectively in resolving global challenges. For the Security Council to be effective, it needs to have legitimacy and reflect the current realities of the international community. ²⁰⁶
Italy	2014	We all believe that the Council must be made more effective, representative, transparent and accountable to the members of the international community. ²⁰⁷

Figure 40 - Statements related to the lack of legitimacy of the UN Security Council.

¹⁹⁵ A/67/PV.15, p.16-17

¹⁹⁶ A/69/PV.8, p.13

¹⁹⁷ A/69/PV.6, p.47

¹⁹⁸ See also Binder and Heupel (2014)

¹⁹⁹ A/49/PV.6, p.12

²⁰⁰ A/51/PV.22, p.15

²⁰¹ A/53/PV.15, p.26

²⁰² A/53/PV.8, p.23

²⁰³ A/53/PV.8, p.10

²⁰⁴ A/57/PV.2, p.5

²⁰⁵ A/59/PV.8, p.24

²⁰⁶ A/65/PV.14, p.34

²⁰⁷ A/69/PV.9, p.37

A Crisis of Integrity

This situation is quite troubling, showing that the body charged with upholding a primary objective of global order lacks legitimacy. Indeed, arguably out of all the formal arrangements of contemporary order discussed so far, the Security Council is perhaps the one generating least buy-in and most contestation. Stewart Patrick goes so far as to assess that this “poses an existential threat to the long-term credibility and legitimacy of the world’s premier organ for international peace and security”²⁰⁸. Such concerns should not be taken lightly.

All these criticisms drive calls for reform of the Security Council, which, based on the sample of speeches covered in this study, hit their peak in 2022²⁰⁹. Of course, there is no quick fix or simple solution – there are so many pitfalls and so many possibilities for reform, keeping, limiting or removing the veto, adding more permanent members, accepting some but not others, and based on what criteria. But in the meantime, the Security Council continues to suffer on both criteria of functionality. Literature on the shortcomings of the Security Council and the need for reform abound²¹⁰. The findings and evidence being put forward here support previous contributions on the matter, showing that even amongst the G20 members the message is ‘enough is enough’. The current situation at least from the perspective of a functional global order is arguably untenable.

There is also a bigger picture here. Criticism regarding the veto, paralysis, a lack of effectiveness, and a lack of legitimacy points in the direction of a crisis of integrity. The Security Council, rather than being a guarantor of international peace and security creates an enabling environment for permanent members to take advantage of their privileged position. The Security Council provides cover for such actors when they themselves violate the rules of the game: accentuating their hard power advantage relative to other actors with an institutional advantage. This is an alternative take to the narrative of the West, the Rest, and the Global South, or developed and developing economies, but a question of the great powers against ordinary actors.

Making a similar point, Murithi²¹¹ assesses that “Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine is not a departure from this pattern but a continuation of the reign of the powerful over the less powerful.” He highlights that it is developing countries and the countries of the Global South, particularly in Africa that have suffered as a result of this disparity in status. This is a point alluded to by actors with varying

²⁰⁸ Patrick (2023)

²⁰⁹ Australia (2022, A/77/PV.5, p.38); Brazil (2022, A/77/PV.4, p.10); EU (2022, A/77/PV.10, p.20); France (2022, A/77/PV.4, p.49); India (2022, A/77/PV.12, p.53); Italy (2022, A/77/PV.5, p.57); Russia (2022, A/77/PV.12, p.46); Saudi Arabia (2022, A/77/PV.13, p.14); South Africa (2022, A/77/PV.7, p.37); USA (2022, A/77/PV.6, p.20-21)

²¹⁰ See for example: Slaughter (2000); and more recent takes by Lundgren and Klamberg (2022); Patrick et al. (2023); Hathaway, Mills, and Zimmermann (2024), as well as Hathaway and Patrick (2024). It is of note that many G20 members also have dedicated webpages to the topic of UNSC reform.

²¹¹ Murithi (2023) p.25

characteristics on a few occasions, and even if they avoid naming and shaming, the willingness to put forward such criticism shows that governments are clearly unsettled by this situation.

Going back to 1990 at the beginning of the sampled statements, Indonesia warned of the risks to the authority of the UN if “major powers, choose to act outside the ambit of the purposes and principles of the Charter”, a point returned to in 2008²¹² in the context of Georgia and Gaza. Argentina similarly refers to “a world of double standards – where only the developing and extremely weak countries are compelled to abide by the international legal order while those who can systematically violate it do so”²¹³. Meanwhile, the last edition of UNGA speeches sampled in this study was characterised by such remarks, amongst which Australia argued²¹⁴ that smaller actors should push back against a political climate where their influence is reduced to “supporting players in a grand drama of global geopolitics on a stage dominated by great Powers”, which is contrary to the ethos of sovereignty and “the very rationale for the United Nations itself”.

When presenting the collective vision of the new world order, governments converged upon two shared understandings which are particularly relevant to this criticism. Firstly, respect for the principle of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference, as the basis for peaceful international relations. Secondly, respecting the common language embedded in the UN Charter, and the rules-based relations that it promotes in the interests of international peace and security. These are key principles in the interests of an order that is responsive to the ultimate calling of international politics. Non-P5 states see their P5 counterparts as withdrawing from their responsibilities in this domain and indeed taking advantage of their privileged role.

In fact, these concerns have proven to be well founded. The US invasion of Iraq, Russia’s invasion of Georgia and the attempt to conquer Ukraine, reflect this approach, as does to a lesser degree China’s abrasive maritime territorial claims overlapping with those of the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, amongst others. Their diplomatic protection and support of proxies in the Middle East and Africa also enable conflicts which continue to this day at different levels – from Gaza, to Libya, to Sudan. Somewhat prophetically, France warned of this risk amidst calls for intervention without Security Council intervention in the Balkans – warning that “after this case there would be another exception, and then another. Little by little, any country would declare itself entitled to intervene wherever its interests, security or ambitions so required, and we would have to begin all over again”²¹⁵.

²¹² A/45/PV.5, p.73 (Indonesia, 1990; A/63/PV.14, p.16 (Indonesia, 2008)

²¹³ A/65/PV.14, p.7 (Argentina, 2010)

²¹⁴ A/77/PV.11, p.37 (Australia, 2022)

²¹⁵ A/53/PV.11, p.16 (France, 1998)

This closely reflects the mood in the room today. States are questioning the structure that they have built, opting out not by challenging the principles of order – but by turning inward, looking at their immediate allies, creating blocs, because they feel that on matters of international peace and security they cannot rely on the Security Council. The combined issues of a lack of responsiveness and an institutionalised class divide between countries unsurprisingly contribute to a strong sense of resentment and frustration against the Security Council.

Pragmatically, the inefficiencies of the Security Council could be overlooked if it was responding to the needs of international society at large, but to the contrary speeches from all sides of the G20 indicate a consistent, negative assessment regarding the responsiveness of the UN Security Council. It is considered to be paralysed and unable to respond effectively, appropriately, and quickly to international crises. It is considered to be both entirely unrepresentative of the contemporary distribution of power and responsive mainly to the needs and interests of an established, elite cartel of great powers.

Particularly given the intense focus on international peace and security, and the alarm generated by crises in this domain, the above argumentation all leads to the conclusion that a second driver of the current responsiveness deficit is the UN Security Council. Moreover, the Security Council is arguably the most apparent driver of a fully dysfunctional order – one which lacks buy-in, and which produces negative assessments of responsiveness. Contemporary order is premised on the basis of sovereign equality, yet the P5 benefit from a level of supra-equality and influence no other governments enjoy. They have also demonstrated their willingness to circumvent the rules of the game. This is indeed the paragon of a status-based critique and goes far beyond a question of *symbolic* status. It is a critique driven by Orwellian characteristics of the international system that have been ingrained within global order.

7.4: A Crisis of Great Power Policies?

The explanations discussed so far addressed three aspects of the responsiveness deficit. Firstly, a perception-based argument that the current sense of crisis is driven not necessarily by a worsening of the global situation but by elevated expectations. Secondly, an agency-based argument that the responsiveness deficit is driven by conscious policy choices by governments not to coact, alongside increased antagonism and competition over status within the system. Thirdly, an institution-based and norm-based argument that the responsiveness deficit is also driven by the shortcomings of the UN Security Council, and the guarantors of international peace and security themselves undermining the

principles and integrity of order. To some degree each of these explanations may be traced back to a constant system-level barrier to responsiveness: the constraints of anarchy.

In an anarchic system, it is idealistic to have high expectations of world politics. Governments may choose to coact, and they may collectively articulate shared expectations of behaviour, but they cannot be compelled to work together, nor can standards be universally enforced. From a traditionalist perspective, therefore, one may justifiably argue that such explanations stop short of the real issue at stake here, underplaying the role of power in international politics, under-appreciating how power influences agency.

In this section I therefore examine the responsiveness deficit through a broadly realist lens, borrowing the vocabulary of mainstream analysis regarding contemporary order, devoting more attention to power dynamics as an explanation for the current responsiveness deficit, and as a potential underlying cause of this partial dysfunctionality. Specifically, I examine three elements related to the relationship between the distribution of power and contemporary global order: hegemonic decline, multipolarity, and the role of the great powers in relation to responsiveness.

Hegemonic Decline and the Decline of Coaction

Going back to my introduction, I highlighted the intimate link between the post-Cold War order and the USA as a “benevolent hegemon”, utilising overwhelming power preponderance to bring stability to the international system together with its Western allies, adopting an approach to international relations prioritising cooperation ahead of coercion. In this vein, according to hegemonic stability theory, a responsive, functional global order was the result of the US serving as a provider of stability globally and as the engine of the coaction that I identified as a necessary component for a responsive order. Global order was responsive not because governments necessarily possessed the political will to coact or because interests aligned, but because the US was exerting cooperative or coercive encouragement upon governments to coact, and they complied willingly or unwillingly because the US was stronger than them.

Drawing upon the same theory, it holds that as relative US power declines, or Washington becomes less willing to bear the costs of leadership, the level of coaction also declines. This critique may also be extended in the opposite direction – hegemonic over-reach, where the US pursues policies which are unpopular internationally, even alienating allies and partners. Coaction is faltering not as a result of competition over status, antagonism, or declining political will, but rather as a result of a hegemon that

is either unable or unwilling to galvanise coercion. This is as much a responsiveness deficit as it is a leadership deficit, where the international system lacks a dominant actor to organise international politics, to absorb costs, where cooperation and coercion become harder to sustain, leading to a global order that increasingly lacks responsiveness, and which is increasingly dysfunctional.

The volume of the debate on the apparent decline of the US and the nature of American hegemonic leadership suggests that it is still extremely unclear as to whether the US has declined or withdrawn in any way²¹⁶. This ambiguity already undermines the argument that the decline in coercion is a product of hegemonic decline given that the notion of such decline is itself strongly contested. Admittedly, administrations may have sought to engage more selectively than previously²¹⁷. However from Bush to Obama, Trump to Biden and back to Trump – for all the claims of an American hegemon in decline, in practice the US has continued to wield influence as if it is a unipolar power. The US return as a pivotal actor in the Middle East during the second Trump term is a case in point. The question here is, after all, one of influence – the ability of the US hegemon to influence other actors, thereby stimulating coercion.

From the outset, this study embedded the notion of global order within the broader environment of the international system. In this regard, it would be somewhat naïve to act as if the US posture towards international affairs does not influence the stance taken by other countries. Clearly, a hegemonic power such as the US has enormous capacity to influence expectations, policies, and positions. This is not a point that could credibly be argued against. Nonetheless, while US power and willingness to engage undoubtedly matter, this explanation risks overstating the centrality of hegemonic influence in relation to the ability to generate coercion on matters relevant to the principles of global order. There is, in this respect, a need to clarify the extent to which this theory can explain the presence of successful coercion or lack thereof, particularly to avoid downplaying the autonomy and agency of other actors.

If coercion were primarily a function of hegemonic capacity to coerce, one would expect alignment to emerge whenever the hegemon engages to such ends and signals commitment to particular goals and interests. My data does not support this claim. I have already referred to the lack of support for liberal interventionism at a general level. Looking more specifically at the US invasion of Iraq in this respect, it becomes evident that even considering the wider backdrop of 9/11 which generated sympathy for the American public, the US could not generate global support for such a controversial policy. As the below data illustrates, even G7 and NATO allies such as France and Germany opposed this, as did their neighbour to the south, Mexico, amongst others.

²¹⁶ Cooley and Nexon (2020), Ikenberry (2022), Brooks and Wohlforth (2023)

²¹⁷ Löffmann (2024), Borzel and Risse (2024)

Country	Year	Statement
Germany	2002	What consequences would military intervention have? What would it mean for regional stability? What effect would it have on the Middle East conflict? Are there new, concrete findings and facts? Does the situation as assessed justify the taking of a great risk, namely, taking responsibility for peace and stability in the entire region for years or even decades to come?...In the face of these open questions, we feel deep scepticism with regard to military action and thus hold to our approach ²¹⁸ .
France	2004	In Iraq, violence is exploding...France, as everyone knows, did not approve of the conditions in which the conflict was unleashed. Neither today nor tomorrow will it commit itself militarily in Iraq ²¹⁹ .
Mexico	2002	Mexico believes that unilateral military action, taken without prior consultation with the Security Council, would undermine the foundations of the new architecture of international security and could affect the consensus in favour of the battle against international terrorism that followed the attacks perpetrated a year ago against the United States ²²⁰ .
Indonesia	2002	Any unilateral use of force risks not only undermining the authority of the United Nations, but would also carry the grave potential of destabilizing the immediate region, and indeed beyond, with its attendant humanitarian implications ²²¹ .

Figure 41 - Positions against US intervention in relation to the case of Iraq.

Certainly, this divergence may be representative of a particularly controversial aspect of US hegemony. Yet zooming out a little, longer-term interventionist policies did not gain sustainable traction either, generating further pushback. So much so, as I outlined earlier, in none of the UNGA sessions analysed in this study did more than five members of the G20 support policies of intervention. The point here is not simply to show the unpopularity of the position being pursued by the US, but more specifically the inability of the US to generate global support on a defining feature of their foreign policy and national security agenda.

Zooming out further, my findings regarding the visible cleavages highlighted earlier reflect a constant resentment against a hegemonic bloc, both in terms of the criticism posed by emerging powers against the developed Western economies in relation to economic development, as well as Russian and Chinese criticism in terms of Western policies in the Middle East. At least from the perspective of a vocal segment of G20 members it would be quite premature to speak of hegemonic decline – even more so if we look at the US together with its Western allies. Taking this a step even further, discourse in relation to hegemony indicates that this is not necessarily seen as a force for stability at all, the connotation – to the contrary – is that this may also be quite negative for global affairs.

²¹⁸ A/57/PV.6, p.17

²¹⁹ A/59/PV.7, p. 29

²²⁰ A/57/PV.5, p.23)

²²¹ A/57/PV.14, p.7

Country	Year	Statement
Türkiye	1996	The new expectations and hopes that the end of the cold-war era instilled in us all have, unfortunately, been short-lived. Indeed, such dark forces as extreme ethnic nationalism, aggression, hegemonistic tendencies, intolerance, racism, xenophobia and terrorism have been unleashed to wreak havoc on a global scale ²²² .
Saudi Arabia	2000	We hope that the United Nations will support us in standing against a globalization that results in the hegemony of the strong over the weak, increases the causes of the oppression and exploitation of nations, and fosters injustice and inequality in international relations ²²³ .
Brazil	2006	However strong they are today, rich countries should have no illusions: nobody is safe in a world of injustice. War will never bring security; it can only generate horrors, bitterness, intolerance and fundamentalism and create damage associated with hegemonism ²²⁴ .
Italy	2006	The old solutions to the world's problems — the logic of balance and hegemony — are no longer enough to guarantee stability and security ²²⁵ .
Russia	2016	Hegemony has no place in the future, if we want it to be a just future that gives people the opportunity to choose their own ways of development. That entails the need to learn to respect one's partners and respect the cultural and civilizational diversity of the modern world ²²⁶ .

Figure 42 - Statements regarding hegemony.

Regardless of hegemonic superiority, ultimately the pursuit of policies that were globally unpopular led to resentment and backlash against the US. It was not declining power that made the US less influential, but, to the contrary, hegemonic over-reach, leading to resentment²²⁷. In his argument that the Liberal International Order was ‘bound to fail’ Mearsheimer makes precisely this point²²⁸. Even Machiavelli, oft cited in defence of the concept that it is better to be feared than loved, warned that “above all else a king must guard against being despised and hated”²²⁹. Whether the US has declined to the point that its influence is substantially curtailed compared to previously is debatable. Perhaps of more significance, however, is how US decision-makers have opted to use such influence, transforming the US from a benevolent hegemon into a “predatory hegemon” – particularly under the second Trump administration²³⁰.

Taking these elements into consideration, I would advance a more nuanced position. Applying hegemonic stability theory appropriately requires some appreciation of the inter-play with the agency possessed by other states within the international system. Whilst US hegemonic behaviour may facilitate coercion, the withdrawal or decline of the US does not necessarily hinder coercion either. Indeed, more than a question of hegemony this is a question of the US administration’s political will to

²²² A/51/PV.15, pp.4-8

²²³ A/55/PV.15, pp.11-14

²²⁴ A/61/PV.10, p.5-8

²²⁵ A/61/PV.12, p.15-18

²²⁶ A/71/PV.17, pp.39-43

²²⁷ Rodman (2000)

²²⁸ Mearsheimer (2019)

²²⁹ Machiavelli (1513 original, 2014 Penguin Classics Edition) p. 64

²³⁰ Poast (2025); see also Walt (2026)

coact, the will to find common purpose with other actors, and the implications of how other actors perceive the USA, and how they position themselves regarding US policies.

In terms of hard power, the international system remains, to borrow Alcaro's terminology "US-centred"²³¹. In terms of soft power, however, the verdict is clearer. The variable that has changed is not America's place as the main pole in the system, but rather the mode of American engagement – exiting the era of the benevolent hegemon and ushering in a new era of US relations with the rest of the world. As compellingly argued by Nye throughout his writings on soft power and indeed, in his final critique of American foreign policy, it is not enough to have hard power alone²³². A hegemon that is largely disliked will ultimately see their influence diminish, finding it more challenging to build coalitions and to shape the international system to their liking – particularly a hegemon that attacks multilateralism. The difference in this sense, is possibly not a product of a decline in power but – put simply – a decline in likeability, and an increase in antagonistic attitudes towards the US.

Recalling Ikenberry's analysis again, it is worth underlining that the crisis of purpose is in-built within the inclusivity of order, even in a unipolar international system. Perhaps, a more compelling power-based explanation would be the related but distinct critique that the apparent decline in coaction reflects the structural transition from unipolarity to a more diffuse distribution of power. In focusing on hegemonic influence to generate coaction, there is a risk that such analysis falls into the trap of seeing global order as a Western-led construct, whilst downplaying the agency and perspectives of other actors. Whilst hegemonic leadership can be a significant factor to generate coaction and galvanise political will, it is the political will shared by a broader, global set of actors that is decisive.

Multipolarity

In this vein, it is appropriate to recall complementary literature on the concurrent 'decline of the West' alongside 'the rise of the Rest'. Accordingly, having addressed the potential implications of hegemonic decline on coaction, I now turn to the implications of the shift from unipolarity to some form of multipolarity. Of all the discussions covered in this study, this segment is perhaps the one that blurs the line most between global order and the international system. I open with systemic realist (traditionalist) argumentation before turning to a constructivist, agency-based (modernist) counter-argument, focusing on the interplay between systemic influences on the behaviour of rising powers and how these elements may influence coaction.

²³¹ Alcaro (2018) p.5

²³² Nye (2025)

The point of departure for this discussion is the widespread understanding that – short of a concert of powers – a multipolar system is generally considered to be less stable than a unipolar one. At face value, my findings would appear to broadly sustain this thesis, aligning with literature on the implications of fragmentation in international politics and the observation that the more competing interests, competing perspectives and competing influential powers there are, the more difficult it becomes to generate coaction, as actors pull in different directions. As the world has become more multipolar, coaction has become more difficult to sustain.

Even if one accepts that US hegemony is not vital to coaction, those who favour unipolarity ahead of multipolarity in the interests of a stable system may yet argue that under unipolarity, contemporary emerging powers may have been constrained or cautious in openly contesting dominant norms or expressing policies and national positions that may have been in competition with those of the dominant Western actors, other significant regional players, or fellow emerging powers²³³. On the most extreme end of the spectrum – potential spoilers with particularly divergent interests and perspectives from the US and the West would have been hesitant to openly promote such views – lest they face punitive measures for deviating from Western expectations²³⁴. These factors represented implicit incentives for governments to minimise differences, fall into line, mitigating spoiling behaviour, and thereby increasing the likelihood of coaction.

Continuing along this line of thought, what explains the lack of coaction today is not the emergence of antagonism and competition over status, but the removal of unipolarity as a constraint upon competing interests and antagonistic positions. As power and influence have become more diffuse, emerging powers and resurgent actors have sought to establish themselves as significant global players and regional poles in their own right. In this new context, such actors feel emboldened to defend their national positions more openly and strongly than they did previously, promoting perspectives on international affairs that they may have been apprehensive or hesitant to promote previously, due to the risk of pushback from the hegemon.

From this vantage point, one could argue that antagonism and competition were always present but suppressed. This argument advances the point of view that perspectives on global order have not become more divergent, governments have not become more antagonistic, nor are they involved in competition over status any more than before. In this sense, what I refer to as an evolution from a latent lack of political will to a benign lack of political will would be a misreading of the situation. What has changed is not the substance of the national positions and policies promoted by key players. Rather, the

²³³ Wohlforth (1999); Brooks and Wohlforth (2008); Jervis (2009)

²³⁴ Lake (2009)

structural, system-level environment has changed – and shifts in the distribution of power brought an already present antagonism to the surface more openly²³⁵.

Whilst much has been written about China as the long-term challenger against the US, this hypothesis is backed up most vividly by the case of Russia, which is more overtly portraying itself as balancing against the West. In this respect my findings also support this analysis to some degree. The discourse that I have presented throughout this chapter on behalf of Russia shows that antagonistic rhetoric is longstanding and prevalent. Russia has also been at the forefront of heralding the emergence of a multipolar system in their speeches at the UNGA. Moving from words to action, the invasions of Georgia (2008), annexation of Donbas and Crimea (2014), support for the Assad regime (2015), and deployment of the Wagner Group in Libya (2018), as well as the renewed invasion of Ukraine in 2022 lend credence to the idea that as a result of perceived Western decline, Russia may have calculated that the time was ripe to pursue its own course, and to challenge US/Western hegemony in Eastern Europe and the Middle East²³⁶.

With this example in mind, the logic of this explanation is quite straightforward. The responsiveness deficit is not simply the result of antagonism and status-based competition becoming prevalent, but at a deeper more structural level, the responsiveness deficit is the result of barriers to such antagonism and competition being removed, evaporating together with unipolarity. Unipolarity kept a lid on divisive behaviour, and enabled coercion. Such an argument captures a valuable dimension of systemic transition that informs our understanding as to why antagonism and division appear to have become so prevalent in contemporary international relations. My conclusion that the lack of coercion is driven in part by an increase in status-based competition implicitly supports this point of view given that such competition is a consequence of the shift in the distribution of power which presented an opportunity to compete over status.

Nonetheless, borrowing extensively from the constructivist logic employed by Wendt in his discussion on the “three cultures of anarchy” that may characterise the international system, I believe that this explanation is somewhat incomplete. Whether relations amongst states take on a Hobbesian, Lockean, or Kantian flavour is inherently contingent upon the prevalent practices pursued by the actors within the system²³⁷. Continuing with the example of Russia in this respect, the structural power transition may have altered Russia’s assessment of risk and reward, but the decision to pursue a foreign policy agenda defined by confrontation against the West rather than accommodation or cooperation remains a policy choice. In this respect, it is crucial to avoid conflating a situation where states are empowered to use

²³⁵ Schweller and Pu (2011)

²³⁶ Phillips (2022) pp.363; Trenin (2014); Cooley (2025)

²³⁷ Wendt (1999)

their sovereign voice, with a situation of inevitable antagonism, division and a lack of coercion, and in turn, a responsiveness deficit.

Even in an international system defined by antagonistic relations, a lack of coercion is not inevitable either. Competing perspectives, national positions, and interpretations of events on the one hand, and finding agreement on the other hand are not mutually exclusive. There is no automatism between antagonism, competition and an inability to find compromise or to coerce. Such an understanding of affairs would render the concepts of multilateralism and negotiations meaningless. International politics has always involved disagreement and antagonism. What has produced the contemporary responsiveness deficit is not the presence of divergence alone in this regard, but the unwillingness to translate disagreement into negotiated compromise on themes given particular prominence by governments, notably crises relevant to international peace and security, as well as international economic development.

An international system characterised by greater pluralism, where governments believe that they can defend their interests with less consequences than may have been the case previously does not automatically produce antagonism. After all, not all emerging powers adopt polemical, obstructionist positions, nor for that matter do they adopt policies that are necessarily contrary to those of the established powers or their competitors. This is because regardless of power dynamics, governments retain the agency to perceive the world around them through their own unique lens, to construct their own interests, interpretations of events, and to pursue cooperative or obstructive foreign policies.

Referring back to my findings related to prominent cleavages, it is of note that emerging actors do not necessarily take competing positions against each other, and they appear to restrict their focus to specific themes such as development, and double-standards. Inevitably, one questions why there isn't a wider lack of coercion across more domains in this respect. As demonstrated earlier on in this chapter, whilst China, Brazil, and India may be competing rising powers, their positions on development, criticism of the practices embarked upon by developed economies in this context, as well as in relation to double-standards are largely convergent. And whilst China sometimes backs up Russia in criticising Western 'adventurism', it has restricted the extent to which it can be seen in an antagonistic light²³⁸. Of course, Brazil and India are understandably more critical of the UN Security Council than China also.

The key take-away here is that ultimately governments choose whether they want to pursue an antagonistic, disruptive path or not: whether they adopt a culture of coercion. The question in this sense

²³⁸ This also corresponds with the previously cited study by Kaczmarek (2019), who finds that whilst Russia presents itself as a bulwark against the West, China seeks to cultivate a more 'suave' image.

is, why has Russia pursued this approach, in contrast to the competitive but less antagonistic approach pursued by other powerful, emerging actors? In my view, the answer to this is that embracing antagonistic politics and embarking upon a collision course with other actors was a policy choice driven by Russia's unique perception of the shift in the distribution of power. Certainly, the decline of the West and the emergence of rising powers may have expanded the opportunity space for antagonistic policies, competing visions of order, and to pursue divergent interests in relation to current affairs and crises – yet actors are not compelled to occupy such a space.

My reading of the evidence in this sense would be that coercion is dependent upon a combination of factors. Certainly on the one hand, systemic factors – the distribution of power, status-based competition, competing interests and competing perspectives. Nonetheless, on the other hand – and recalling my theoretical debate in the introduction and literature review – whether such system-level considerations translate into behaviour that obstructs coercion is dependent upon the political will to coerce. The convergence or divergence that may arise between clusters of actors is contingent upon their desire – their political will – to steer relations in such a direction.

Concluding this reflection on the matter, a shift from unipolarity to some form of polarity may have cultivated an environment conducive to a lack of coercion. However, while polarity and the distribution of power may shape incentives and national cost-benefit analyses, it does not dictate behaviour. I defer here to Wendt's ever-relevant dictum that anarchy is what states make of it. Global multipolarity and the emergence of several regional poles may broaden the spectrum of policy choices available to governments in this respect – but, fundamentally, governments retain the agency to compromise, coerce, and to produce a responsive order. The decisive factor goes back to coercion as a way of 'doing politics', and whether governments buy-in to this culture, whether they choose to interpret this increased room for manoeuvre opportunistically or collaboratively, as an opportunity to undermine shared rules, or an additional responsibility to uphold them. The responsiveness deficit, therefore, cannot be reduced solely to the distribution of power. It rests ultimately on the political will of governments to coerce — or their decision not to.

Global Order & The Tragedy of Great Power Policies

The logic that agency is the determinant factor in relation to the responsiveness of order regardless of hegemony, polarity and the distribution of power does, however, encounter an important challenge. It is undeniable that a recurring pattern throughout this study is that proclamations of an order in crisis tend to be the result of great power involvement in a conflict: from US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, to Russia in Georgia and Ukraine, from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to civil wars in the

Western Balkans, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, among others where the UNSC's role has proven ineffective. The discourse that I traced from optimistic transition, to interregnum, to pessimistic crisis is defined by such conflicts triggering concerns regarding some form of crisis. The data that I presented in relation to criticism of the Security Council is also dominated by expressions of concern and of frustration regarding great powers ignoring the preferences of others, using their vetoes to protect allies and partners who are violating the principles of order, or violating these principles themselves.

The consistency with which this theme features throughout my discussion raises an uncomfortable question. If the responsiveness of the principles of order depends upon the agency of states, is it in fact more specifically dependent upon the agency of the great powers? The question is not whether agency matters, but whose agency matters most. Do persistent negative assessments of responsiveness simply reflect the reality that when great powers pursue controversial or norm-violating policies, others lack the capacity to constrain them? In this reading, the notions of legitimacy and responsiveness are rendered largely meaningless, and the premise of functionality collapses into a familiar realist logic: global order reflects the preferences of the strong.

Such a critique finds support in well-established traditions of IR theory, where the mainstream view gravitates towards the understanding that global order mirrors great power preferences. "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must"²³⁹ – even more so in a global order where the recourse to address violations by the strong is through an institution controlled by them. From this perspective, responsiveness is less a product of upholding shared expectations of behaviour or pursuing shared aspirations, and more an extension of the great power behaviour – while the rest of the actors on the international scene are at their mercy. Again, it would be idealistic to reject this explanation outright. Great power violations undeniably strain global order and illustrate the potential hollowness of shared expectations and rules of behaviour that cannot be enforced. It would be ambitious to argue against the notion that the responsiveness of order is influenced more by the behaviour of the great powers, who are more likely to violate the principles of order, than others.

However, I again posit that there is an additional layer to this explanation. Turning to the English School, Hedley Bull assigns a "managerial role" to the great powers – however, this role is conditional. He adds important caveats; amongst others, the need for such powers to generate legitimacy, to avoid explicitly claiming spheres of influence, to seek to fulfil the demands of smaller actors, and to "avoid being responsible for conspicuously disorderly acts themselves"²⁴⁰. The great powers are not, in this sense, above international society but embedded within it, and their ability to derive the benefits of great

²³⁹ Thucydides (416 BC)

²⁴⁰ Bull (1977/2012) pp.220-222

power status without being confronted at every turn depends upon recognition and acceptance by others. Actors who abuse of their power do so at their peril, breeding resentment, increasing the reputational cost of unpopular policies, undermining this “managerial” status.

In an anarchic system, the responsiveness of principles lies not in their capacity to prevent violations, but in their capacity to provide shared standards that actors can invoke, defend, and mobilise when violations occur. In moments when such principles are violated, these principles remain responsive because they provide a method to counter such violations, and to pushback against the normalisation of such behaviour. The principles of order, after all, serve an organisational function – a means to an end – they exist to fulfil a purpose. And this is why treating global order as a collective endeavour, and not simply the playground of the great powers has added value. Whilst the weak suffer what they must, they may also defend their conception of acceptable international conduct, even without recourse to hard power.

As already discussed, it’s vital to differentiate between a crisis event and a crisis of order. Discourse referring to crises points audiences in the direction of what is causing distress, but crises are not by default an indication of a dysfunctional order. Wars, human rights abuses, humanitarian catastrophes, and other norm-violations are crises within the system. Crises are a regrettable but typical component of uncertainty, which is the primary characteristic of an anarchical system. A crisis of order, by contrast, would imply the erosion of shared expectations of behaviour, principles losing their legitimacy, and the disappearance of normative standards. The crucial point therefore, is not whether great powers violate principles, but how other actors respond to such violations, and if the principles of order themselves represent tools for such actors to uphold shared expectations and normative standards when faced with great powers who violate them.

While the functionality of order may be greatly influenced by the behaviour of the great powers, the legitimacy and responsiveness of order do not follow their lead alone. This would be contrary to the notion of collective authorship, and the view of global order as a collective endeavour. All importantly, other actors retain the agency to either endorse and follow the lead of the great powers, or to reject their approach. Empirically, my findings suggest that non-great powers do not respond with passivity. Trump’s criticism of the rules-based order prompted defence of this principle, including from American allies. Russia invading Ukraine prompted a defence of the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Policies embarked upon by both these actors exposed them to criticism of double standards and hypocrisy from other powers.

As exemplified in particular in the previous section on the crisis of integrity, my data shows that when great powers violate or challenge a principle of order, or when they render the UN Security Council

unresponsive, ‘middle powers’ and non-P5 members of the G20 do not watch on passively. Instead, such episodes generate widespread reaffirmation of the principles of order. These reactions indicate not acquiescence, but dissent against great powers abusing of their privileged role, highlighting how such policies diverge from the wishes of wider international society, the need for accountability, as well as the unsustainability of such behaviour. This is indicative of a policy decision on behalf of smaller powers to hold the major powers at least rhetorically accountable in such instances.

The notion of rhetorical accountability – or naming and shaming – is well established within scholarship on the interaction between norms and behaviour. Sikkink²⁴¹ notes that norms create “chains of legitimate expectations” serving as a platform for governments to name and shame other governments who violate such norms, and that such a practice can generate reputational costs even for powerful actors”. More broadly, Adler-Nissen²⁴² makes the point that “great powers, too, can become the objects of stigma when their actions are framed as inconsistent with shared norms”.

This links us back to the discussion on status as a social construct. Great powers may believe that they are above others who possess less material capabilities. Yet at the end of the day whether one is a benevolent hegemon, a superpower for hire, a responsible or revisionist power, and a pariah state is a socially constructed status. It is for this reason that great powers also feel compelled to publicly portray their behaviour according to norm-conforming justifications, scrambling to link their policies to the upholding of some form of rule or international law²⁴³ – whether it is preventing nuclear weapons in Iraq or Iran, or eradicating Nazis in Ukraine. Of course, rallying around a principle does not solve a crisis, end armed conflict, or reverse territorial conquest. Moreover, great powers – superpowers – might not care about how they are perceived: power trumps perception.

Nonetheless, the decision and follow-up action to publicly defend a principle when faced with great powers acting beyond the realms of what is considered to be acceptable behaviour demonstrates dissent with the policies pursued by the great powers, disagreement with how policymakers on behalf of such powers utilise their agency, and crucially, an attempt to hold such great powers accountable in the court of international public opinion. The principles of global order enable smaller powers to express such dissent. By calling out great powers, non-great powers identify them as disruptors and spoilers, not leaders – and more importantly they take on an important role of guarantors of order, utilising their agency to invoke the principle being challenged, and in turn to respond against the action challenging the principle.

²⁴¹ Sikkink (2011) p.210

²⁴² Adler-Nissen (2014) p.145

²⁴³ Hurd (2007) p.65

Even if the responsiveness does not contribute to results or provoke a change in behaviour, it is present and fulfils the function of an order oriented towards ensuring that shared expectations of behaviour are upheld. If responsiveness is understood as the ability of the principles of order to respond to the needs and interests of states, then violations do not indicate a lack of responsiveness on the part of the principles, but rather a challenge to these principles – which is why negative assessments of responsiveness are paired so frequently with accusations against other actors. By providing a hook through which smaller powers can hold greater powers accountable, the principles of order are nonetheless responsive to the needs of the smaller powers, who would otherwise be deprived of such a tool, the capacity to push for accountable great power behaviour, and to try to influence the agency of the great powers.

In a nutshell, if the responsiveness of organisational principles is understood narrowly as enforcement capacity, then global order appears to be frequently dysfunctional. This is particularly the case in terms of the pursuit of aspirational principles which are less prescriptive, and even more so in the domain of international peace and security, which often trumps other principles as an overriding concern and justification. If, however, the responsiveness of such principles is understood more broadly as the capacity to generate shared standards and mobilise collective dissent against violation, then responsiveness remains present even in moments when shared expectations of behaviour are disrespected.

Realist critics placing a premium on power alone may certainly brush off these considerations. Yet the power of such criticism is not abstract. Words may not be mightier than the sword, nonetheless, in the long run reputational damage takes a toll even on the most powerful of actors, making them less trustworthy, making it more difficult to build alliances, and more challenging to play a leadership role within the international system. In this vein, Buzan²⁴⁴ argues that “Great Powers are not above international society, their legitimacy depends on acceptance by other members”, and that such legitimacy is also conferred by other actors – it is not simply something they can claim for themselves. The resentment against the US and the perceived double-standards of the West that we have already discussed reflect how such legitimacy can erode over time, influence evaporates, and resentment accumulates.

With all this being said, I do not deny that great power behaviour profoundly shapes global order. The focus of my analysis on the G20 is in and of itself admission that the perspectives of some hold more weight than others, and this discussion is defined by references to shifting influence – an implicit

²⁴⁴ Buzan (2004) p.161, p.143

recognition that some actors have greater influence on the system and on the responsiveness of order compared to others. But global order is not reducible to the preferences of the great powers either. In this respect, whilst great powers may use their agency to violate principles and to act outside the boundaries of shared behavioural expectations, others may utilise their agency to defend such expectations.

Challenges to the principles of order do not show how they lack responsiveness. To the contrary, their core function is thrust into the spotlight and emphasised via the response to a violation. This is not an attempt to downplay the real implications of great power politics and policies on the responsiveness of order. Great powers may violate such principles, and global order may appear to lack responsiveness. However, smaller powers invoking the principles of order, identifying the great powers as violators of order, and defending the standard of order is evidence that the principles of order are fulfilling a vital function; enabling a response to departures from shared expectations of behaviour, and ultimately contributing to the mitigation of anarchy. Despite the inability to enforce compliance, non-great powers still retain authorship over the standard of order.

Hegemony, Multipolarity, and the Great Powers: Limitations of a Functionalist Approach

Concluding on this note, arguably an entirely separate thesis could be written on each of the dimensions discussed in this section. The relationship between hegemony, unipolarity, and multipolarity on the responsiveness of global order is not intrinsically new. Yet by consciously making a crossover between system-level and order-level domains rather than lumping everything into one box, there is scope to continue to enrich the conversation in a way that is more synchronised with contemporary realities – exiting a primarily Western worldview of what order should be, and applying such theoretical insight to understand how current power dynamics relate to a global order seen, by governments, as something collectively owned. Likewise, amidst a focus on great powers violating principles of order and discourse on double-standards, there is much that could be learned by analysing discourse specifically on behalf of smaller powers seeking to hold larger powers accountable in some way.

Indeed, this quite theoretical discussion on responsiveness reflects that the functionalist understanding of order put forward in this thesis also has limitations, and that such intricacies merit further analysis. An inevitable question arises in terms of the point at which frequent and consistent violations of global order and shared expectations of behaviour by the great powers are indicative of a breakdown of order, regardless of whether smaller powers seek to hold them accountable. How can a global order be

functional in terms of mitigating the uncertainty of an anarchic system if it is routinely violated and nobody can do anything about it? What is the value of global order, as a concept, if the principles of order do not actually constrain actors – if they are shared expectation of behaviour but expectations that can, for all intents and purposes, be ignored by the great powers? Perhaps an understanding of global order as an offshoot of the system would after all have more practical value.

That said, the foundations of this research are clear. I introduced the concept of global order as a construct embedded within the context of an anarchic international system, an attempt by states to mitigate anarchy. Outlining my functionalist understanding of order as a product of collective authorship and shared expectations of behaviour, I reasoned that global order cannot be considered simply as a reflection of the international system, nor the preferences of the great powers alone. For a global order to not represent disorder, it should be legitimate, generating buy-in, and it should be broadly responsive to states globally, not only the major powers. Nonetheless, I acknowledged that the order and the system are intrinsically linked, shaping each other, and shaping relations between states.

In this section I addressed three overarching claims – mirroring topics arising in the introductory discussion and the literature review – which I all acknowledge to some degree, with the caveat that there are limits to their explanatory value. In doing so, I have sought to bring the interplay between order and the system to the fore, incorporating power-based systemic explanations for the responsiveness deficit in a manner that contrasts with and complements the arguments put forth thus far. This discussion is perhaps also more theoretical than previous sections, nonetheless there are valuable insights that could be derived from the discourse that has been studied which speak to this dimension.

Beginning by applying Hegemonic Stability Theory to my findings, there is a case to be made that the lack of coercion causing the lack of responsiveness is due to the decline of US hegemony, which served as an engine driving such coercion. I challenge this assessment based on two main points. Firstly, the debate as to whether the US has declined is still very much inconclusive, which already counteracts this argument. I highlight moreover that discourse at the UNGA indicates that members of the G20 see the concept of hegemony negatively, and that many still resent what is perceived as a hegemonic bloc. Secondly, I refer to the case of Iraq, where – even in a moment of global sympathy – the US was unable to generate support and galvanise coercion neither in favour of the invasion of Iraq, nor interventionist policies.

Next, I addressed the assessment that the lack of coercion is not primarily due to an increase in antagonism per se, but rather due to the erosion of unipolarity and the emergence of a multipolar international system. In this sense, antagonism was always present, but its effects were contained by

unipolarity. Power diffusion may embolden rising states, intensify rivalry, and amplify competition over status or competing visions of order. Whilst highlighting that my argument related to competition over status sustains this overarching hypothesis to some degree I also underlined, however, that governments do not automatically pursue antagonistic relations, nor are they inherently unable to compromise and coact even in such circumstances. Whilst the system may incentivise and prod governments to act a certain way, they retain agency.

Finally, I turned to the viewpoint that the responsiveness of order is fundamentally dependent upon the behaviour of the great powers and their willingness to abide by the rules of the game. Here, I conceded that it is undeniable that great powers do influence the responsiveness of order, given their greater propensity to violate the principles of order. Nevertheless, I underscored that even amidst challenges that call into question their effectiveness – given that they cannot be enforced – the principles of order are nonetheless effective by providing a platform for smaller powers to express dissent with disorderly behaviour, and a method through which such actors may still seek to uphold shared standards of conduct. Essentially, responsiveness – and thus functionality – are outcomes of agency.

7.5: Concluding Remarks – The Responsiveness Deficit Explained

This chapter represents an investigation as to why states consider that contemporary global order lacks responsiveness, as well as a discussion on the drivers of this responsiveness deficit. Utilising the perspectives of G20 members to inform this analysis, I have focused primarily on three themes that stand out from their speeches: the notion of an outdated order; a lack of political will coupled with antagonistic rhetoric, as well as their heavy criticism of the UN Security Council. Corresponding to each of these themes, I proposed three potential explanations as to why contemporary global order may be experiencing this responsiveness deficit. I labelled these explanations as a ‘crisis of expectations’, a ‘crisis of coaction’, and a ‘crisis of integrity’. This concluding segment thus wraps up my thoughts on these potential explanations.

Building on the key take-away from my findings in the previous chapters that expectations of governments are not being met, I initially framed the chapter according to a logic of supply and demand. In this respect, I turned my attention to the recurring perspective that the arrangements of contemporary order are outdated – that the principles of a global order born in the 20th Century, almost 100 years ago,

are unable to cope with the demands and requirements of a 21st Century world. The world changed, the global distribution of power changed, but the structure remained the same. It would appear then that the supply of order cannot meet the demand of order.

Referring to orthodox understandings amongst researchers in the field of global order, I countered this with the argument that perhaps an element of expectation management is appropriate. I recalled that the thicker, more ambitious a normative order is, the less attainable it becomes. I also cited several achievements across domains, including peace and security and development since the end of the Cold War, making the point that in fact there have been tangible results registered. However, mirroring findings in the previous chapters, I noted that affairs appear to have taken a turn for the worse over the past decade. Furthermore, I recalled that it is not as if the maintenance of global order has been outsourced and states lack autonomy. I recalled that global order remains state centred. States have agency, and the trajectory of international affairs is still shaped primarily by the behaviour of states themselves. The issue is that the expectations outlined by states are not backed up by their behaviour. I therefore discarded this explanation as surface-level insight, classifying this as a crisis of expectations.

On this note, I proposed that a primary driver of this responsiveness deficit is a crisis of coaction. Contemporary order relies upon states dedicating their agency towards coaction, working together driven by common interests to generate collective action. It appears that a ceiling has been reached in this regard. States repeatedly highlight the importance of political will in their speeches, notably in the context of common challenges absent common solutions, as well as in relations to concerns of a crisis of multilateralism. I argue that governments are talking the talk but not walking the walk: they fail to convert their buy-in and commitments into tangible action due to a lack of political will to do so.

Here, I drew a distinction between a benign lack of coaction as opposed to antagonistic lack of coaction. The former can be understood in terms of a combination of factors arising out of complacency. I defer in particular to well established research on the pitfalls of multilateralism, together with Ikenberry's assessment that contemporary order is experiencing a "a crisis of purpose", highlighting that given the premium placed on the inclusiveness of global order encapsulating so many actors and diverse interests, that inevitably this comes at the cost of finding unity of purpose. I thus focused more deeply on the antagonistic lack of coaction, as a manifestation of a deliberate unwillingness to coact.

I posit that what is driving this lack of political will is an increase in division and antagonism within contemporary international society. The high degree to which accusations are made by governments against other governments is indicative of a spirit quite opposite to a collaborative one, shaming each other, blaming each other. Such accusations are indicative of an antagonistic, confrontational, and

divided international society. Furthermore, the increase in references to a sense of division alongside references to a sense of crisis from 2014 onwards appears to sustain this line of thought, with governments themselves increasingly concerned by this phenomenon.

My findings strongly support literature on the implications of an increasingly politically fragmented international society. I identify three sets of cleavages in this respect which are indicative of status-based competition driving this lack of coaction. This is demonstrated at a general level via the different perspectives amongst segments of actors in terms of the promotion of development and international security. Additionally, dovetailing with an increasingly in vogue body of research today, I also cite a troubling genre of accusations relevant to the schism between the G7 family, Russia, and China, which appears to support worries about a re-emerging cold war amongst the great powers.

Supporting analysis on this topic, I argue that this antagonistic behaviour reflects an attempt to renegotiate power. Emerging powers employ abrasive, accusatory rhetoric, and make use of narratives which draw upon sentiments of resentment so as to amplify differences with established actors – spinning narratives that amplify existing cleavages. They promote such narratives as part of a strategy, both to further their particular interests and ideological viewpoints in the context of a subject, as well as to establish themselves as a reference point in relation to topics of interest to them, positioning themselves as systemically significant actors in that context. This in turn raises their profile and enhances their status within the international system.

The essential caveat here is that this takes place within the confines of global order. I thus agree with the school of thought that despite the general sentiment of some sort of crisis, this is not a crisis of order but a crisis *within* order. Taking this further, I contend that to the contrary, we are experiencing a situation where systemic characteristics that blossom in an anarchic environment have indeed been broadly contained by the generally accepted rules of the game, and this speaks to the resilience of contemporary order. Here I go back to the point on the added value of the collective authorship that underwrites the organisational dimension of global order. I conclude that while the inclusiveness generated by such collective authorship and global buy-in comes at the cost of responsiveness, this is a fair price to pay in the interest of constraining anarchic characteristics of the international system, and the anarchic factors influencing relations amongst states.

Building on the criticism of outdated principles, the division and antagonism amongst the great powers, and illustrating the significance of status-based competition I shifted the discussion towards the UN Security Council as a microcosm of these three observations, and as another driver of the responsiveness deficit in and of itself. What often seems to trigger governments to warn of a crisis situation are challenges in the realm of international peace and security; scenarios in which the UNSC has a unique

role. However, the UNSC is perhaps the most frequently criticised component of contemporary order, due to perceptions of paralysis, division, and a lack of effectiveness particularly due to the use of the veto: symptoms of an inability of the P5 members to coact with each other in the global interest.

Furthermore, the use of the veto accentuates criticism against the Security Council resulting from a perceived lack of representativeness. There is a class divide between the permanent members of the UNSC and the rest of international society, which feels marginalised. This goes back to a question of status. The Security Council reflects an institutionalised inequality and creates a disparity in influence. A predominant view amongst members of the G20 in this regard is that the UNSC responds to the interests of its permanent members, meaning that the responsiveness of the UNSC is inherently limited. Additionally there is a feeling that the Security Council is almost creating an enabling environment for the great powers to abuse of their position. These findings and arguments support previous literature on the topic, representing a sustained interrogation of the Security Council's role from the perspective of a dysfunctional global order today.

Finally, I turned to more conventional power-based arguments to explain the responsiveness deficit. I first considered whether the lack of coercion today may be a product of hegemonic decline. Here, considering the very inconclusive debate and evidence regarding US decline, in terms of power and influence, as well as the risk of overstating the American hegemonic ability to generate coercion, I argued in favour of a more nuanced position that perhaps of more significance is the decline in American likeability and the increase in negative attitudes towards the US, whilst concluding that – in any case – it is the political will of international society that is decisive, not the US alone. I then examined the argument that responsiveness has eroded because unipolarity kept a lid on the antagonism that accompanies multipolarity. My argument that the current lack of coercion is a result of status-based competition supports this perspective to some extent. Nonetheless, I highlight limitations, arguing that even if one were to accept the premise that antagonism is inevitable, there is no automatism between antagonism and the inability to coact.

Going back to the recurring proclamations of crisis overlapping with conflicts where great powers are involved, I also considered the argument that perhaps while the responsiveness of global order is dependent upon the agency of states, it is – more specifically – dependent upon the behaviour of the great powers, given their tendency to violate the principles of order. Though I argued that such principles are nonetheless responsive because they provide smaller states with a platform to contest disorderly conduct and uphold shared standards of behaviour, I also acknowledged that this analysis exposes the limitations of my functionalist understanding of order.

Through this exercise I have sought to explore prominent potential drivers of the current responsiveness deficit that characterises contemporary global order, based on the main themes emerging from official discourse at the UN General Assembly by the members of the G20 over the past three decades. Given the nature of the evidence being used, which reflects the perspectives, narratives, and opinions of such actors, I would say that my analysis is quite exploratory simply because I have not analysed real world events, but perspectives regarding real world events. This is a limitation of constructivist, English School research. On the other hand, I believe this discussion also shows clearly that at the end of the day order is what states make of it – both in terms of the capacity to shape order as well as their eminent capacity to form unique perspectives on the subject.

Wrapping up this segment, the different factors outlined throughout my analysis take us back to the original discussion in the literature review as to what global order really means. The interplay between the organisational dimension and the anarchical dimension of international politics is omnipresent throughout this chapter. It is all well and good for states to agree upon certain principles, to express their buy-in and support for them and to try to organise their relations according to shared understandings of how things should be done. But at the end of the day, how the organisational arrangements manifest in the real world depends upon the willingness of states to bring them to life, to promote them, defend them, or update them – and their ability to work together in this endeavour, to coact in the interests of a functional order. Achieving a higher level of responsiveness depends on the willingness to coact. Certainly, if there is a (political) will there is a way.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This concluding chapter wraps up my research project, bringing together the main components of this study. The first half of the chapter focuses on the framing of this study, and how this sets it apart from prior research. I open by briefly re-outlining the motivation for this study, recalling *what* I investigated – the functionality of contemporary global order. I discuss *why* this topic is relevant, highlighting the context of contemporary international politics, and the lack of research on this particular theme. I then move on to *how* I investigated this, the methods employed in this analysis with a focus on the members of the G20, and the utility of studying speeches delivered at the annual UN General Assembly Debates. Whilst stressing the added value of this project through the use of this framing and the data gathered, I also touch upon the limitations and shortcomings of this endeavour.

In the second half of the chapter I concisely summarise how this research brings added value to the discipline. Here, I dedicate particular attention to three contributions. Firstly, I advocate once more in favour of my functionalist understanding of order, a conceptual contribution underscoring how my proposal builds on existing theoretical understandings and adapts them into a more practical framework. Secondly, I sum up my findings and the basis for my claim that contemporary order is partially dysfunctional, referring to the data indicating consistent buy-in contrasted with a responsiveness deficit. Thirdly, I recapitulate the potential explanations as to why there is this perceived lack of responsiveness. I close with brief remarks on the implications of this research, suggesting avenues that can take this field of study further.

8.1: Framing

When this study was conceived, the world was in some ways quite a different place. Over the past five years, short-term shocks to the international system collided with longer term trends. The diffusion of power became more pronounced. On the most high-profile issues, international cooperation floundered. The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed the warnings that far from united nations lay a world of every nation for itself¹. Wars have become prevalent again. The disjointed and contrasting reactions to Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine, Israeli aggression throughout the Middle East, and the situation in Gaza betrayed a polarised world. The civil war in Sudan continues in the background, alongside several other crises throughout the African continent, largely unaddressed. Even before the re-election of Donald Trump to the Whitehouse, governments were rethinking the assumptions that

¹ Bremmer (2012)

guided their behaviour since the end of the Cold War. In many ways, the uncertainty highlighted in the introduction became more vivid, further accentuating the validity of the research question at the core of this study: is contemporary global order dysfunctional?

Thus, this study is firstly relevant because of the context in which it is being put forward. As a departure point, I opened the study with a retrospective look at the vision of the New World Order proclaimed in 1990, outlining some of the positive trends that characterised international politics in the post-Cold War era. I contrasted this with the heightened uncertainty that characterises international politics today. In truth, perhaps this needed little introduction. Over the past decade or so the topic of global order has surged to the forefront of IR research, propelled by a widely shared sentiment that contemporary order is in 'crisis'. Considering the relentless unpredictability and the rhythm of uncertainty that has taken hold of global politics, it seems that research on different facets of contemporary global order will remain popular and relevant for the foreseeable future.

As I elaborated upon in the literature review, it is widely held that the root causes of this uncertainty are a product of a transition at the level of the international system from unipolarity to some other form of polarity. Scholars highlight in particular a general trend towards fragmentation – a diffusion of power and influence, accompanied by a diffusion of interests and ideologies. These issues are not new. However, today, with a redistribution of power across 'the West and the Rest' influential global and regional stakeholders interact with each other on a more level playing field than before.

The general school of thought here is that with different actors pulling in different directions, due to their relative parity this leads to an impasse. Additionally, research suggests that this impasse is exacerbated by a parallel trend whereby global order is challenged both from the 'inside' and the 'outside'. Significant Western actors who helped shape contemporary order are now challenging principles previously characterising their foreign policies, whilst simultaneously, emerging revisionist powers never bought into these principles in the first place.

Prior research and explanations on what might be going wrong is admittedly strong. There is already a generous academic conversation on the general sense of uncertainty defining global affairs. Contributing insight of added value to the debate is not necessarily an easy feat. Nonetheless, by appropriately orienting this study towards addressing specific deficiencies within this body of research, I would argue that make I quite a unique contribution to the discipline through this analysis. In this respect, apart from my findings, observations, and the analytical arguments that I put forward, two notable components set this study apart: at the conceptual level, and the methodological level.

8.2: Conceptual Contribution

Firstly, looking at the totality of research on contemporary global order, it is clear to me that the topic is still maturing as a niche subject in its own right. Often, analysis on ‘order’ at the global level is still very much in the shadow of the ‘system’ and there is still a tendency to use terminology interchangeably. As a result, it is frequently quite unclear what exactly the crisis of order being discussed relates to. To grow, the order must be separated from the system more explicitly and consistently in academic research. To this end, while focusing this study on the functionality of contemporary global order, as an avant-garde lens through which to study the subject, I also used this space as an entry point to explore the relationship between order-level and system-level arrangements on the functionality of order, putting forward my understanding of this relationship.

The recurring usage of such a framing by UN Secretary General Guterres in recent years, describing the current situation as “dysfunctional”, is in and of itself quite intriguing. Considering the colloquial understanding of the term this seemed to me to be a prudent concept to explore in relation to the state of contemporary global order and to apply this concept academically. However, as I noted in the literature review, it became apparent that apart from a brief reference by Ikenberry, this concept was almost entirely overlooked in prior literature. Considering this gap, my analysis clearly distinguishes itself from previous research and represents an innovative angle from which to assess the state of contemporary global order.

The first major contribution of this study is therefore a conceptual one – putting forward a “functionalist” understanding of global order, and an accompanying framework to understand if order is functional or dysfunctional. Though this is a fairly novel endeavour, the proposal that I outlined built on previous ideas. At the most basic level, this arises from the very concise remarks put forward by Ikenberry that functionality is “the ability of an international order to solve problems that states want solved...a question about the practical capacity of an international order to get things accomplished”². Amidst the debate contrasting the descriptive and normative viewpoints on whether order is simply a pattern or a pattern of a particular sort, more and more researchers agree that today it is the latter.

On the one hand, it is eminently visible that states possess the ability to coact with each other if they so which, contrary to the views of traditionalists. On the other hand, scholars increasingly agree that there is a certain expectation for a level of order today that goes beyond predictability in international affairs and in the direction of managing behaviour amongst states based on agreed arrangements, norms, and

² Ikenberry (2014) pp.102-103

rules, and facilitating cooperation amongst states in pursuit of common interests³. Considering the existence of such expectations, I suggested that another way of understanding the concept of international order is according to the logic of supply and demand, with a demand from states for a certain type of order matching their interests and concerns⁴.

In this vein, based on the recurring dilemmas discussed in relation to the nature of order I argued that the demand is two-fold. Firstly, states demand a certain supply of arrangements which are responsive to their expectations in the sense that they reflect their preferences of how relations amongst themselves ought to be organised. Secondly, states also demand a supply of arrangements which are responsive to their expectations in the sense that they are capable of producing results according to their needs and interests. I therefore proposed that we may assess the functionality of global order according to two criteria: buy-in and responsiveness.

Buy-in relates to the ability of the arrangements organising relations amongst states to generate endorsement: if they are supported or contested, reflecting expectations of how relations ought to be organised – whether supply is tailored towards demand in the first place. Responsiveness relates to the ability of the arrangements organising relations amongst states to deliver results. Or rather, if they are perceived to be delivering results: if they are meeting expectations in terms of tangible deliverables – whether supply is meeting demands in terms of addressing the needs, interests, and aspirations of states. In short, functionality may be defined as follows: the ability of the arrangements of global order to generate buy-in on behalf of its members and to be responsive to their expectations, needs, and interests. The question then is which arrangements should meet this threshold.

Here, I acknowledged that though the international *system* remains anarchical, states actively work together to shape policies in the interests of organising relations amongst themselves within this anarchical context. In this respect I proposed that the arrangements shaping relations amongst states may be understood according to two dimensions: the organisational dimension and the anarchical dimension. Whereas the former arrangements are the product of some degree of agreement amongst the members of contemporary order – products of “collective authorship” – the latter are not. The anarchical dimension reflects systemic arrangements that influence relations amongst states in parallel to the collectively authored organisational arrangements of order. Placing emphasis on whether arrangements are the products of collective authorship or not cuts through the noise of whether an arrangement is meant to contribute to order or not.

³ Mearsheimer (2019) pp.9-11; Sorensen (2006) p.344; Bull (1977); Wendt (1992)

⁴ Sorensen, (2006) p.344

In this regard, the organisational dimension can be visualised according to two categories of formal arrangements: ordering principles, and aspirational principles. Ordering principles refer to common understandings on how relations among states within an international order should be organised, setting out widely accepted expectations for how these states should behave, establishing widely held parameters within which and through which states are expected to engage with each other. Meanwhile, aspirational principles refer to shared aspirations that states within an international order widely subscribe to, common objectives which they agree that their behaviour should be oriented towards achieving. The former directly set out agreed upon expectations for how states should behave, whereas the latter imply that states would behave in a certain way in the interests of widely agreed upon aspirations and desired achievements. Then, there is the anarchical dimension populated by systemic characteristics, referring to the prevalent features of international politics which contextualise and influence relations amongst states.

The purpose of differentiating between the organisational and anarchical dimensions of the arrangements shaping relations amongst states is not simply a theoretical exercise – there is a very practical purpose. By drawing a line between the organisational and anarchical forces influencing relations amongst states – the arrangements that are a product of collective authorship and those that aren't – it is possible to identify which type of arrangements should meet the criteria of buy-in and responsiveness, and which should not be expected to meet this threshold. A functional global order is an order where the ordering principles and the aspirational principles are both legitimate and responsive. A dysfunctional order is one where these criteria are not met, and a partially dysfunctional order is an order where levels of buy-in and responsiveness are more mixed.

With all this being said, I concede that this is a fairly simple conceptualisation of order. At the same time, my aim was not to put forward something with predictive qualities, but to propose a framework through which one may understand the different forces influencing relations amongst states, with an emphasis on what to look for to assess if global order is dysfunctional. Though imperfect, this proposal represents a first foray into the subject of the functionality of order, and considering the gap in prior research on the theme, I would argue that this tangibly contributes towards elevating the state of the art.

8.3: Methodological Contribution

As I highlighted early on, this project reflects my affinity towards a Constructivist and English School approach to global order – prioritising the agency of states and the perspective that ultimately 'order is what states make of it'. In this respect, it does seem as if despite acknowledging the diffusion of power, influence, and interests characterising the contemporary system, the voices of key stakeholders beyond

the usual suspects are a little subdued in previous research. Most analysis tends to focus on the US, China, the BRICS, whilst marginalising other actors. As I noted in the introduction, Acharya and Hurrell – two heavyweights in the field – both suggest that analysis on contemporary order should follow a more global approach, incorporating the viewpoints and preferences of diverse actors.

Secondly, then what sets this research apart more than my somewhat puritan approach to global order is how I investigated whether global order is dysfunctional: the actors under the spotlight and the data being utilised. I followed an inclusive approach focusing on the members of the G20, thereby structuring this study around a group of influential governments from around the world, beyond the usual interest which is concentrated upon a smaller group of actors. Instead, my analysis reflects a diversity of political viewpoints, geo-strategic interests and ideological affiliations. From Mexico and Argentina, to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia. This inclusive approach was not simply a question of framing the study differently for the sake of being different, but in the interests of generating new knowledge by incorporating a wider sample of actors, in turn contributing to a more rounded, comprehensive understanding of how significant stakeholders perceive the evolution of international politics, as well as their attitudes and sentiments towards the arrangements of contemporary order.

Alongside this wider-than-usual sample of actors, I also harnessed the potential of the largely under-researched UNGA speeches as deep vessels of political discourse in order to capture how these governments perceive international politics, focusing on their views and appraisals of global order. Of particular value, the fact that UNGA speeches are open to all UN members and delivered yearly enabled my study to incorporate a longer timeframe while ensuring a consistency of information. The depth and nuance of information and the value of being able to derive data about how states perceive global order straight from their political leaders is, I believe, ably demonstrated in my findings. In this respect, this study represents a vote of confidence in the utility of researching political discourse on behalf of states in order to gain insight into how they perceive the world around them.

All in all, the data and evidence that I present in my findings and arguments in the latter chapters demonstrate the value of this approach and should be of encouragement to others to pursue similar methods. The content itself is rich in information, reflecting a multi-decade global conversation amongst the main stakeholders themselves regarding how they believe international relations should be organised, on the principles of contemporary order, and what seems to be going wrong – in a manner that, arguably, few previous studies have been able to capture.

8.4: Findings & Key Arguments

The Partially Dysfunctional New World Order

I emphasise the value of how I framed the study because the combination of these two elements provided strong foundations for a project that can produce results and findings that seriously enhance our understanding of contemporary order. The first notable result here is that there are clearly discernible principles of order that the governments of the G20 members refer to time and time again without fail over the course of more than thirty years. The first deliverable in this respect was the set of principles of the post-Cold War order that I identified, based on the speeches on behalf of the G20 members in the 1990s.

To briefly recap, I outlined a set of ordering principles – a way of doing things, or a *modus operandi*, that governments have widely signed up to, around which they organise relations between themselves: multilateralism, rules-based international relations, the principle of sovereignty, and the primacy of the United Nations as the catalyst bringing the major arrangements of order together. I also identified a set of aspirational principles: the promotion of international peace and security within which counter-terrorism and non-proliferation also feature; the promotion of development - including economic liberalism and sustainable development; and the promotion of human rights and of democracy.

Having defined the principles of the post-Cold War order, or the New World Order, I next answered the research question of whether contemporary global order is dysfunctional. Here, I argued that contemporary global order is partially dysfunctional. On the one hand, I put forward the claim – based on my evidence – that the principles of contemporary order have generated consistent buy-in. Perhaps this is not too surprising, after all the core elements of this order are designed to be inclusive: multilateralism, the UN, sovereignty all establishing some form of level playing field and likewise the idea of a rules-based order, and the shared pursuit of peace and prosperity. Many have written about a post-Western global order, but this order was designed to be post-Western. The principles are ultimately attractive, appealing and notwithstanding a few exceptions, most notably China's views regarding human rights as a form of interference, there is recurring support for these principles.

On the other hand, I argued that there is an evident, palpable sentiment that these principles are lagging behind in terms of the responsiveness criterion. I classified this as a responsiveness deficit. Governments feel that these principles are not responding to their needs, interests and expectations. Beyond frequency-based data, I also drew upon their commentary and assessments regarding the state of global order to substantiate this claim. Recalling the chapter on the *interregnum* of order, I outlined

how an initially optimistic sense of transition gave way to a more pessimistic sense of crisis, driven in particular by the notion that events were simply unfolding too quickly for international policy to keep up. To some degree this is quite a literal reflection of a lack of responsiveness. On this note, I highlighted a drawn-out inflection point which corresponds roughly to the 2012-2018 period, during which the state of affairs deteriorated markedly.

I further underscored that what is particularly notable – apart from the persistent sentiment that expectations are not being met – is that there is indeed a palpable sense of crisis even amongst governments. My findings show that in parallel to the academic debate that has been ongoing, governments have been holding the same debate themselves quite openly. However there is a key difference between the direction of my research, and a dominant assumption that conditions previous studies. Concerns are rife that global order as we know it is changing towards something unknown, with some proclaiming the demise of contemporary order, propelled by revisionist powers. Perhaps, such conclusions have been reached too hastily.

In this sense, I argued that in fact there is no evidence of a critical mass of great powers or any group of countries seeking to upend contemporary order, rather it seems that they want to improve it and fix particular deficiencies, particularly those related to the responsiveness deficit. I propose that this responsiveness deficit reflects dissatisfaction on behalf of these actors, who perceive – rightly or wrongly – a lack of results, and who feel that their expectations are not being met. But I do not concur that this is a challenge against the principles of order from within, or a challenge from emerging powers from the outside. It isn't a legitimacy problem but a responsiveness problem. That being said, this responsiveness deficit should not be downplayed, and it is nonetheless indicative of a crisis of sorts. In this vein, I discussed three potential explanations for this trend lack of responsiveness.

Explanations: A Crisis of Coaction & A Crisis of Integrity

I initially entertained the possibility that this responsiveness deficit is the product of outdated principles, which is a recurring theme. However, I argue against this. The principles of order are not autonomous, and they are not forced upon states. They have the agency to shape them, reform them, improve them or discard them. The problem seems to be that often the principles of order are treated as some form of *deus ex machina* which simply create solutions to common problems without the necessary political investment, particularly the ordering principles. Certainly, expectations are not being met – but I put forward the counterpoint that perhaps the crisis is that expectations are too high. Considering the broad set of organisational principles from the UN, sovereignty, multilateralism, rules, to the promotion of

security and development, it is arguable that these have had a credible baseline level of success. The negative assessments become prevalent only in the last decade or so.

In my view the more compelling explanation is that the uncertainty we are experiencing is the product of a crisis of coercion. The problem is that by their very nature the way that the principles of contemporary order materialise is dependent upon the willingness of states to coerce. In addition, they are oriented towards inclusiveness and generating legitimacy, rather than efficiency and responsiveness. However, coercion is stifled by a lack of political will amongst the great powers as this inclusiveness comes at the cost of responsiveness. To a certain degree, it could be said that this is an in-built flaw, within the make-up of contemporary order. Thus, I expressed support for Ikenberry's analysis that this is a crisis of success, as well as the arguments that contemporary order has self-limiting characteristics.

In this respect, I argue that the root cause of the lack of responsiveness is political. Though it is quite normal for there to be significant inefficiencies in multilateral processes, and it is to be expected that there are certain diverging interests these are somewhat benign explanations. Instead, I argued that the factor driving this lack of coercion is somewhat more sinister. Citing the high rate of accusations made by actors against each other, I put forward the claim that contemporary international relations is characterised by a strong degree of antagonism as well as fragmentation, supporting the two main themes characterising prior research.

Here, firstly, I cited the awareness amongst stakeholders themselves, recognising that they are increasingly divided. Secondly, I pointed towards two particular strands of accusations which indicate the presence of two particular cleavages and potential underlying motivations for this division. At one level, the high rate of accusations made by the global south against the established economies in relation to economic and development issues. At another level, I cited the accusations and the rhetoric between G7 members, Russia and China in relation to security issues and broader principled views on the way the principles of global order are sometimes flouted – American exceptionalism, and interference in the Middle East. Both of these issues dovetail with claims of double standards, reflecting resentment relevant to these particular domains.

While the ballpark objectives may be the same and the principles organising relations amongst states are supported, governments appear to deviate from each other in terms of how these principles should be pursued or implemented. I expressed agreement in this sense that this is ultimately a question of status and anarchic influences, notably a deterioration in relations. Significant stakeholders are locked in a battle to control the narrative of affairs in certain domains, they are seeking to enhance their status by positioning themselves as champions of particular causes which are rooted in a sense of resentment and inequality, amplifying grievances – but crucially they are doing so within the confines of order.

Indeed, a prevalent strategy is to criticise others for pursuing policies that stray away from common standards of behaviour, whilst coming to the defence of contemporary order.

These undercurrents of division and resentment in relation to status are even more vivid in the context of the UN Security Council, which is the most criticised aspect of order, even whilst the United Nations is the most supported element throughout the speeches. On the one hand, members of the G20 resoundingly condemn what they see as a privileged minority dictating affairs – a niche segment of states that may have represented the great powers after the Second World War but which are no longer at the top of the hierarchy. They condemn the lack of representativeness in this respect. They also condemn this lack of representativeness due to the Security Council's paralysis, its inability to perform its duties, either due to division or due to perceived abuse of the veto.

In this sense, what stands out here is that this is seen as a crisis relating to the integrity of order. International peace and security are generally accepted as the key aspiration, one which lays the foundations for achieving others. Thus, when there is such a crisis of international peace and security, this tends to trigger concerns of a crisis of order – amidst governments and academics alike. The issue here is that from the perspective of the non-P5 members the UNSC is essentially playing the role of a cartel-like group without oversight, who should be ensuring international peace and security, but who are themselves potentially the main spoilers. Again, this is ultimately a question of status and influence. As emerging actors clamour for reform, they are doing so because the status and influence conferred upon the P5 is no longer merited.

Finally, I also discussed the relationship between power and order: touching upon hegemonic stability theory, multipolarity, and great power policies as potential explanations for the responsiveness deficit. On the first point, I argued that it is premature to conclude that any US decline has contributed to less influence, and furthermore as demonstrated by the case of Iraq, the US was not able to generate coercion even when their superpower status was clearer, and they benefitted from sympathetic attitudes. On the second point, I argued that notwithstanding the potential emergence of a multipolar system, governments do not automatically pursue antagonistic relations, nor does multipolarity inherently render them unable to compromise and coact.

Turning to the third point, great power policies, I acknowledged that such actors certainly influence the responsiveness of order, notably in view of their increased tendency to violate and challenge shared expectations of behaviour. That said, I underscored that even amidst behaviour that undermines the principles of order, particularly in view of the lack of enforcement, such shared expectations nonetheless serve their function by serving as a conduit for smaller powers to castigate great powers for disorderly behaviour, at least rhetorically, and a method through which such actors may still seek to uphold shared

standards of conduct. I acknowledged, furthermore, that such a critique exposes the limits of my functionalist understanding of order.

In sum, I concluded that ultimately global order is partially dysfunctional by design. Inclusiveness comes at the cost of responsiveness – it is a necessary evil. This has the benefit that indeed it is “easy to join and hard to overturn”⁵ – everyone is a member of this global order, and in turn they channel their discontent and dissatisfaction through the institutions of order which give them the voice to express such dissatisfaction. At the same time, global order is reliant on coercion and political will – the desire of states to work habitually in the collective interest beyond the national interest, to pursue policies mindful of *raison de system* alongside *raison d’etat*. The ongoing shift in the distribution of power in this sense has led to a situation where influential stakeholders do not feel that they are accorded the same status as others, or who feel that their interests should be accounted for more strongly. In the end, the strategy pursued to fix this has led to increased division and amplified the existing lack of responsiveness.

8.5: Shortcomings & Recommendations

This study was an attempt to make some sense of an uncertain world, to navigate perspectives on the state of global order, to try to understand why things seem to be going so badly. Prioritising the voice of the main stakeholders themselves, incorporating a relatively wide sample of influential states in this study, and drawing upon data providing a consistency of information in terms of content and across a broad spectrum of time certainly paid off. The evidence often quite literally speaks for itself, but the data also served as a platform to build upon previous research whilst contributing new knowledge to the field. That being said, there are of course limitations.

Whilst at the conceptual level this study has a unique focus on the functionality of order and while I bring new data to the table, at the explanatory level this research does not per se put forward something new, but rather substantiates previous assessments notably in relation to Ikenberry’s claim that the current predicament is the product of a ‘crisis of success’, as well as others who see the current difficulties as a product of competing narratives, a competition for status and influence, though crucially within the confines of the agreed upon principles of order⁶. This explanatory ceiling is to some degree an in-built limitation that results from a discourse-oriented study such as this. The strong point is the rich reflection of how states see the world. However, ultimately, there is a limit to the degree of

⁵ Ikenberry (2018)

⁶ As per discussion in literature review.

information that can be squeezed out from such data, and a balance must be found between educated inference and conjecture.

McKeil highlights the risk of studies such as this falling into the trap of re-inventing the wheel⁷. Though an effort was made to avoid this, and though my conceptual framework demonstrably builds on established ideas and previous debates producing something new – perhaps one could also argue that this is an arbitrary metric. Should global order be functional? Should it be legitimate and responsive, or rather is global order about predictability? Does the study give too much importance to the perspectives and preferences of actors in terms of how they see the world around them rather than highlighting the influence of anarchic systemic factors? Realists and traditionalists may certainly concur with this criticism.

After all, if international politics is becoming more and more uncertain, and the principles of contemporary order are perceived to be less and less responsive, then this renders the concept of functionality self-defeating. Just as I argued that a state of constant war may be representative of predictability but a false reflection of an orderly state of affairs, likewise a legitimate but entirely unresponsive order where things keep getting worse is an order only in name. I would counter this with response that clearly for the main stakeholders themselves, the criteria of buy-in and responsiveness are relevant, and that additionally considering both the context and the content of this study, findings that I put forward testify to the value of understanding if global order is dysfunctional.

At the methodological level, despite the positives that I already highlighted, two issues stand out. One may justifiably highlight that focusing on the G20 simultaneously fails to differentiate between the top echelon of actors vis-à-vis middle powers, whilst conversely it is a sample that marginalises others who are not members of the G20. One may fairly question if this study attempts to represent the views of a select group of contemporary great powers or an attempt to reflect the views of a more global representation. To this I would respond that it is both an attempt to achieve an approximate view of how key stakeholders with a significant degree of influence today perceive global order, whilst at the same time trying to cast a wider net, both for the sake of going beyond the usual framing of analysis, and to seek new knowledge.

Finally, the most glaring shortcoming is of course that my sample covers alternate years, and that the analysis has a cut-off point in 2022. What this means is that information in the unsampled speeches may well alter results if they were to be incorporated, and that highly relevant years – such as 2001 and 2011 – were overlooked. Moreover, by ending the analysis in 2022, this removes more recent

⁷ McKeil (2023)

developments from the equation – from the war in Gaza, to the return of the Trump administration. Particularly in terms of the latter point, it may well be the case that global order may be reaching the nadir of an inflection point, with the USA taking stances at the international level consistently at odds with some of the principles of contemporary order.

In such a context, the possibilities for further research in relation to global order are quite endless. The trend of interest in the subject will only continue to increase. With this in mind, I would argue that further research on global order as a distinct concept from the international system remains paramount. Part of the risk faced by such studies of re-inventing the wheel is precisely due to the pitfall that global order seems to be recognised as a global interest rather than an American or Western interest only now that the established powers are losing their monopoly over global influence, and now that alternative viewpoints are challenging the Western perspectives of what constitutes an orderly state of international politics.

I would argue that the findings, the positions and assessments conveyed by these actors should encourage other researchers to explore the approach followed in this study. On the one hand, further analysis would do well to take advantage of the rich content available through UNGA statements. On the other hand, an analysis incorporating the views of other middle powers would likely also contribute much added value. Combining such analysis with preferences in relation to specific events and how these correspond to the principles of order, and the implementation of such principles would also provide a more granular understanding of where exactly the lack of coaction is manifesting in practical terms.

For example, assessing how certain principles are applied in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Syria, Libya, Ukraine, the South China Sea, and other geopolitical flashpoints as well as other points of contention such as climate negotiations or WTO reform would lead to a more detailed understanding of what is driving division at the global scale, particularly in order to judge if the friction and accusations are ultimately driven due to technical or case-specific divergences which are driven by genuinely divergent though benign interests, or by antagonistic attitudes and an unwillingness to coact.

8.6: Concluding Remarks

As I discussed at the outset, global order is a question of how relations amongst states are organised, a question of the rules of the game, a question of finding the right balance between a thick and thin order. Compared to other conceptualisations of order, the post-Cold War arrangements are relatively thick and legitimate – compared to the idea of order as predictability, compared to an order premised on the hopes

of a stable balance of power, and compared to the pre-1945 order. The level of integration amongst states today has necessarily thickened global order in the 21st century, and likewise the deep level of cooperation that exists amongst states today has also organically produced transnational links that simply weren't feasible a century ago.

At the same time, global order is also quite a thin order. The starting point of order is the understanding shared by states that they need a rules-based setup to organise relations amongst themselves, foremost amongst which is the principle of sovereignty. Accompanying this is the shared willingness to engage with each other in a spirit of multilateralism, and friendly relations. Bringing the different ordering principles together, serving as a catalyst is the United Nations, as an institution with global reach and legitimacy which governments agree should play a special role in international affairs. At the aspirational level are principles setting out common objectives towards which behaviour should be oriented. At the forefront of the aspirational principles are the promotion of international peace and security and the promotion of international economic and social development, with the promotion of political liberalism given a lesser degree of importance.

These are all very broad principles, and crucially in an anarchic international system, there is still no method to enforce compliance. Moreover states clearly have different interpretations and expectations of how these principles should be implemented and pursued – even if they agree on the general idea. Thus, notwithstanding that these principles represent a loose set of rules of the game that consistently generate buy-in amongst actors, there are limits to the responsiveness of these principles, or the level to which they are allowed to be responsive. This is because global order lacks the mechanisms to be responsive, and states are lacking the willingness to coact in the interests of a more responsive order. These are rules of the game by consent, not by coercion, a general standard of behaviour respected not because governments must adhere to it, but because they understand that it is in their interest to do so.

It is easy to criticise this flaw – after all, what is the scope of the rules of the game if players have different interpretations of the rules, and if there is no way of enforcing the rules? There seems to be a pile-up of crises and challenges, things seem to be getting worse and worse, there are less and less results. Yet even as the trajectory of contemporary international affairs seems to be spiralling, the rules of the game are supported, and are generally respected. Though governments can ignore the principles of contemporary order, those who do so to a significant degree are few, whilst those who now have the influence to challenge or to remake global order if they so wish, have not taken this path thus far.

The flip side to this flaw is that governments retain the space to act independently, and the space to voice their discontent, to challenge the status quo and to push for change within parameters of global order. We are experiencing today an institutionalised transition in the distribution of power, the likes of

which have never been seen before. Rather than great power conflict to remake the international system, we are seeing a largely controlled expression of great power competition and the emergence of new powers from beyond the established circle. And yet, this competition for status, for influence – to be recognised as a significant player – this is all taking place according to the principles of order. The risk here is that great powers who seek an advantage over other actors, who feel constrained by such rules and expectations begin to treat them as optional – buying out from such principles.

The responsiveness deficit is perhaps a small price to pay for a global order that can maintain buy-in. The onus now is on these actors to overcome their own divisions and to recognise the need to reverse their increasingly destructive tendencies. It is up to them to reboot their willingness to coact, in the common interest of a responsive global order. Only by coming together will they be able to address the issues that they want solved. The inclusivity is a failsafe – a safety valve – so that when relations deteriorate, when competition increases, when the risk of war returns (which is currently the case) there is an architecture in place to keep things going, and to hopefully steer things back on track. There are known rules of the game, a mutually recognised way of doing things, so that different interests and perspectives can co-exist within the parameters of global order – even if sub-optimal – and so that a problematic direction of affairs can be corrected.

This trade-off should not be discounted. The alternative to an inclusive collectively authored platform that can claim to be representative of the rules, aspirations and expectations generally supported by a global community – even at the lowest common denominator – would be a less legitimate order. An order that is less legitimate is one that is more likely to be challenged, and one where the rules of the game, absent a critical mass of support, would likely crumble under the weight of antagonistic relations. What we also observe here is thus a responsiveness to a more basic expectation, which takes us back to the nucleus driving states to coact, which is their common wish to mitigate the anarchy characterising the international system.

Global order is about organising relations amongst states in the international system. Certainly, the standard of organisation has deteriorated in recent years. The holiday from history seems to be coming to an end, but relations amongst states are nonetheless at least loosely organised according to common expectations, loosely rules-based, loosely oriented towards common aspirations of peace, security and development. In this respect, the contemporary global order continues to fulfil its key function. This is possible, fundamentally, because the members of global order – states – continue to buy-in to the principles of global order, even if they are discontent with the lack of responsiveness, and even if they express resentment that their expectations are not being met. Global order is partially dysfunctional, but it is functional enough.

Chapter 9: Bibliography

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South Africa: A/63/PV.16, pp.11-16
Türkiye: A/63/PV.5, pp.20-22
UK: A/63/PV.11, pp.18-20
USA: A/63/PV.5, pp.8-12

2012, 67th Session

Argentina: A/67/PV.7, pp.5-10
Australia: A/67/PV.9, pp.56-58
Brazil: A/67/PV.6, pp.7-10
Canada: A/67/PV.19, pp.1-4
China: A/67/PV.14, pp.25-29
EU: A/67/PV.9, pp.47-49
France: A/67/PV.6, pp.43-46
Germany: A/67/PV.15, pp.15-17
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Italy: A/67/PV.9, pp.53-55
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Türkiye: A/67/PV.15, pp.46-50
UK: A/67/PV.9, pp.40-43
USA: A/67/PV.6, pp.10-15

2014, 69th Session

Argentina: A/69/PV.6, pp.46-51
Australia: A/69/PV.9, pp.49-51
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Japan: A/69/PV.9, pp.29-32
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2018, 73rd Session

Argentina: A/73/PV.7, pp.13-15
Australia: A/73/PV.13, pp.37-40
Brazil: A/73/PV.6, pp.7-10
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Indonesia: A/73/PV.11, pp.12-14
Italy: A/73/PV.8, pp.51-52
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South Africa: A/73/PV.6, pp.50-53
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2022, 77th Session

Argentina: A/77/PV.5, pp.24-27
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Brazil: A/77/PV.4, pp.8-11
Canada: A/77/PV.14, pp.24-26
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Indonesia: A/77/PV.14, pp.12-13
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2016, 71st Session

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Brazil: A/71/PV.8, pp.7-10
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Appendix: Codebook

Unit of Analysis

At the conceptual level, the unit of analysis in this study is the individual narrative of international order promoted by each of the great powers focused upon in this study, or their “strategic narratives”. In tangible terms, while strategic narratives may manifest through various avenues, this study focuses on political discourse, specifically, official statements. Thus, at a practical level, the unit of analysis is the statements (speeches) delivered by each of the members of the G20 at the United Nations General Assembly general debate, on a biennial basis. Copies of these statements are available online in document form via the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library at <https://www.un.org/en/library/unms>.

Coding Unit

The coding unit is the individual segment of discourse in these statements which is considered relevant to answering the research question, and assigned a code, or set of codes, accordingly. Concretely, for the purposes of this study, the coding unit is the national position advocated by a government in their statement on indicators relevant to assessing the evolution of the post-Cold War international order in line with the parameters set out in the literature review, namely in terms of buy-in indicators (support or contestation) and responsiveness indicators (positive or negative) relative to the ordering or aspirational principles associated with the post-Cold War order.

Text is coded when a speaker begins outlining a relevant position in terms of buy-in or responsiveness. A relevant policy position consists of three components: (i) a direct or indirect reference to an ordering principle or aspirational principle, (ii) a policy regarding that principle, and (iii) a justification for the policy being promoted. Therefore, when a segment of text meets these criteria, it is coded. Text ceases to be coded when the speaker finishes outlining that particular position. In this respect, positions are classified firstly according to the principle being referred to and the policy promoted in relation to that principle, and secondly the justification for the policy. The coding unit is thus constituted of two codes, the first pertaining to the policy regarding a principle, the second pertaining to the justification for the policy.

Additionally, in order to limit the amount of coded text to a manageable workload, the following approach was taken. Once a national position regarding a principle was coded on the basis of a certain combination of policy and justification, for an additional national position to be coded regarding this same principle the speaker had to either (i) promote a different policy

to the one previously supported – meaning a different buy-in or responsiveness indicator – or (ii) cite a different justification if the same policy is being promoted.

In the interests of a holistic analysis of national positions, beyond positions in the form of preferred policies and justifications, two other types of national positions are also coded, in sync with observations made in the literature review regarding some of the key features of literature on the subject. The first additional type of national position relates to the promotion of a ‘vision’ of order. The criteria for this are that the speaker outlines a forward looking or aspirational set of preferences or expectations for international order, which translates into the promotion of either three or more organisational/aspirational principles, or a combination of three or more principles and justifications. The second additional type of national position relates to the sharing of an assessment of order. Such assessments are classified according to five codes: (i) international order in transition, (ii) a crisis of order, (iii) assessments framed in terms of polarity, and the manifestation of (iv) a new world order or (v) a rules-based order.

The Coding Scheme & the Coding Process

As elaborated upon in the methods chapter, the data collected for this study is tailored towards enabling systematic, empirical testing of prevalent claims in scholarly literature on the evolution of the post-Cold War Liberal International Order, through content analysis via the coding of discourse. The preparation of an appropriate coding scheme was an iterative and interpretative process. With the exception of the ‘buy-in’ and ‘responsiveness’ indicators – which are borrowed metrics – the coding scheme was developed through bottom-up inductive coding, involving a series of coding and re-coding discourse, allowing the final set of consolidated codes to emerge from the text being analysed as the result of an accumulation of data.

In this regard, analysing the statements delivered by members of the G20 in their annual UN General Assembly debates statements on a biennial basis from 1990 to 2022, text was coded so as to gather data relevant to:

- i. identifying the prevalent organisational principles and aspirational principles characterising the post-Cold War international order,
- ii. identifying relevant policy positions relevant to these principles in terms of ‘buy-in’ and ‘responsiveness’ indicators,
- iii. identifying the justifications for the positions taken.

In order to provide an additional level of analytical detail substantiating the above, text was also coded in order to gather data relevant to particular assessments on behalf of the members of the G20, notably in terms of:

- i. identifying assessments that international order is in a **state of transition**,
- ii. identifying assessments that international order is in a **state of crisis**,
- iii. identifying assessments framing the state of international order with **reference to a polarity metric**

- iv. identifying assessments which refer to **the manifestation of a ‘new world order’**,
- v. identifying assessments which refer to **the manifestation of a rules-based order**.

Corresponding to the above, the coding process follows a basic two-step approach. The first step relates to the identification of the principle being referred to and the corresponding position relative to that principle in terms of buy-in and/or responsiveness. The second step relates to the identification of the justification for the position taken. In terms of discourse which conveys an assessment on behalf of a government the code simply captures the nature of the assessment. The queries and variables elaborated upon below, together with the additional glossary of variables served as a framework guiding this exercise.

Coding Queries and Variables

Query:	When was this discourse/statement delivered?	
Variable:	The year the statement was delivered.	
Code:	YEAR	
Indicators:	1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022	
Query:	Who delivered the discourse/statement containing the relevant position?	
Variable:	The G20 member on behalf of whom the statement is delivered.	
Code:	ACTOR	
Indicators:	Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.	
Query:	What is the ordering principle or aspirational principle being referred to?	
Variable:	The principles of the post-Cold War international order.	
Code:	PRINCIPLE	
Indicators:	(1) Rules (2) Multilateralism (3) Sovereignty & Non-Interference (4.i) Non-Proliferation (4.ii) Counter-terrorism (5) United Nations (6.i) Sanctions (6.ii) Intervention (7) Peace & Security (8.i) Democracy (8.ii) Human Rights (9.i) Development (9.ii) Environment (10) Economic Liberalism & the LEO	
Query:	What is the position taken regarding this principle?	
Variable:	Positions regarding the buy-in and/or responsiveness of the principles of the post-Cold War international order.	
Code:	POSITION	
Indicators:	Support, Contestation, Positive, Negative	

Query:	What is the justification for the position/s being taken?	
Variable:	The justification/explanation for the position/s taken.	
Code:	JUSTIFICATION	
Indicators:	(A) Peace & Security	(B) Rules-Based Order
	(C) Common Challenges	(D) Prosperity, Growth & Development
	(E) The People	(F) JFREA
	(G) Legitimacy	(H) Principled Position
	(I) Results & Deliverables	(J1) Unity
	(J2) Division	(K1) Accusations
	(K2) IIA	(L) Effectiveness & Reform
Query:	Does the actor outline a vision or assessment of international order?	
Variable:	The wider long-term preferences and/or macro-level assessments of international order beyond the individual positions promoted by an actor.	
Code:	INTERNATIONAL ORDER	
Indicators:	Vision, Transition, Polarity, Crisis, NWO, RBO.	

Glossary of Variables

Each position is sorted according to a combination of the following variables:

1. *ACTOR*

This variable refers to the G20 member on behalf of whom the statement was delivered and relevant positions were conveyed. The indicators are the G20 members: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union (EU).

2. *YEAR*

This variable refers to the year the statement was delivered. Based on the assessment in previous literature that a new phase of global order began to emerge after the end of the Cold War (1989) the study covers statements on a biennial basis from 1990 to 2022. The indicators for this variable cover every alternate year from 1990 to 2022 (1990, 1992, 1994, 1996...).

3. *PRINCIPLE*

This variable refers to the principles being referred to in relevant positions. These ordering principles and aspirational principles are operationalised as per the following indicators, derived through an iterative process of inductive coding, using the raw discourse being analysed. The definitions for each of these terms are based on general descriptions and usage of the terms in the statements being studied. The use of overly rigid definitions would have been out of sync with the scope of this research, serving as an unnecessary straitjacket given that such statements are drafted and delivered as a political exercise, not academic – the interest is shaping the political landscape and narrative, without consideration for academic definitions

or contributing to common understandings of a term. It is of note that within Atlas.ti, each of these principles are numbered.

(Ordering Principles)

- **Rules:** This code refers to positions on the ordering principle that relations between states in the international system are framed according to common ‘rules’ – the development and use of international law, and certain expectations/norms/standards of behaviour on the basis of respect for the UN Charter. This code also refers to positions which include calls to adhere to agreements/treaties entered into, positions on accountability, and enforcement of international law/standards.
- **Multilateralism:** This code refers to positions on multilateralism – the ordering principle of developing ‘friendly relations’ as per the UN Charter. Multilateralism in this study serves as an umbrella term referring to international cooperation as a policy of first resort, references and appeals to ‘the international community’, positions on international dialogue, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and investing in international, regional, and global organisations/institutions/partnerships. Positions on regional integration as well as treaty negotiations also fall under this heading.
- **Sovereignty & Non-Interference:** This code refers to positions on the ordering principle of sovereign equality, that relations between states are based on respecting the principle of sovereignty and non-interference, including the prohibition of the acquisition of territory through the use of force, as well as the principle of self-determination.
- **Non-Proliferation:** This code refers to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (including chemical and biological), promoting the NPT, CTBT, and other non-proliferation initiatives/agreements, as well as general positions in favour of disarmament (such as in terms of arms trafficking).
- **Counter-Terrorism:** This code refers to positions on the principle of countering terrorism and associated threats to peace and security: countering terrorist activity, violent extremism, radicalisation, religious fundamentalism, and fanaticism.
- **UN:** This code refers to positions regarding the role of the United Nations in the post-Cold War order, empowerment of this institution as an international organisation with global membership set up in 1945, to maintain international peace and security and to serve as a conduit of multilateralism contributing to more organised international relations.
- **Sanctions:** This code refers to positions on the use of sanctions as a tool (mechanism) to enforce standards of conduct.
- **Intervention:** This code refers to positions on the concept of military intervention, as well as references to peacekeeping when presented in the context of/as a form of intervention, though not peacekeeping in general.

(Aspirational Principles)

- **Peace & Security:** This code refers to positions on the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security in relations between states, as a presumed inherent common interest, and an overarching objective of global order (and the UN).
- **Democracy:** This code refers to positions on the promotion of democracy, particularly in terms of the promotion of (free and fair) elections, open civil societies, as well as justice, equality, and representation at the domestic level, including the promotion of popular sovereignty (that sovereignty is derived from the will of the people).
- **Human Rights:** This code refers to positions on the promotion of human rights (including women's rights and children's rights), as well as human security in general terms.
- **Development:** This code refers to positions on the promotion of global economic and social development, including combatting global inequality and relevant challenges in this context, such as debt burdens, the spread of disease, the impact of humanitarian crises, the plight of refugees, migration movements, and transnational crime.
- **Environment:** This code refers to positions on the promotion of sustainable development, the promotion of 'green' policies, including protection of the environment, addressing climate change, increasing environmental awareness, and meeting COP targets.
- **LEO:** This code refers to economic liberalism and the 'Liberal Economic Order' – positions on the promotion of liberal economic values and policies, including open markets, free trade, and free competition, economic growth, and safeguarding individual property rights and economic rights and freedoms. This code also includes positions on protectionism, treated as the inverse of economic liberalism (on the basis of references in the statements). Terms like 'the international trading system', or 'the global financial architecture' and references to the IMF, World Bank, and other such organisations are treated as references to the LEO, over and above specific references positions referring a/the liberal economic order itself.

4. POSITION

This variable refers to the content of the position taken in relation to the principle being referred to, framed in terms of two sets of indicators. When coding within Atlas.ti, these positions are linked directly to the principle being referred to.

- **Support:** This code refers to positions which express support for a principle.
- **Contestation:** This code refers to positions which express contestation against a principle.

- **Positive:** This code refers to positions which convey a positive assessment on behalf of a government, that a principle is responsive to their expectations and needs, inter alia by providing the desired results/deliverables, serving its purpose to the government's satisfaction, and/or being respected and adhered to.
- **Negative:** This code refers to positions which convey a negative assessment on behalf of a government, that a particular principle is not responsive enough to their expectations and needs, inter alia by not generating the desired results/deliverables, not serving its purpose to the government's satisfaction, and/or not being respected or adhered to.

5. *JUSTIFICATION*

This variable refers to the justification/explanation for the position/s being taken. Again, the indicators for this variable are a product of inductive coding, derived from the discourse being analysed. It is of note that within Atlas.ti, each of these justifications is lettered.

- **Peace & Security:** This code refers to positions justified on the basis of promoting/maintaining international peace/security/stability, and justifications framed in terms of the presumed common aspiration for international peace and security as an overarching aim of international order, as well as in terms of the consequences of conflict.
- **Rules-Based Order:** This code refers to positions justified on the basis of cultivating and promoting a rules-based order to regulate international relations, establishing standards of behaviour and international conduct, and enforcing such standards. This includes positions justified on the notion of the need to promote order as opposed to disorder and overcoming the so-called "law of the jungle". Positions justified in terms of appeals to the UN Charter, international law, and the need to abide by treaties which have been entered into also fall under this heading. Positions justified in the context of countering imperialism and colonialism also fall under this heading.
- **Common Challenges:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of common challenges being faced by the members of the UN/the international community, the need for common solutions to common challenges, the need to focus on certain common challenges, as well as justifications framed in the context of the increased need for more common action and cooperation in a more interdependent world.
- **Prosperity:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of promoting 'prosperity' – economic growth and development, a better standard of living. Positions justified in terms of an arrangement contributing to or undermining economic and/or sustainable development.

- **The People:** This code refers to positions justified as a reflection of grassroots demands – what the people of the world, or of a particular country call for/need/want/deserve. This code refers to positions justified in terms of the real-life implications of an arrangement on ordinary people, as well as positions justified in terms of human dignity, fundamental freedoms, the rights and liberties of all people – justice, fairness, representation and equality at the national level.
- **JFREA:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of the concepts of justice, fairness, representation, equality, and accountability (JFREA) at the international level, including calls for a fair and democratic international order. Positions justified in terms of the concept of international solidarity are also included under this heading.
- **Legitimacy:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of the legitimacy of an arrangement.
- **Principled Position:** This code refers to positions justified on the basis of a certain approach being the product of a principled position, a value-based, belief-based, or ideology-based position. Positions which have a constitutional basis, or which are justified on the basis the universality of a concept are also included under this heading.
- **Results & Deliverables:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of the results and tangible deliverables being achieved by a principle – or the lack of results and deliverables. Positions justified on the basis of the perceived effectiveness of a principle and whether expectations are being met also fall under this heading. This justification is associated more frequently with positions related to the responsiveness of a principle.
- **Unity:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of the relationship between a principle and a sense of unity within the international community, either in a specific context, or as a general sentiment. This justification is associated more frequently with positions related to the responsiveness of a principle, particularly positive assessments of responsiveness, as the product of a united international community.
- **Division:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of the relationship between a principle and a sense of division within the international community, either in a specific context, or as a more general sentiment. This justification is associated more frequently with positions related to the responsiveness of a principle, particularly negative assessments of responsiveness, as the product of a divided international community.
- **Accusations:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of accusations against other actors: positions framed in terms of claims of double standards and/or hypocritical behaviour, claims regarding the gap between words and actions on behalf of other actors, and claims generally blaming others or accusing others.
- **Interference:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of claims regarding interference in the internal affairs of another UN member.

- **Effectiveness & Reform:** This code refers to positions justified in terms of the need for institutional reform and on the basis of enhancing the effectiveness of the UN: positions justified in terms of the need for UN and UNSC reform, in terms of a sense of paralysis within the UN Security Council, the lack of effectiveness on the side of the UN Security Council and the P5 being ineffective. Positions justified in terms of reforming other international organisations of relevance, such as the World Bank and/or IMF also fall under this heading.

6. *INTERNATIONAL ORDER*

This variable refers to the wider, long-term preferences and/or macro-level assessments of international order beyond the individual positions promoted by a government. The codes/indicators for this variable are outlined as follows:

- **Crisis:** This code refers to assessments that international order is in a state of crisis – a crisis of order. This includes assessments explained in terms of a situation of chaos, of a breakdown of order, of disorder, and other such descriptive terms, including that the state of order is approaching such a situation.
- **NWO:** This code refers to statements referring to the concept of a new world order or the “New World Order”, and associated terms such as a new international order, new international system, and the like.
- **Polarity:** This code refers to general assessments on the polarity characterising the international system, or general assessments framed in terms of a polarity metric.
- **RBO:** This code refers to statements referring specifically to the concept of a “rules-based order”.
- **Transition:** This code refers to assessments that international order is in a state of transition. In the context of the emergence of the “New World Order” post-1990, this code also refers to assessments that this order was not yet consolidated.
- **Vision:** This code refers to statements summarising a government’s vision of international order, capturing the main ordering and aspirational principles being promoted.

Coding Examples

The following examples taken from a variety of statements illustrate different forms of national positions. In order to demonstrate the coding process, relevant discourse is presented firstly in text format to explain the thought process behind the codes assigned to the discourse, and secondly in Atlas.ti format, showing the end result of the coded discourse within the software.

A position expressing support for a principle:

France, 1990, Doc. A/45/PV.4, p. 36

The following example illustrates a position on behalf of France, expressing support for international law. As per Figure 1, the text in blue indicates that the principle being referred to is the use of common rules, as specified by the reference to international law, hence the code - Rules. The neon highlight indicates an expression of support, calling for international law to 'reign', hence the code – Support. And the text in red indicates the justification for this support, being that international law is required to save countries from violence, hence the code – Peace & Security. Figure 2 demonstrates how this coding manifests within Atlas.ti, which could also be presented as: 1. Rules + Support; Peace & Security. This is thus an example of support for the principle of common rules on the basis that they contribute to peace and security.

We must all understand that the dawning of the rule of law concerns us all. What country can feel safe from violence, high-handedness and domination by others? The time has come for international law to reign. We need only take decisions and actions on that basis.

Figure 43

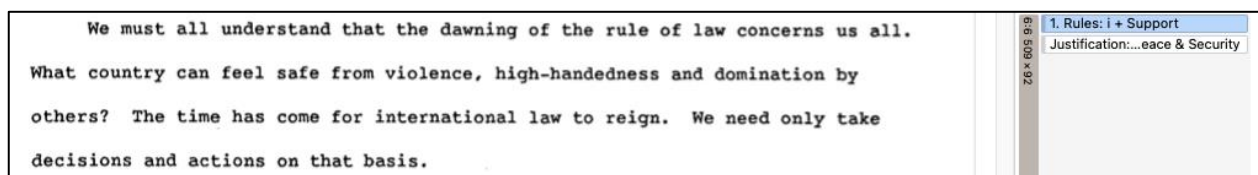


Figure 44

A position expressing contestation for the same principle:

Russia, 2022, Doc. A/77/PV.12, p. 44

The following example illustrates a position on behalf of Russia, expressing contestation regarding the same principle supported in the previous example. As per Figure 3, the text in blue indicates that the principle being referred to is the use of common rules, hence the code - Rules. The neon highlighted text indicates contestation against such rules, as evidenced by the perception that such rules are forced upon everyone else, and only benefits the 'single hegemon'. The justification in red text, which overlaps with the sentiment of contestation, is clearly an expression of contestation on the basis that such rules are not legitimate (because they are forced upon others), hence the code – Legitimacy. Figure 4 demonstrates how this coding manifests within Atlas.ti, which could also be presented as: 1. Rules – Contestation;

Legitimacy. This is therefore an example of contestation against the principle of common rules, on the basis that such rules are not legitimate.

Issues relating to the future world order are being decided today, as any unbiased observer can clearly see. The question is whether that world order will have a single hegemon that forces everyone else to live by its infamous rules, benefiting it alone, or whether we will have a democratic and fair world, free from blackmail and intimidation of anyone deemed undesirable, a world without neo-Nazism and neocolonialism.

Figure 45

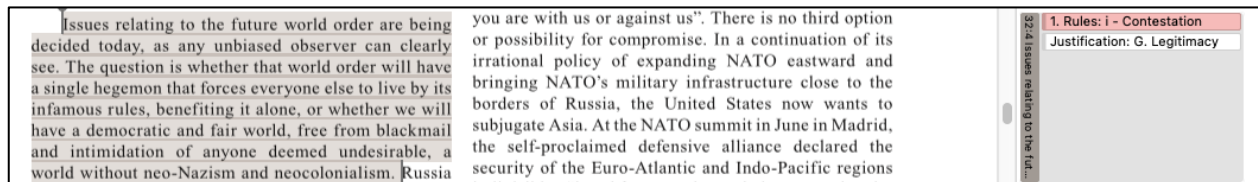


Figure 46

A position expressing a positive assessment regarding a principle:

Indonesia, 1994, Doc. A/49/PV.16, p. 20

The following example illustrates a position on behalf of Indonesia, expressing a positive assessment regarding multilateralism. As per Figure 5, the text in blue shows Indonesia referring to ‘regional and subregional organizations’ which falls under the code – multilateralism. The neon highlighted text indicates a positive assessment, that such organizations ‘continue to make substantial contributions...’. In turn, the text in red indicates that such contributions are being made in the context of disarmament and peace, hence the code – Peace & Security. Figure 5 demonstrates how this coding manifests within Atlas.ti, which could also be presented as: 2. Multilateralism + Positive; Peace & Security. This is therefore a positive assessment of multilateralism for contributing to international peace and security.

Regional and subregional organizations continue to make substantial contributions to the cause of disarmament and peace.

Figure 47

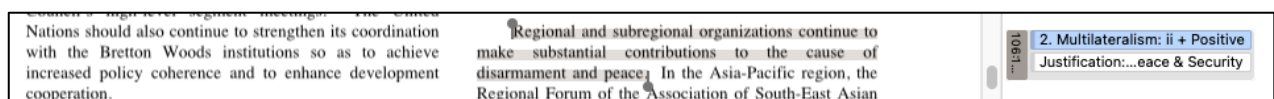


Figure 48

A position expressing a negative assessment regarding the same principle:

Turkey, 2012, Doc. A/67/PV.15, p. 49

The following example illustrates a position on behalf of Turkey, expressing a negative assessment regarding multilateralism. As per Figure 7, the text in blue shows Turkey asking

what ‘the international community’ has done in the context of the Syrian crisis, hence the code – Multilateralism. The neon highlighted text outlines that the response to this query is ‘literally nothing’, which is indicative of a negative assessment. The text in red indicates that the justification for this assessment is that there has not been any effective action taken to save lives, hence the code – Results and Deliverables. Figure 8 demonstrates how this coding manifests within Atlas.ti, which could also be presented as: 2. Multilateralism – Negative; Results & Deliverables. This is therefore a negative assessment that multilateralism was not meeting Turkey’s expectations in terms of the crisis in Syria, by not delivering tangible results and deliverables.

Unfortunately, this humanitarian tragedy has become just a statistic for many. What has the international community done to stop this carnage? Literally nothing. We have yet to see a single effective action to save innocent lives.

Figure 49

Unfortunately, this humanitarian tragedy has become just a statistic for many. What has the international community done to stop this carnage? Literally nothing. We have yet to see a single effective action to save innocent lives. It is a great disgrace to witness that today, after 20 years, the ghosts of Srebrenica and Halabja continue to haunt us, this time in the cities of Syria.	and representative Government. The Turkish nation stands by its brethren, the Syrian people, in their legitimate struggle. We now care for 90,000 displaced Syrian refugees in Turkish homes. Let me underline once again that, since the beginning of the conflict, we have never hesitated, nor will we ever, hesitate to be at the side of our Syrian brothers and sisters in their most difficult hour.	Atlas.ti 2. Multilateralism: ii - Negative Justification: L...& Deliverables
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Figure 50

Two positions in a single paragraph:

Brazil, 2016, Doc. A/71/PV.8, p. 8

The following example illustrates two positions on behalf of Brazil in the same paragraph, firstly expressing a negative assessment regarding the principle of non-proliferation and disarmament, followed by an expression of support regarding the same principle. As per Figure 9, the text in blue indicates a reference to non-proliferation. The neon highlighted text reflects Brazil’s concern that there has been a lack of progress in implementing this principle, which is a negative assessment. The text in red indicates Brazil’s justification for this assessment, being that there has been a lack of progress – a lack of results and deliverables – which means the threats to international peace and security posed by nuclear weapons persist. In terms of the second segment of text, again the text in blue refers to non-proliferation. The neon highlighted text shows Brazil expressing support for the principle, citing its constitutional obligations, whilst the text in red reflects that the motivation for this support is driven by security considerations and ‘the danger that nuclear proliferation poses. Figure 10 demonstrates how this coding manifests within Atlas.ti, which could also be presented as 4.1 Non-Proliferation – Negative; Results and Deliverables, and 4.1 Non-Proliferation + Support – Peace & Security.

Another reason for concern, if I may say so, is the lack of progress on the nuclear disarmament agenda. There are thousands of nuclear weapons in the world today. That amounts to thousands of threats to international peace and security.

The most recent nuclear test in the Korean peninsula is a reminder of the danger that nuclear proliferation poses. Brazil can speak with the authority of a country where the use of nuclear energy exclusively for peaceful purposes is an obligation enshrined in the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil.

Figure 51

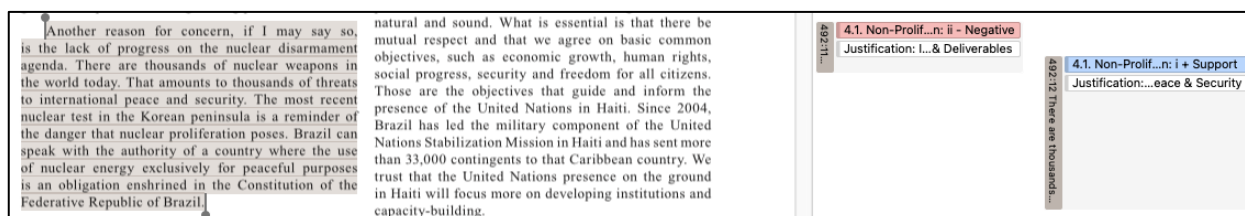


Figure 52

Two different policy positions on the same principle within a single sentence:

China (2000), Doc. A/55/PV.12, p. 5.

As per Figure 3, the text in red indicates that the principle being referred to is the promotion of development - Development. The text in blue illustrates that China first accuses 'a few countries' of dominating global economic affairs, thus the justification - Accusations. This is in turn indicative of a negative assessment in terms of the responsiveness of development promotion vis-à-vis China's interests - because it is being impeded by such countries. The text in orange further indicates a call on China's behalf for equal participation on behalf of developing countries in this context, reflecting wider support for the principle of development promotion, justified on the basis of further representation - JFREA. As per Figure 4, these positions are coded as 9.1. Development - Negative, Accusations, and 9.1. Development + Support, JFREA.

The United Nations should give top priority to the issue of development, make efforts to change the current situation in which global economic affairs are dominated by only a few countries and ensure developing countries their right to equal participation in economic decision-making.

Figure 53

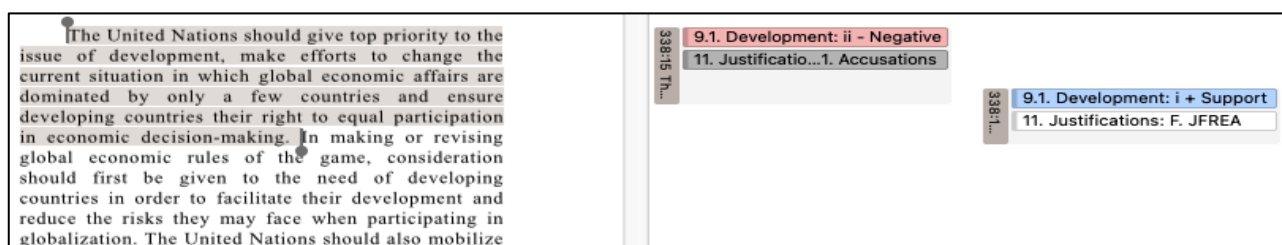


Figure 54

Two same policy positions on the same principle within a single sentence:

Italy (2022), Doc. A/77/PV.5, p. 54.

As per Figure 5, the text in blue indicates that the principle being referred to is the United Nations. The text in red indicates that Italy is recalling the UN's objective to maintain international peace and security, which is both a justification, and a statement assessed to be an expression of support, given that Italy is stressing the UN's role in this context. The text in darker red indicates a second justification, and thus a second position. This second portion of text indicates that Italy is recalling the UN's objective to promote the economic and social progress of all people, which is again also taken as an expression of support, with Italy stressing the UN's role in this respect. As per Figure 6, the first position is therefore coded as: 5. UN + Support; Peace & Security. The second position follows the same initial coding, with a different justification linked to economic and social progress, hence the code – Prosperity. Thus, the second position is coded within Atlas.ti as 5. UN + Support; Prosperity.

As stated in the second preambular paragraph of the 1945 Charter of the United Nations, the objective of the United Nations is “to maintain international peace and security” [and] promote the economic and social progress of all people”.

Figure 55

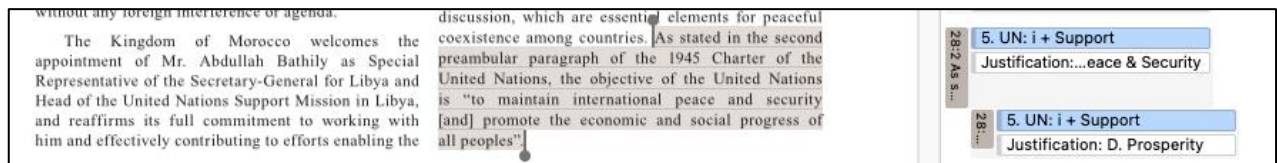


Figure 56

A position outlining a vision of order:

USA (1990), Doc. A/45/PV.14, p. 68.

The below extract illustrates how an actor may present a vision of order, and how this is coded. As per Figure 15, the USA explains that the country has ‘a vision of a new partnership of nations’ before highlighting several principles:

- a partnership based on consultation, co-operation and collective action, especially though international and regional organizations = Multilateralism
- a partnership united by principle and the rule of law = Rules
- a partnership whose goals are to increase democracy = Democracy
- increase prosperity = Development
- increase the peace = Peace & Security
- and reduce arms = Non-Proliferation

We have a vision of a new partnership of nations that transcends the cold war – a partnership based on consultation, co-operation and collective action, especially through international and regional organizations; a partnership united by principle and the rule of law, and supported by an equitable sharing of both cost and commitment; a partnership whose goals are to increase democracy, increase prosperity, increase the peace, and reduce arms.

Figure 57

The screenshot shows a document with a vision statement on the left and a sidebar menu on the right. The vision statement is: "We have a vision of a new partnership of nations that transcends the cold war - a partnership based on consultation, co-operation and collective action, especially through international and regional organizations; a partnership united by principle and the rule of law, and supported by an equitable sharing of both cost and commitment; a partnership whose goals are to increase democracy, increase prosperity, increase the peace, and reduce arms." The sidebar menu on the right contains the following items: "0. International Order: Vision", "1. Rules: i + Support", "2. Multilateralism: i + Support", "4.1. Non-Prolif...n: i + Support", "7. Peace & Se...ity: i + Support", "8.1. Democracy: i + Support", and "9.1. Development: i + Support".

Figure 58

Miscellaneous Positions

A negative assessment of the Liberal Economic Order:

South Africa (2010), Doc. A/65/PV.17, p. 27.

The text in blue refers to two subjects falling under the code relevant to the principle of promoting economic liberalism and the Liberal Economic Order. The neon highlighted text indicates a negative assessment as the expectations of South Africa were not met. The text in red indicates both that the economic crisis vindicates previous positions on the matter, as well as the expectations for an international financial architecture more sensitive to the interests of the global South, which relates to a justification for this negative assessment on the basis of fairness and representation in the LEO, hence the code – JFREA. As such, as per Figure 18, this position is coded in Atlas.ti as 10. LEO – Negative; JFREA.

A speedy and satisfactory conclusion of the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization, which promised so much for the developing South, unfortunately remains a dream yet to be fulfilled. At the same time, the global economic crisis has highlighted the point that many of us have always made about the need to work for an international financial architecture that is sensitive to the development needs of the South.

Figure 59

The screenshot shows a document with a paragraph on the left and a sidebar menu on the right. The paragraph is: "and effectively to a nation in distress. A speedy and satisfactory conclusion of the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization, which promised so much for the developing South, unfortunately remains a dream yet to be fulfilled. At the same time, the global economic crisis has highlighted the point that many of us have always made about the need to work for an international financial architecture that is sensitive to the development needs of the South." The sidebar menu on the right contains the following items: "10. LEO: ii - Negative" and "Justification: F. JFREA".

Figure 60

Support for the principle of sovereignty:

European Union (2014), Doc. A/69/PV.9, p. 38.

In Figure 19, the text in blue refers to the principle of sovereignty. The text in red, also neon highlighted, indicates an expression of support for the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity on the basis that this principle should be defended as one of the rules upholding the society of nations, hence the code – Rules-Based Order.

That violation of *Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity* triggered the gravest threat to the European security order in decades. It matters beyond the European continent. *It is about rejecting the use of force and about defending the rule of law that upholds our society of nations.*

Figure 61

hear a statement by the President of the European Council. Mr. Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, was escorted to the rostrum. The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, and inviting him to	the abrupt and illegal annexation of Crimea in March. That violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity triggered the gravest threat to the European security order in decades. It matters beyond the European continent. It is about rejecting the use of force and about defending the rule of law that upholds our society of nations. The General Assembly assumed its responsibility by adopting resolution 68/262 on the	47/65 The violation... 3. Sovereignty...e: i + Support Justification:...es-Based Order
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Figure 62

Support for the principle of the promotion of human rights:

ROK (2002), Doc. A/57/PV.5, p. 19.

As per Figure 21, the blue text indicates reference to the promotion of human rights. The highlighted text indicates support for the principle, highlighting that this is a 'priority agenda item'. The text in red indicates that moreover the Republic of Korea justifies this support on the basis that the human rights situation in any country firstly cannot be considered as an exclusively domestic affair and is secondly a matter of interest 'for the international community', hence the justification code – Common Challenges – as the promotion of this principle is being presented as a common challenge. Within Atlas.ti this position therefore manifests as 8.2. Human Rights + Support; Common Challenges.

The *human rights situation in any given country* is no longer an exclusively domestic affair. The issue of *human rights* has become a priority agenda item for the international community.

Figure 63

eloquently put, poverty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth indeed. The human rights situation in any given country is no longer an exclusively domestic affair. The issue of human rights has become a priority agenda item for the international community. During the last session of the General Assembly, special attention was paid to the human	Excellency Mr. Igor S. Ivanov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Mr. Ivanov (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian): One year has passed since the tragic events that took place on 11 September 2001 in the United States of America shook the world and demonstrated	365:12 The hu... 8.2. Human Rights: i + Support Justification:...mon Challenges
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Figure 64

Contestation against the use of sanctions:

Argentina (2020), Doc. A/75/PV.5, p. 45.

As per Figure 23, the text in blue indicates a reference to the use of sanctions. The neon highlighted text indicates an expression of contestation against this mechanism when taken in the context of the rest of the sentence – that states ‘cannot remain passive’. As per the text in red, this position is justified on the basis that sanctions ‘serve only to oppress people’, hence the code – The People. Figure 24 illustrates the coding of this position within Atlas.ti, which could also be expressed as 6.1. Sanctions – Contestation; The People.

We cannot remain passive in the face of sanctions that include economic blockades that serve only to oppress people amid this humanitarian crisis.

Figure 65

As never before, our human condition demands solidarity from us. We cannot remain passive in the face of sanctions that include economic blockades that serve only to oppress people amid this humanitarian crisis.

6.1. Sanctions: i - Contestation
Justification: E. The People

Figure 66

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How are references to the UN Charter coded?

References to the Charter of the UN are coded on a case-by-case basis. A speaker may express a position regarding the Charter with emphasis on the value it has in the context of the UN. Alternatively, a speaker may express a position regarding the Charter with emphasis on its value as an expression of international law, a manifestation of rules and norms, a ‘global constitution’ of sorts.

2. How are references to agreements coded?

References to agreements are coded on a case-by-case basis, depending on how exactly the speaker is referring to the agreement.

For example, the GATT can be coded either as a reference to Multilateralism or a reference to the Liberal Economic Order. If it is being referred to as a treaty which demonstrates the benefits and results of a multilateral approach to international trade affairs, the emphasis here is on the value of multilateralism, with the GATT being an example of how multilateralism has contributed positively. Therefore, the position would be coded in terms of a reference to multilateralism, a positive assessment of multilateralism. Alternatively, if a position refers to the treaty as a way to expand the benefits and results of open trade and economic liberalism, the emphasis here is on the value of economic liberalism. Therefore, the position would be coded as a reference to the Liberal Economic Order, in support of the principle.

The same could be said for the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Again, the treaty could be referred to in terms of the value of a multilateral approach towards addressing a common concern in terms of peace & security, or alternatively it could be referred to with specific emphasis on non-proliferation; supporting the principle of non-proliferation, or citing the NPT as an example of responsive non-proliferation measures.

3. Do you code positions regarding policies/behaviour which are the result of ordering/aspirational principles?

If a speaker takes a position regarding a policy, policies, or general behaviour which is motivated by a certain principle – then the position taken is treated as a position regarding the motivating principle. Such positions are coded in terms of responsiveness. Thus, if it is assessed that the policy in question is either contributing to or undermining the achievement of a certain principle, then the motivating principle receives a positive or negative assessment, as ultimately the policy being commented on is a reflection of how different actors interpret the promotion of different principles in different ways, or alternatively how they share the same interpretation of how a principle should be promoted.

For example, France might criticise certain ‘neutral’ countries for being silent regarding Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. For such neutral countries these policies may be presented as being motivated by neutrality in the interests of peace, however, from France’s perspective

this policy actually undermines peace and security – thus the promotion of peace and security by such countries is not responding to France’s expectations of the principle. These positions are frequent and often associated with accusations against other actors.

4. How do you code positions regarding the independence of breakaway regions?

Such positions must be coded on a case-by-case basis given the unique-ness of each situation. Moreover, they are not necessarily relevant to the scope of the research.

5. What does a negative assessment of responsiveness mean exactly?

Responsiveness may be understood as a government’s perception of effectiveness; a negative assessment of responsiveness therefore conveys that a government perceives that in some way a principle is not effective: it is not responsive to their needs/interests/expectations. When coding a position which assesses the responsiveness or performance of a principle negatively, a government is not necessarily taking a position that the principle as a whole is not functioning or needs to be scrapped, it is not necessarily a position which is against the principle as a whole, but rather an assessment that certain elements of the principle are not responding – or need to be more responsive.

The degree of criticism is dependent upon the substance of the position and justification in this respect. Particularly in terms of UN reform, this is often associated with a negative assessment of the UN’s responsiveness, but this is not a claim that the UN as a whole is not responding to the needs of governments and should be scrapped. For example, an actor may assess that the UN Security Council is not generating results, outlining a negative assessment, whilst also supporting the UN’s responsiveness in other fields (such as humanitarian affairs) and supporting the UN more generally.

6. How do you code the ‘responsiveness’ of an aspirational principle?

The responsiveness of an aspirational principle is coded on the basis of two kinds of positions. Firstly, positions on the substance of the principle: whether the principle being promoted is perceived by an actor as being responsive to their expectations/interests or not. Secondly, positions on the promotion element of the principle, meaning whether the principle is perceived as being closer to being achieved and if it is perceived as being promoted successfully or unsuccessfully.

There is a difference between a position which calls for more to be done to achieve something (which is an expression of support), as opposed to a position which assesses that what is being done to achieve something hasn’t been effective, or which outright criticises what is being done to achieve something – or indeed outright accuses others of working against the principle. These latter positions are treated as a negative assessment of the responsiveness of a principle, given that the way it is being pursued/implemented does not reflect an actor’s expectations of how the principle is promoted, or haven’t generated the results an actor would like to see. For example, an actor can support democracy promotion, criticise the way that democracy is being promoted, and also express concerns that democracy promotion is not being achieved.

To illustrate, an actor may call for more to be done to promote global development (Buy-In, Support), and then criticise the way that development is being promoted (Responsiveness, Negative). This latter position is marked as a negative assessment in terms of responsiveness as ultimately policies taken in the context of promoting development are undermining the achievement of this principle. Similarly, an actor might support international peace and security, whilst then taking the position that policies pursued in the name of peace and security are not contributing to a more peaceful and secure environment. Thus, the way the promotion of a principle is being translated from theory into practice might not meet an actor's expectations, so a negative assessment in terms of responsiveness is assigned, despite previous support in terms of buy-in.

Criticisms regarding the non-fulfilment of an aspirational principle are also coded as a negative assessment of performance/responsiveness when speakers blame or accuse others for this situation – but not in cases where speakers simply urge more to be done. Whilst this may appear to be counter intuitive as the speaker is ultimately expressing support for the principle, such positions serve to highlight two issues from the perspective of the speaker. Firstly, that the promotional dimension of the principle is failing because others are undermining the achievement/fulfilment of the principle. Secondly, that the non-achievement of this principle is indicative of prevalent policies pursued by other actors in the context of the relevant principle, which do not respond to the expectations/interests of the speaker's government.

Simply urging more to be done is not necessarily indicative of a lack of responsiveness, and in such cases the coding depends on the specific wording of the position.