The Beginning(s) and End(s) of the International Order

These days, the pulse of the world's political health is running fast. The general prognosis is terminal, the end of the international world order, as we know it. But determining what order we are on the verge of losing could do with more diagnosis, including tracking the symptoms of the disorder (and order) back to their beginnings. One of the useful roles that historians can play in this regard is to offer a longer view of what we have lost, or, at least, the international order that seems to be disappearing from view. So bear with me as I offer a "Cook's tour" of two centuries in search of the point where the end possibly began, in order to understand better the history of the aims—or "ends"—of international order itself.

1814?

European historians have long assumed that the early nineteenth century made "international" politics possible: In 1814, after decades of continental wars against French hegemony, a coalition led by Russia, including Sweden, Prussia, Austria, and Britain (as well as some smaller now non-existent sovereignties) emerged victorious and established what became known as the "Congress system." At its most basic, this comprised negotiations through discussion—famously identified with the Congress of Vienna—and transnational cooperation in the interests of permanent peace. In the years that followed, ambassadorial conferences in London, and occasional conferences around the smaller towns of the European continent, became a method for managing territorial and ideological flashpoints. Within a few years, the British foreign minister Lord Castlereagh confidently reported to his Prime Minister the practical value of this transformation of European politics:

how much solid good grows out of these Reunions, which sound so terrible at a distance. It realy [sic] appears to me to be a new discovery in the Science of European Government at once extinguishing the Cobwebs, with which Diplomacy obscures the Horizon – bringing the Whole bearing of the system into its true light, and giving to the Counsels of the great Powers the Efficiency and almost the simplicity of a Single State.[1]

As startling was the sense of the scope of those "Counsels". The Russian Tsar Alexander saw the congress system as a means of pursuing philanthropic projects, and "some new European conception" [*quelque nouvelle conception européenne*"], on the model of the "federative European system".[2] One site of this "revolution" was the Committee structure, designated for discussion of the idea of a Germany confederation, Swiss borders, sovereignty in Tuscany, the territorial claims of Sardinia and Genoa, and also the Slave Trade and the Free Navigation of Rivers. Guided by Wilhelm von Humboldt—the Prussian political thinker-cum-administrator/diplomat—Free Navigation invoked "principles" for regulating taxes that could be raised by the states bordering on the Rhine "in the mode the most impartial, and the most favourable to the commerce of all nations"; the facilitation of "the communications between nations … to render them less strangers to each other"; and the extension of the Rhine's provisions to other rivers, which "in their navigable course, separate or traverse different states" (here Humboldt was thinking of the Neckar, Mein, Moselle, Meuse, and Escaut).[3] Humboldt believed the Congress system could be used to invent institutions and structures that would complement principles "so general" that the free movement of commerce would not be affected "by local diverse circumstances, or by war". [4]

The entangled rhetoric of political and economic liberty was evident among the members of the Slave Trade Committee, although in this case, the British Foreign Minister Castlereagh, who led the discussion, portrayed the

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slave trade as "a commerce incompatible with the Christian religious principles of universal morality and humanity". This was not a question of his own feeling; Castlereagh had no personal objection to the slave trade. Instead, when he stated that abolition of the slave trade was exemplary of "the principles of natural and enlightened justice" which shaped "the times in which we live", he was communicating the position taken by his government in response to the demands of a broader British public.[5] This is the context in which the wily French Foreign Minister Talleyrand added that "a similar declaration would be well received by the sane and enlightened public of all countries, and that it would bring honour to the Congress".[6] Even the reputedly arch-conservative Metternich concurred, stating that although the outcome was not relevant to countries without colonies "there was nothing foreign to them in regard to the importance of the good of humanity".[7]

There was of course also the dissenting point of view of the Spanish, who challenged the right of the Congress system to decide the legislation of nations or moral questions. When Castlereagh conceded that slavery might be thought of as a question for each state, a clause was added to the peace treaty allowing a suitable compromise between "the wishes of humanity" and "the concerns of the interests and rights of independent powers". [8] (The Spanish, Portuguese, and French were allowed to set their own timetables for abolition). This outcome too suggests 1814 as the origin of the national economic priorities of the international order as we know it.

The Congress also introduced modern diplomatic procedures, to save the "*amour propre* of states," making the space of international communication and relations more dispassionate. This was the principle of "ceremonial equality", exercised either by preparing multiple copies of a multilateral treaty with the name of each signatory appearing at the top of his copy; or by using a (French-based) alphabetical order for signatures, thereby defusing any intimation of an implicit hierarchy of power. Similar thinking was applied to the presentation of diplomats in courts, now decided by seniority according to the date of the official notification of an ambassador's arrival at a particular embassy.[9]

The Oxford historian, Paul W. Schroeder, maintains that in 1814 statesmen had learnt

from bitter experience that war *was* revolution… [and] that something else even more fundamental to the existence of ordered society as they knew it was vulnerable and could be overthrown: the existence of any international order at all, the very possibility of their states' coexisting as independent members of a European family of nations.[10]

Tidying up after nearly a quarter of a century of continental clashes, these men recognized the value of "intermediary bodies …of concert and grouping methods" and international politics "restrained by consensus and bounded by law", to the ends of peace.[11] In their hands, congressing brought together strategic issues, economic concerns, and moral complexities. It also generated, de facto, the possibility of an "international society." That term is Hedley Bull's, another Oxford (Australian-born) political scientist who, in the 1970s and 80s, used it to describe the perception of common interests at an international level, and cooperation in the working of common international institutions. [12]

It is easy to pick moral and political holes in these visions of the significance of the 1814 international order. The Committee structure that complemented the *ancien* settings of diplomatic sociability—whether dinners, balls, or salons—removed women from the evolving practices of High Politics, and erased the historical memory of women-led salons as the training ground of the professional (male) diplomat's requisite conversational techniques.[13] Similarly, the modernization of diplomacy involved the delimitation of the geopolitical boundaries of international politics. In 1814, Britain initiated a long tradition of excluding from the sight of European peacemaking its own maritime and colonial interests, refusing to include its ongoing war with America on the congress of Vienna agenda; that process was dealt with separately by the British in the town of Ghent around the same time. And then, there were the European statesmen (Metternich excepted) who wanted the Ottomans left out of this new "international" society. Nor was a century of peace guaranteed in the way that historians often claimed; we need only think of the Europe-instigated battles in Spain, and Ottoman and Persian territories, and in the appalling Crimean war (1853-1856). International "order" and international "society" were always a work-in-progress.

1919?

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More than a century passes before we arrive at another familiar historical beginning, the end of the First World War, when once again the statesmen of an alliance fighting for Europe's future reconfigured an international order. This time the cast had changed, and broadened—America was now in arms with Britain leading a European coalition, joined by new countries like Australia and New Zealand, and older empires Japan and China, against a foe led by Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire.

1814 was not forgotten. The British historian and political advisor to the peace, Charles Webster, went back to the 1814 archive in search of lessons for a postwar peace. By contrast, and more surprisingly, Woodrow Wilson, the (former historian) president of the United States, cast 1814 as the "shreds and patches" antithesis of his own vision for an international order "based upon broad and universal principles of right and justice" and "permanent peace." The Wilson vision, he argued to the U.S. Congress, was based on "international action and … international counsel" conducted "in a spirit of unselfish and unbiased justice, with a view to the wishes, the natural connections, the racial aspirations, the security, and the peace of mind of the peoples involved". [14] Which sounds an awful lot like the rhetoric of 1814. there were other points of continuity, given that the twin principles of the 1919 peace, national self-determination and a League of Nations, resonated what the German historian Friedrich Meinecke described as the dominant temper of the new order of 1814, when "[n]ational autonomy and universal federation impelled each other like two engaged gears". [15]

What was different a century later was less due to Wilson, than to the changing political form and status of "the state" as a way of organizing political cultures, and the scientific popularity of race as its defining characteristic. There were other novelties, including the establishment of an International Labour Organization on the view that social justice was important for the maintenance of world peace (or as a pragmatic counterweight to the siren call of the Bolshevik Revolution), and that health, commerce, slavery, colonialism might all require forms of international governance in the modern age of interdependence.

There were new limits to this vision of an international order and international society. Who could belong? Only nation-states. To be sure, the earlier peacemakers never spoke of "racial aspirations". And thanks to Wilson, the new international order would not embed racial equality as a principle of the League's Covenant, despite the requests of wartime allies Japan and China.[16] Wilson forced the rejection of a clause in the Covenant of the League of Nations declaring the principle of racial equality, even though the majority of peacemakers in 1919 agreed to Japanese demands for its inclusion.[17] In this new international order, national-states such as the United States and Australia were to have the right to determine their immigration policies on grounds of racial discrimination, as a point of national sovereignty. When the League of Nations failed to prevent a Second World War, there were recriminations aplenty about the national and racial emphases of the 1919 international order, to the extent that everyone preferred to just forget it all together.

1945?

The end of the Second World War, stands out in current discussions as *the* moment that marks the international order under threat today, born of the destruction and hopefulness that framed the United Nations Conference on International Organization held in San Francisco in 1945. However, we can also claim that its principles were well in place by this time: from the possibility of international politics, to the ambition of permanent peace; from the methods of diplomacy and international society, to the mutually reinforcing status of the nation-state and international cooperation. What had changed was that the United States—which had pursued an isolationist path in the 1920s and 1930s—was now indisputably the leader of these trends and their transformation into a *new* international order.

The document that eventually gave that order its distinctive 20th century feel—the Atlantic Charter—was agreed between Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill in 1941, signed onto by China and the Soviet Union, as well as a broad swathe of British Commonwealth, Central American and Caribbean states, East and West European governments in exile, and later African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries. As a result, the world-scale of international politics was in full view at San Francisco, just as the Atlantic Charter's catchphrase "freedom from fear and want" spoke to the post-war ambitions of a much broader and representative international public. The spectre haunting this new democratically-inclined international order was the figure of the refugee, the human being left

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stateless, or unprotected by war, by changing boundaries, and by states targeting their own citizens. While international governance now stretched into an ever-widening expanse of modern life—crises, education, science, food and agriculture, health, trade and capital needs—its moral cause was increasingly oriented around the concept of human rights.

There was then much that was different again about the seeds of international society in this 1945 international order, and the scope of the international imagination and law that fed its ambitions. Even the evolution of the European Union from economic to political entity was coddled in the post-war popularity of a renewed narrative of progress and permanent peace and "One World".

But there were also the curious strategic remnants of the wartime alliances frozen in the membership, and veto power, of the UN Security Council, whose members were a select few: the US, UK, USSR, France, and China. This is the UN that survived the Cold War, that became a critical, if not always vocal, forum for managing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, overseeing decolonization and development, and occasionally calling out proxy Third World "hot wars"; but it seemed the world was just going through the motions of conferencing and diplomacy, and the rule of international law.

1975?

Of all the versions of an international order that might be coming to an end, the least likely might have begun in 1975. But it is worth considering "The Declaration of a "New International Economic Order" made at a Sixth Special Session of the UN General Assembly that year. This was the moment when, in the face of evidence of mounting inequality between the Gross National Product [GNP] of "developed" (old imperial) and "developing" (colonial and post-colonial) parts of the world, the latter worked through the UN to demand an equal place at the international table. A *new international economic order* was supposed to eradicate the economic and even cultural remnants of imperialism.

There were echoes in 1975 of the 1919 social justice themes, however, more than half a century later, race and imperialism as part of the old international order were under the microscope. This was potentially a new beginning, an attempt to reset the international order as a post-imperial order. Instead, it led the American government of the time to take against the UN and, in the words of President Gerald Ford, "the tyranny of the majority". At most, we might argue this failed new international order left its mark by forcing limited concessions from the developed states, not equality but the benchmark of developed states" "aid" commitments to the developing world set at 0.7% of GNP.[18] If that fraction is no longer holding, then perhaps 1975 should count as *one* beginning of the end of a 20th century international order?

1989?

1989, the end of the Cold War, looks promising. The international players, the practices, the premises appeared to line up as a new moment of global thinking built around multilateralism and the UN system, and with international law on the ascendant. Now the world had International Criminal Tribunals in Arusha and The Hague to bring crimes against humanity and genocide to trial, on the promise of 1945.

The UN also became the heart of "Human Security," a slogan that echoed the 1945 themes of "freedom from fear and want", with an emphasis on international responsibility for war and poverty tackled bottom-up (women now had a place in the international order as economic "fixers") rather than top-down. Added to that was the Responsibility to Protect, or R2P. Both Human Security and R2P were arguments for international intervention, even at the cost of taking on national sovereignty. Is this the relatively short-lived, perhaps stillborn, beginning of the now ailing international order?

9/11/2001?

The unimaginable events of 11 September 2001 remind us that international orders are born of war-making as much

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as peace-making, and that the past marks the present in unpredictable ways. The terror attacks on the United States briefly revived the idea of a global, regionally-inclusive, multilaterally-motivated "international society"; but it also, as swiftly, unleashed unilateral military campaigns, and created new alliances. More fundamentally it a renewed a view of the world unhinged at the point of East and West, but whereas during the Cold War these oppositions stood for communism and liberalism, respectively, now they represented a bipolar world view of Muslim and Christian cultures (as if each of these were homogenous, and there were no other religions in the fray).

This living story is too familiar to warrant repeating here. Except to note that—regardless of whether we prefer as our start date 1814, 1919, 1945, 1973 or 1989—in 2001 the end might have already begun.

Ends?

When we pick our way back to a beginning, sorting through the detritus and collateral damage rotting on the highways of the international past, the easier it is to discern some consistent points of orientation: an emphasis on cooperation and rules, on the methods of diplomacy and conferencing on an expanding multilateral scale, and, ultimately, the aim of peace. Each of these has been regularly institutionalized and normalized as the basis of international politics, and society, consciously reinvented, renewed and "reset," at moments of crisis and opportunity.

Over the last two centuries, as membership of the international society has shifted, adapted and grown, so have the ambitions annexed to the possibilities of international politics and order—usually echoing changes in national political cultures. In 1919, in 1945, in 1973, economic and social welfare dimensions were actually written into international order scripts, not out of the selfless generosity of the world's great powers, but as antidotes to the acknowledged causes of war, among them the economic and cultural inequalities that they had helped create, between imperial and colonised countries, between the rich and poor in their own states.

Of course, other scraps of evidence could as easily lead us to the 1885 Berlin conference, where the European powers used international conferencing to "peacefully" carve up Africa for their separate imperial interests; or to the 1938 Evian conference, which was meant to bring the plight of Jewish refugees to the attention of international society, but exposed instead the extent to which even states that saw themselves as bulwarks of a liberal international order, like Australia, only accepted a minimum number of Jews, because its government felt morally pressured to do so.[19] Even that moment can be traced back to 1814, when the Congress system also spawned the idea of a Christian international order.

Which brings me back to history: Does the story we tell about the beginnings or ends of international order still matter? In 2014, two key figures in the world today took the measure of the contemporary world with specific reference to the previous two centuries, although not as we might expect. Angela Merkel, as German Chancellor (of course, Germany as a defeated power in 1945 is not on the UN Security Council), bewailed the damage that the Russian state's support for pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's Crimea had wrought on international norms, arguing that Russia's cynical military and strategic policy was evidence of "[a]ctions modeled on those of the 19th and 20th century… carried out in the 21st century"; of "[t]he law of the strong … pitted against the strength of the law, and one-sided geopolitical interests … placed ahead of efforts to reach agreement and cooperation."[20]

Eight months later, the *Moscow Times* reported on a monument to Tsar Alexander newly erected near the Kremlin, and on the "historical justice" of having President Vladimir Putin participate in the unveiling ceremony.[21] As the separatists ramped up their military efforts in the Ukraine under Putin's helpful gaze and against the tenets of an international system of politics "restrained by consensus and bounded by law", the same Russian President described Alexander as one of the founders of a system of European security in 1814, when "conditions for the so-called balance were created, based not only on mutual respect for the interests of different countries, but also on moral values".[22] (The *Moscow Times* also attributed to 1814 the "origin of the current cultural and political split in Ukraine", its territories divided between the eastern and western cultures of Russia and Austria by the Congress committees).[23]

We might note the tragedy of Putin's regrettable and perhaps ambiguous identification with the Tsar of 1814, in

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contrast to Merkel's relatively judicious assemblage of the shortcomings of 19th and 20th century international politics and diplomacy. But Putin, perhaps only for a domestic audience, was restoring a memory of the international scope of the international past of European diplomacy and politics.[24] Meanwhile, Merkel favoured a view of the privileged work of the present and future.[25]

There are certainly differences that constitute the 21st century as we now know it: political scientists diagnose no single international society, rather "contested multilateralism" and "heteropolarity", even as the universalizing language of human rights, and humanity persist.[26] Meanwhile, the gestures by governments looking on in dismay have not yet been matched with meaningful discussion of the international order under attack, what they might do about it as members of an international society, or the precepts of the existing international order they grieve. One reason may be the identification of the United States, long the axis of modern international society, with the virus of radical nationalism threatening the international order; another, that the UN which might otherwise have provided fora for such discussions has fallen into a moral hole of its own member-states digging; or even that many of those same anxious governments have been guilty of challenging the rules and laws of the international order, including most obsessively the rights of refugees.

It is obvious too that the memory, or history, of an international order, wherever we decide it begins or ends, is hardly a magic pill. But as statesmen turn to *ad hoc* foreign policy by tweet, and belligerent soundbites by phone, and refugees are portrayed as threats to national security rather than victims, it may be time to resuscitate the importance of "international society" as an ambition, a means and ends of international order. Even if we care less about the Tsar or Castlereagh in 1814, we might find it salutary to remember the ends of international orders through the last two hundred years consistently demanded some gesture to peace *and* a shared moral compass—whether in the figure of the slave, or the refugee, or social and economic justice. At its most fundamental, the lesson the past teaches us was learnt in 1814: the role of diplomacy, conferencing, and the value of even rhetorical invocations of "humanity" and international society. Maybe it is time to take the talking cure, not just to link us to the international past, but to find our bearings for an international future.

Notes

[1] Castlereagh to Liverpool, Aix, 20 Oct 1818, ff 67-8. Ms 38566, *Liverpool Papers*, British Library.

[2] Friedrich Gentz, on the Tsar, 18 Apr 1818, *Dépêches inédites du chevalier de Gentz aux hospodars de Valachie pour servir à l'histoire de la politique européenne (1813 à 1828)* (E.Plon et cie, 1877), 388.

[3] "Baron Humboldt's Project for the Regulation of the Congress, Vienna, September 1814," in Great Britain Foreign Office, *Peace Handbooks*, no. 153 (London, 1920), Appendix IV, (Dec 1945), 532-554.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Castlereagh, "Protocoles des Conferences des Huit Puissances relative a l'abolition de la traité des Nègres pendant le Congrès de Viènne," *St.K. Kongressen Akten*, 181, Karton 5 5.1, *Haus-*, *Hof– und* Staatsarchiv, Vienna, 224; See also Genevieve Peterson, "Political Inequality at the Congress of Vienna", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 4.

[6] Talleyrand, "Protocoles des Conferences des Huit Puissance", 227.

[7] Metternich, "Protocoles des Conferences des Huit Puissance", 251.

[8] For more on this debate, see Jerome Reich, "The Slave Trade at the Congress of Vienna – A Study in English Public Opinion" *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1968, pp. 129–143, www.jstor.org/stable/2716488; Ian Clark, International Legitimacy and World Society (Oxford University Press, 2007), ch. 1.

[9] Randall Lesaffer, "Vienna and the Codification of Diplomatic Law", *Oxford Public International Law* (Oxford

University Press, 2015), http://opil.ouplaw.com/page/vienna-and-the-codification-of-diplomatic-law.

[10] Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994) p. 802.

[11] Ibid, p. 803.

[12] See Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 3.

[13] For more on this history, see Glenda Sluga, "Women, Diplomacy and International Politics, Before and After the Congress of Vienna", in Glenda Sluga, Carolyn James (eds.), *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500* (Routledge, 2016), p. 120-136.

[14] Woodrow Wilson, "*President Wilson's Address to Congress Analyzing German and Austrian Peace Utterance, 11 February 1918*" in *President Wilson's State Papers and Addresses* (The Review of Reviews Company, 1918), p. 475.

[15] Friedrich Meinecke, *Cosmopolitanism and the National-State* (Princeton University Press, 2002, first published 1907), p. 118.

[16] For more on this history see Glenda Sluga, *The Nation, Psychology, and International Politics* (Palgrave, 2007).

[17] Sluga, *The Nation, Psychology and International Politics*, p. 35 and *passim.*

[18] OECD, "The 0.7% ODA/GNI target – a history", http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/the07odagnitarget-ahistory.htm.

[19] Michael Blakeney, *Australia and the Jewish Refugees 1933-1948*, (Sydney Croom Helm Australia, 1985), p. 126 ff.

[20] Stefan Wagstyl, Kathrin Hille and Peter Spiegel, "Merkel accuses Russia of adopting 'law of the jungle' in Ukraine", *The Financial Times,* March 13 2014, accessed https://www.ft.com/content/98ffbd4c-aa8c-11e3-9fd6-00144feab7de.

[21] Georgy Bovt, "Putin is inspired by Russian empire", *The Moscow Times,* November 25 2014, accessed https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/putin-is-inspired-by-russian-empire-41711.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Wagstyl, Hille and Spiegel, "Merkel accuses Russia of adopting 'law of the jungle' in Ukraine."

[25] "Unveiling Monument to Alexander I", November 20, 2014, Accessed http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47044.

[26] Julia C. Morse and Robert O. Keohane, "Contested Multilateralism", *The Review of International Organizations* 94 (2014): p. 9, 4, 385-412; James Der Derian, "Security in an Age of Heteropolarity" (2011), accessed https://securecaucasus.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/james-derderyan.pdf.

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